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## **Ageing population and nationality law: the case of Italy**

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# Demography and Nationality Law: the Case of Italy

## Abstract

Demography determines every aspect of our lives and society. By understanding the factors that drive demographic changes, we can better predict and address their future consequences. This research aims to further study the relationship between demographic trends, in particular population ageing and international migration, and the political narratives surrounding nationality law in Italy, by analysing how political parties in Italy frame and prioritise certain issues. Utilising the issue-yield theory<sup>1</sup>, the study presents two hypotheses regarding the salience of nationality law compared to migration topics in the political discourse. The thesis adopts a qualitative approach and it is structured as follows. Firstly, it proposes a comprehensive literature review on the impact of international migration on ageing countries; then it follows a comparative analysis of citizenship legislation across Europe and its impact on integration policies; and in conclusion, it presents a case study of Italy's political debate on nationality law.

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<sup>1</sup> De Sio, L., and T. Weber. "Issue Yield: A Model of Party Strategy in Multidimensional Space." *The American Political Science Review*, 2014

## Introduction

Every aspect of our life is determined by our demography. Demographic changes entail our expected lifespans, the number of children we should have, and the places and lifestyles we will most likely lead. The requirement for housing and infrastructure throughout the European regions, as well as our economies, welfare, and health systems, are all significantly impacted by demographic change. Budgetary constraints for the government are thus affected by this. Recognising the reasons behind demographic shifts helps us better anticipate and address their effects in the future<sup>2</sup>. Population dynamics, i.e. its structure and changes are considered to be one of the primary drivers of politics at the meso and macro levels. Political demography is the scientific study of population change and politics, public policy, and politics. Specifically, it studies how population dynamics—size, composition, and distribution—affect political and policy processes. Population change can be defined as follows: (a) changes in the relative sizes of the age groups within those societies, as a result of variations in fertility and life expectancy; (b) migration across international borders; and (c) changes in the population's absolute size. Here, "political consequences" refers to public programs (such as pensions, education, family policy, and population control), political institutions, and political processes such as voting results, political rhetoric, power balances, and other manifestations of political strife, whether peaceful or not<sup>3</sup>. Over the past 50 years, life expectancy has significantly grown throughout Europe. The consequent shifts in age structure have far-reaching economic consequences. A decline in the number of working-age persons will have a negative impact on labour markets, slowing capital investment and GDP growth. The working-age population<sup>4</sup> is shrinking, which strains welfare states and labour markets, and raises the old-age dependence ratio<sup>5</sup>, putting pressure on government resources as well as the long-term viability of pension and healthcare systems. Without significant government intervention, these negative trends will become more pronounced as the population ages<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, the 2023 UN State of World Population report warns that if population reduction persists, "whole countries or even the human population itself could 'collapse'". The ageing of the population also means that welfare, public health, and workplace systems must change to meet the growing need for easily accessible, reasonably priced, high-quality healthcare and long-term care. The vulnerabilities of the current demographic structure of the European society were clearly shown by the Covid-19 pandemic. When

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<sup>2</sup> U. Von der Leyen. State of the Union Address. 2023

<sup>3</sup> Goerres, A., and P. Vanhuyse. Global Political Demography: The Politics of Population Change. 2021.

<sup>4</sup> The share of 15- to 64-year-olds in the total population. [OECD](#)

<sup>5</sup> The number of individuals aged 65 and over per 100 people of working age defined as those at ages 15 to 64. [OECD](#)

<sup>6</sup> Izvorski, I., and M. M. Lokshin. "How Can Europe and Central Asia Tackle its Ageing Crisis?", 2024

approaching this topic it is important to understand that not every country is impacted by demographic changes in the same manner<sup>7</sup>. The relevance and challenges that the demographic transition poses to Europe were emphasised by President Von der Leyen in her 2023 State of the Union Speech:

“Labour shortages hamper the capacity for innovation, growth and prosperity. So we need to improve access to the labour market. Most importantly for young people, for women. And we need qualified migration. [...] We need to respond to the deep-rooted shifts in technology, society and demography”

This research situates itself within the discourse surrounding the role of immigration as a potential mechanism to mitigate population ageing. Goerres<sup>8</sup> has conceptually framed the above-mentioned trends as the "age transition" and the "migration transition." These demographic shifts bear significant long-term political implications due to their gradual and inexorable nature. While some nations may possess the capacity to adapt internally to the ageing of their populations, many may find themselves ill-equipped to respond adequately without the infusion of immigration<sup>9</sup>. Although immigration to Europe is larger than emigration, the EU's population and labour force are predicted to continue to gradually drop<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, to maintain sustainable growth, Europe is anticipated to require a substantial influx of immigrants<sup>11</sup>. While the population of Europe is generally getting older, there are significant differences in demographic trends across and within EU Member States. A significant portion of the population has been losing population in some Eastern EU Member States as a result of high rates of emigration and internal migration from rural to primarily urban areas in quest of better employment, educational, and training opportunities. The ensuing demographic splits have the potential to widen political rifts and worsen already-existing economic, social, and territorial disparities<sup>12</sup>. Alongside the Eastern European countries, Italy represents a relevant case. According to Eurostat, Italy is the oldest country in the Union<sup>13</sup>. The Mediterranean country is going through a "demographic winter", i.e. a combination of low birth rates, increased life expectancy - with the consequent rise of the elderly cohort- and workforce emigration abroad. It is crucial to note that the natural growth rate, i.e. the difference between births and deaths is negative by 300 thousand

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<sup>7</sup> European Commission. The Impact of Demographic Change – in a Changing Environment. SWD(2023) 21 final, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Goerres, A., and P. Vanhuysse. Global Political Demography: The Politics of Population Change, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Calasanti, T. M., et al.

Ageing and Migration in a Global Context: Challenges for Welfare States, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> European Commission. The Impact of Demographic Change – in a Changing Environment. SWD(2023) 21 final, 2023

<sup>11</sup> Bacci, M. L. Does Europe Need Mass Immigration?, 2018

<sup>12</sup> European Commission. Standard Eurobarometer 100 – Autumn 2023, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Eurostat. Population Structure and Ageing. 2023

units. The inflow of the immigrant population has been considered a vital resource in recent years to counteract demographic decrease. However, in Italy, public opinion is still strongly convinced that immigrants represent a cost rather than a gain<sup>14</sup>. Immigration has been at the centre of the Italian political debate since the 1990s, and during election campaigns the positions of the parties tend to become more radical, highlighting the elements of identity that weigh heavily on many migration-related issues. Examining the political debate of the last general election, held on 25 September 2022, four specific themes can be identified: the management of regular immigration, integration processes, legislation on the acquisition of citizenship and the control of irregular immigration<sup>15</sup>. This research will focus specifically on the political debate on the acquisition of citizenship. For the past two decades, Italy has made several attempts to reform its citizenship law, all of which have failed. The latest reform proposal, based on the *ius scholae* model, aimed to grant Italian citizenship to foreign children who attended school in Italy for at least five years. This included children born in Italy to legally present foreign parents and those who entered Italy before turning 12. It combined aspects of a moderated *ius soli* approach, shifting the focus to educational and cultural ties rather than just residency. If passed, it would have affected around 280,000 children. Data from the Italian Ministry of Education showed a significant increase in non-Italian students, reaching nearly 877,000 in the 2019-2020 school year, with a notable rise in those born in Italy from 478,000 to almost 574,000 between 2015 and 2020<sup>16</sup>. Different studies show that foreigners may be essential to counteract demographic decline. Foreign citizens are an indispensable resource for the labour market and a vital source of youth needed to revitalise a demographic system in deep crisis<sup>17</sup>. There are 5 million foreign residents in Italy, accounting for 8.6% of the total population, an increase of 9.5% compared to ten years ago (over 400,000 more in the decade), but with only a 0.4% increase in the last year (about 20,000 more). Without foreigners, Italy's population would be just under 54 million today. About 45.6% of foreign residents (approximately 2.3 million) are under 35 years old (with 20.8% being minors and 24.8% aged 18-34). Only 5.4% are over 65. In contrast, among Italians, there are about 17 million under 35, representing 31.7% of the total. Among these, 14.9% are under 18 and 16.8% are adults under 35. Moreover, more than half of the foreign women residents (55.6%) are of childbearing age (15 to 49 years), while the percentage among Italian women is 37.0%. The average age of mothers at childbirth is 29.7 years for foreigners and 32.8 years for Italians. The average number of children per woman is 1.2 for Italians and 1.9 for foreigners. Ultimately, foreigners significantly contribute to the demographic

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<sup>14</sup> Fondazione Leone Moressa. Rapporto Annuale 2023 sull'Economia dell'Immigrazione. 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Bonifazi, C., and S. Strozza. L'immigrazione nei programmi elettorali., 2022.

<sup>16</sup> ActionAid. Sondaggio Quorum/YouTrend per ActionAid, 2022

<sup>17</sup> CENSIS. 57° Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese, 2023

balance. In 2022, more than 53,000 children were born to foreign parents, making up 13.5% of all births<sup>18</sup>.

This thesis aims to contribute to the literature on the effects of the interaction of international migration and demographic change, such as population ageing. Specifically, it aims to study an under-researched perspective, i.e. the role of nationality law as a possible tool to counter population ageing in old countries. The research stems from the 2023 CENSIS report<sup>19</sup>. The CENSIS (Center for Social Investment Studies) is a socio-economic research institute founded in 1964. For over fifty years, Censis has been engaged in constant and comprehensive research, consultancy, and technical assistance in the socio-economic field. Research work is mainly carried out through assignments from ministries, regional and municipal administrations, chambers of commerce, business and professional associations, banks, private companies, network operators, and international organizations, as well as within the framework of European Union programs. The annual "Report on the Social Situation of the Country," prepared by Censis since 1967, is considered the most authoritative and comprehensive tool for interpreting Italian reality. Regarding the recognition of Italian citizenship for foreign minors, 72.5% of Italians support the introduction of *jus soli*, granting citizenship to minors born in Italy, while 76.8% support *jus culturae*, granting citizenship to foreigners born or arrived in Italy before the age of 12 who have completed an educational path in our country<sup>20</sup>. A new phase of claims seems to have matured, as indicated by Italians' opinions on some critical issues struggling to find official recognition through legislation. This research aims to better understand the abovementioned gap between public opinion and legislative action. This analysis will answer the following research question: How do the political discourse on migration and the perception of demographic trends (namely, population ageing) interact in Italy? And how does such interaction reflect upon – or even influence - the debate on the reform of nationality laws?

To frame the issue, the next section will follow an overview of the relevant literature; I will then expose the theoretical framework and methodology.

## Literature Review

The majority of the world has experienced a demographic shift from high fertility and low life expectancy to low fertility and high life expectancy. This has led to a shift in migratory patterns,

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<sup>18</sup> CENSIS. 57° Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese, 2023

<sup>19</sup> ibidem

<sup>20</sup> ibidem



with Europe becoming a key destination rather than a major source<sup>21</sup>. The industrialised world is transitioning from an expanding to a shrinking population. A diminishing population may lead to a shrinking labour force and GDP, as well as a change in the power balance in developed countries towards North America over Europe and Japan. A diminishing population can lead to a loss of power and influence in global politics<sup>22</sup>. The systematic and persistent rise in the percentage of elderly individuals within a population is known as population ageing, and it continues to be one of the biggest issues facing society<sup>23</sup>. Ageing populations can be beneficial, but only if they are in good health. In terms of physical efficiency, older people's health has improved significantly. This includes a decrease in the risk of death at a given age, as well as improvements in physical fitness, disability, and chronic disease incidence. In modern civilizations, the transition from physical labour to intellectual work reduces the impact of ageing on economic efficiency. The move towards dematerialized manufacturing and consumption relies on technology and education. Policies and institutions will support this process. Empirical research demonstrates that individual job performance during the working life cycle resembles an inverted bowl, notwithstanding better well-being for the elderly. It rises at the beginning of the working cycle, remains flat for much of it, and decreases near the conclusion. Youthful workers are more productive than older workers, even when considering the possibility of a simultaneous relationship between business production and workforce age structure. Improving legislation and investing in human resources, and technology can help lessen this discrepancy. However, it cannot be completely removed. Countries with elderly populations confront rising social expenses. They have more health and long-term care demands, necessitating more infrastructure investment and changes to provide accessibility. It also makes it difficult to maintain decent pensions. By 2040, Europe's old-age dependence rate might increase from 33% in 2022 to over 50%, leading to increased labour shortages and skills gaps<sup>24</sup>. According to the 2019 ESPAS Report to limit the expected 2% increase in European spending on age-related illnesses by 2030, Europe's actions should be focused on pensions and healthcare, with migration as a potential solution<sup>25</sup>. Unfortunately, living longer does not necessarily lead to better health. Despite advances in technology and longer lifespans, older persons still face similar levels of health deterioration as their parents. This is due to the lack of morbidity compression, which reduces illness to the latter years of life. Healthy older persons can work longer, require less

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<sup>21</sup> Poutvaara, P. Population Aging and Migration. CESifo, 2021

<sup>22</sup> Bacci, M. L. Does Europe Need Mass Immigration? *Journal of Economic Geography*, 2018

<sup>23</sup> Fihel, A., A. Janicka, and W. Kloc-Nowak. "The Direct and Indirect Impact of International Migration on the Population Ageing Process: A Formal Analysis and its Application to Poland." *Demographic Research* 38, 2018

<sup>24</sup> European Parliament. *Choosing Europe's Future: Global Trends to 2040*, 2024

<sup>25</sup> European Parliament. *Challenges and Choices for Europe: Global Trends to 2030*, 2019.

medical care, and have a better overall quality of life<sup>26</sup>. In demographic studies on the ageing of the population, the focus has primarily been on the significance of fertility and mortality as drivers of this process. Less research has been done on how migration affects the age distribution of a population, even though migration is a worldwide phenomenon that is becoming more and more common. Migration across borders impacts a population's size, age composition, and future birthrate directly and indirectly from a demographic perspective. The latter has far-reaching and long-term effects, whereas the former is immediate. International migration may have a substantial long-term influence on populations and have a major impact on the ageing process of the population. Fihel<sup>27</sup> identified various causes for this gap in research. Geographic mobility is not a result of population reproduction, unlike natality or mortality. Economic conditions, legislation, and sociocultural variables have a greater impact on international migration than natural increases. Global demographic studies tend to focus on long-term population patterns and processes, rather than on international mobility. In today's globalized world, migration is growing more frequent, transient, and repeating. However, official registration systems fail to track many types of international mobility, including cyclical and short-term migration. Due to the scarcity of long-term data on international migration, researchers investigating population ageing tend to focus solely on net migration rates. Incorporating immigration rates into the model of age-specific growth rates may pose interpretational difficulties as it compares immigrants (in the numerator) to a receiving population (in the denominator). Regardless research studies show that international migration can lead to variations in population age structure and lead to population rejuvenation or ageing. International migration initially accelerates the process of population ageing in the sending country while delaying it in the recipient country. The initial "rejuvenating" impact may fade if age-specific net migration rates remain steady over time, or it may require continual increases to maintain the benefit. For instance, European populations postponed ageing compared to Japan by boosting the intake of foreigners. Fihel<sup>28</sup> developed an age-specific model to study the impact of international migration (emigration and immigration) on the population of a given country. The abovementioned author studied the population of Poland. The age-specific growth model demonstrates that variations in the population of various age groups are caused by both international migration and the offspring of migrants. Emigration had little influence on the population's age structure, compared to fertility and death. This finding is consistent with previous studies on foreign flows in different nations and periods. However, the effects of outflow will be exacerbated by missing births and a

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<sup>26</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>27</sup> Fihel, A., A. Janicka, and W. Kloc-Nowak. "The Direct and Indirect Impact of International Migration on the Population Ageing Process: A Formal Analysis and its Application to Poland.", 2018

<sup>28</sup> *ibidem*

decrease in future cohort size. Analysis of international migration and population ageing should focus on the indirect influence. The research on Poland primarily examines the impact of emigration. However, this model may also be applied to nations with significant inflows<sup>29</sup>. Concerning the old continent, there are three main uncertainties about population estimates: predicting migration, fertility decline in Sub-Saharan Africa, and recovery from low fertility to replacement levels in rich nations<sup>30</sup>. It is mandatory to keep in mind that policy choices cannot entirely solve the problem. The underlying demographic shifts have been long-term and are caused by fundamental changes in economies and society. Global population growth has declined from about 2% in 1960 to 0.8% currently. Similarly, the worldwide fertility rate has fallen by half over this time, to 2.3 children per woman. However, in the relevant literature four major policy directions are investigated to ameliorate these demographic trends. One is support for increased birth rates. Ambitious pro-natal programs aimed at partially offsetting present population trends might be quite expensive. In the absence of labour market reforms, women and society must choose between motherhood and labour market participation as the labour force shrinks. Higher fertility rates may discourage older women from staying in the work market, reducing the size and composition of the labour force<sup>31</sup>. However, efforts to increase fertility have been inadequate in addressing population reduction. Fertility rates may climb to near-replacement levels in the long run, but they may also drop to lower levels. Rethinking social policy is crucial for achieving the desired outcome. A strong pro-fertility social policy would be costly (a few points of GDP) and unlikely to succeed without a significant shift in cultural attitudes<sup>32</sup>. Increased immigration is another policy. Migration is predicted to be the primary driver of population expansion in high-income nations during the coming decades. High inflows of migrants may be viewed as a straightforward option for augmenting the labour force and increasing worker-to-retiree ratios, but countries will require a high number of migrants to counterbalance population aging. To keep its present worker-to-retiree ratio by 2050, the EU would need to attract more than 100 million foreign-born migrants. Even by raising the present fertility rate of 1.46 to the replacement rate of 2.1, the EU would only achieve a minor rise in the worker-to-retiree ratio<sup>33</sup>. Since the beginning of the century, Europe has seen a substantial net influx of immigrants. However, due to the economic crisis, several nations have implemented restrictive policies and are exploring zero migration. Between 2015 and 2050, with zero migration, most nations' populations and active populations would decrease, even if activity

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem

<sup>30</sup> European Parliament. Choosing Europe's Future: Global Trends to 2040, 2024

<sup>31</sup> Izvorski, I., and M. M. Lokshin. "How Can Europe and Central Asia Tackle its Ageing Crisis?", 2024

<sup>32</sup> Bacci, M. L. Does Europe Need Mass Immigration? *Journal of Economic Geography*, 2018

<sup>33</sup> Izvorski, I., and M. M. Lokshin. "How Can Europe and Central Asia Tackle its Ageing Crisis?", 2024

rates and retirement ages increased. Immigrants have contributed 15% to the rejuvenation of European societies since the beginning of this century.<sup>34</sup> However, bringing in large numbers of migrants whose skills do not match the needs of destination nations may be cost-prohibitive. Furthermore, the costs and viability of steps to recruit skilled migrants in competition with other nations may be substantial. It is unknown if there is an adequate global supply of talented migrants, and whether exporting nations will make efforts to maintain their people capital. Fertility rates in exporting nations are beginning to fall, and the worldwide supply of migrants is expected to fall by 31.5 million below demand by 2050. The effectiveness of these measures is further limited by the influence of technology on productivity in post-industrial economies, as well as the amount of older people who choose to work beyond retirement. Another option is to bring into the labour force a significant number of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). NEET accounts for around 20% in Romania and 15% in Bulgaria and Croatia, higher than the EU average of 12%. Integrating pro-migrant policies with measures to boost labour market prospects for women should be at the heart of how the area responds to a greyer population. These policies must be reinforced by measures aimed at increasing labour force participation, particularly among young people who do not study or work<sup>35</sup>. Many European governments are rapidly restricting international mobility and the consensus in Europe in favour of limitations is growing. Bacci<sup>36</sup> identifies the following arguments provided to support a restrictive approach towards migration. Immigrants do age, consequently, the “antiageing” benefit is only temporary. Deductive reasoning and empirical evidence indicate that significant immigration can harm the material and social well-being of the poorer segment of the receiving population. This can lead to lower wage levels, friction in schools, and housing markets, and claims for welfare-state benefits. Third while mass immigration may contribute to overall growth, it is unlikely to increase per capita wealth. This relies on migrants' talents and employability. Finally, mass immigration damages cultural coherence, diminishes mutual regard, impairs collaboration, and makes redistributive initiatives unattractive. Taxpayers believe the beneficiaries will be varied and recent immigrants. Immigration threatens national cohesiveness, leading to a severe rightward shift in Western democracies<sup>37</sup>. Similarly, Merritt<sup>38</sup> provides an overview of arguments in the European public discourse surrounding migration. The first popular fallacy is that migrants “steal employment” from local Europeans. The current active EU-UK workforce of 240 million is expected to fall to 207 million by mid-

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<sup>34</sup> Bacci, M. L. Does Europe Need Mass Immigration? *Journal of Economic Geography*, 2018

<sup>35</sup> Izvorski, I., and M. M. Lokshin. "How Can Europe and Central Asia Tackle its Ageing Crisis?", 2024

<sup>36</sup> Bacci, M. L. Does Europe Need Mass Immigration? *Journal of Economic Geography*, 2018

<sup>37</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>38</sup> Merritt, G. *People Power: Why We Need More Migrants*, 2021.

century, boosting demand for even relatively unskilled people. Migrants are often believed to place a significant load on social security systems ranging from unemployment assistance to healthcare. The data suggests otherwise; the OECD clearly states that "migrants contribute more in taxes and social contributions than they receive in individual benefits."<sup>39</sup> In reality, extensive research demonstrates that migrants generally contribute more as taxpayers and consumers than they cost during the initial 'settling in' stages of arrival. The 2015-16 migrant crisis did create financial constraints inside Europe, particularly in Germany and Sweden, but they are now considered as positive expenditures. There is also the terrorist myth, which has gained traction after the attacks in Paris, Nice, Brussels, London, Berlin, and Manchester. However, counter-terrorism specialists estimate their involvement at 0.01 %, noting that Islamic extremists are typically from established second or third generation immigrant households. Arguments against immigration include claims that Europe is too crowded to accommodate additional people, and that competition for employment from lower-paid migrants lowers general pay levels. Neither holds up to inspection. Europe's problem is increasingly the 'desertification' of neglected areas, rather than a population density significantly lower than that of, say, China. Although migrants have somewhat lowered pay levels in some unskilled areas, in the majority of cases, earnings have increased. A more compelling argument is that robotisation and the digital revolution eliminate the need for migrants to supplement diminishing workforces. However, digital technologies have yet to produce the promised productivity benefits that would drive much-needed development and prosperity, the 'people power' that migrants may bring will be critical<sup>40</sup>. Regardless of the numerous studies empirically proving the benefits of migration for an old population, immigration remains the second biggest concern of Europeans, right after the ongoing war in Ukraine (Eurobarometer, 2024). In previous EuroBarometer, immigration was the main concern of European citizens. 75% of respondents are in favour of the reinforcement of external borders and 68% would support a common European Asylum system (Eurobarometer, 2023). This highlights the relevance of studying the public discourse on migration as it can have a greater impact on policy choices. The discourse on migration can be compounded in four main areas: the management of regular immigration, integration processes, the control of irregular immigration and the legislation on the acquisition of citizenship<sup>41</sup>. When analysing the latter aspect, one must take into consideration that migration governance is a multifaceted process shaped by state and non-state actors, policies, practices, and discursive techniques. Recognizing and eliminating bias in this process is critical to building a more equal and successful migration

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<sup>39</sup> Merritt, G. *People Power: Why We Need More Migrants*, 2021

<sup>40</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>41</sup> Bonifazi, C., and S. Strozza. *L'immigrazione nei programmi elettorali*, 2022

policy. The definition of migration goes beyond the actual act of crossing borders and includes discriminatory laws that decide who is awarded certain privileges. For example, in nations where citizenship is based on *jus sanguinis*, people born in the country to foreign parents are frequently considered migrants despite never having crossed an international boundary<sup>42</sup>. As shown by a multilevel analysis of prejudice in European nations, a specific society would generally be more prejudiced towards migrants than societies of more inclusive states. It would view their presence as a worsening factor for their country, if the narratives that accompany the theme of migration are embedded in an exclusive and discriminatory cognition of the nation. Therefore, it is not surprising that in Europe, the nations that have reacted more harshly to the "migration crisis" coincide with those that present more concerning situations in terms of prejudice: Turkey, Greece, Russia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ukraine, Italy, United Kingdom, and Austria. The dominant narrative in cases where a cognitive framework permits the use of prejudiced language to shape discourses, policies, strategies, and tactics is migration as a crisis that has to be addressed<sup>43</sup>. This institutional prejudice is visible in Italy, where many people born to foreign parents are non-citizens and can become 'irregular migrants' when they reach adulthood if they do not satisfy specific criteria, such as work or education. Efforts to address this issue, such as suggestions for *ius culturae*, which would confer citizenship based on cultural integration rather than birthplace, have encountered opposition in the Italian Parliament. This opposition demonstrates how migration is more than just a physical act; it is a profoundly institutionalised category used to discriminate among inhabitants. Far-right and populist political organizations frequently exploit these divisions, claiming that migrants are only entitled to certain rights in their native countries and not abroad. Prejudice and the securitisation of migration generate a negative feedback loop that perpetuates discriminatory actions. Prejudice-based migration policies can deepen anxieties and sustain aggressive politics. Policy adjustments, on the other hand, can have a considerable influence on migration governance, either reinforcing or weakening the migration-crime link. Effective governance necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between policies, practices, and narratives while acknowledging that even little changes may transform the landscape of migration governance<sup>44</sup>. In a democratic system, political parties typically compile social interests and publicly reflect them through elected members in national parliaments. Dahl defines democratic representation as the capacity of political elites to bring together and represent socially diverse interests within democratic

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<sup>42</sup> Bello, V. "The Spiral of Prejudice and the Securitization of Migration: The Complexity of Small Changes in the Italian Migration Networked Governance." Italian Political Science, 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Bello, V. "The Spiralling of the Securitisation of Migration in the EU: From the Management of a 'Crisis' to a Governance of Human Mobility?" Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 2020

<sup>44</sup> Bello, V. "The Spiral of Prejudice and the Securitization of Migration: The Complexity of Small Changes in the Italian Migration Networked Governance." Italian Political Science, 2021.

institutions. Recently, the tension, the conflict between responsive and accountable political parties has been exacerbated by globalization and its effects on domestic decision-making. Nations are increasingly a part of intricate global networks of interdependence, and political parties are being compelled to act responsibly as a result of their relationships with other nations and international players. Against this context, political parties have frequently defied the will of their own electorates in order to uphold their countries' foreign commitments. Political parties, especially mainstream ones, have been accused of encouraging voter alienation by emphasizing their responsibilities as responsible elites more and more. Conversely, the latter have become more and more irritated with the parties' disregard for their preferred policies. Previous research indicates that this phenomenon holds special significance inside the European Union (EU). There is a common consensus that the EU had a comprehensive crisis of political representation throughout the many crises that struck Europe in the 2010s. While this crisis created a "strain of representation" at the national level, it also raised questions about the democratic accountability of the EU's answers to the difficulties it faced at the EU level<sup>45</sup>. However, Vicere's<sup>46</sup> empirical analysis finds that concerning the migration crisis that started in 2015, political parties matched their immigration stance with that of their constituents. Political parties also had increasingly conservative stances on immigration flows. The data demonstrates that the public's perception of immigration as a danger was correlated with their choices in this respect. Migration is a high-salience topic in the public debate. Vicere's<sup>47</sup> findings indicate that the parties responded considerably to the impetus of public opinion on the immigration problem, changing their policy stances in line with changes in public opinion.

## **Theoretical framework**

Why does each party want to talk about specific issues but not others? The explanation is that each party's primary goal is to preserve or expand its vote from election to election. And this goal necessitates balancing two priorities: (a) retaining as many of their committed voters as possible, and (b) attempting to recruit new ones. Starting with Downs, extensive research contends that it is difficult to reconcile both goals; for example, if you shift to the centre to attract moderate people, you will certainly lose more radical supporters. However, the original notion of issue yield<sup>48</sup> is based on the discovery that, when addressing particular problems under dispute, there are frequently win-win issues that allow a party to fulfil both goals. These are

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<sup>45</sup> Vicerè, M. G., and D. Angelucci. "Disconnected? Public Opinion, Interest Groups, and Political Elites during the Migration Crisis." *Italian Political Science*, 2022

<sup>46</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>48</sup> De Sio, L., and T. Weber. "Issue Yield: A Model of Party Strategy in Multidimensional Space." *The American Political Science Review*, 2014

subjects on which the party's base is nearly united - and hence there is no possibility of internal split – and on which a large number of additional citizens agree - thus there is room for expansion. They are classified as high-yield topics; and indeed, they are at the heart of a party's characterization and the focus of the election campaign. The party is considered credible on these matters even by those who do not vote for it, therefore granting the possibility to retain committed voters and attract new ones<sup>49</sup>. The foundation of issue-yield theory is comprised of several axioms:

- a) The objective of party strategy is to maximize votes.
- b) Voters assess parties using voter-party proximity estimates.
- c) Shifting a party's issue stance is more challenging and expensive than shifting the focus of an issue
- d) Voters' relative weights for various topics are susceptible to priming effects, which means that the focus that political parties place on a certain subject may have an impact.

This theory depends mostly on preference distributions, which are accessible even in the absence of established credibility reputations, even if it can incorporate credibility judgments as well. A party may determine a high potential yield for a new issue that isn't yet on the political agenda, for an issue without a clear ownership pattern, or for an issue that isn't usually associated with the party. This method adds a fresh, dynamic aspect by facilitating the identification of chances for issues before they completely enter the political sphere. This is especially important during an election season when new parties and topics are growing and emerging, and when major changes in the strategies of established parties occur. Parties evaluate public issue preferences based on how well they mesh with the party's current base of support, as explained by issue-yield theory. They only draw attention to problems when they give them a competitive edge without compromising their internal cohesion<sup>50</sup>. However, it would be naïve to think that parties respond just to these incentives, even while the issue-yield method attempts to simulate the strategic component of parties' issue emphases. Parties are typically required to react to the public's larger agenda of concerns and priorities as well. This generally involves using a "riding-the-wave" strategy and matching their campaign agendas with the topics that the public views as being the most important. The issue-yield theory makes clear that parties prioritize public problems based on how well they mesh with the party's current base of support, giving priority

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<sup>49</sup> Cataldi, M. "Partiti 'populisti'? Piuttosto 'neo-conflittuali'. E dietro il loro successo c'è spesso una superiore capacità strategica." CISE, 2024

<sup>50</sup> De Sio, L., and T. Weber. "Issue Yield, Campaign Communication, and Electoral Performance: A Six-Country Comparative Analysis.", 2020



to subjects that provide them a competitive edge while preserving internal cohesion. While the issue-yield model attempts to simulate the strategic aspect of the parties' issue emphases, it is impractical to anticipate that parties will act only in response to these incentives. Parties are typically required to react to the public's larger agenda of concerns and priorities as well. This generally involves taking a "riding-the-wave" approach, with campaign agendas aligned with the most important topics. As such, De Sio and Weber's model incorporate not just party-specific issue-yield indices but also an index that represents the total salience that all respondents have given to each issue<sup>51</sup>.

Based on this theory, I formulate two hypotheses:

H1: the debate on nationality law has a higher saliency than migration issues

H2: the debate on nationality law has a lower saliency than migration issues

In this thesis, the salience of the debate surrounding potential reforms to nationality law is employed as an indicator to assess the presence and significance of more broader view that entails the interaction between international migration and demographic change within the Italian political discourse.

## Methodology

The empirical strategy for this research is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between demographic trends and political discourse on citizenship law in European countries, with a specific focus on Italy. Initially, the study undertakes a broad analysis of citizenship laws across various European nations, seeking to identify patterns and correlations between demographic changes and the political narratives surrounding international migration flows. This analysis sets the stage for a more focused case study on Italy, chosen due to its growing old-age cohorts and the ongoing discussion on the reform of citizenship law (Law 91/1992<sup>52</sup>). The case study on Italy is methodically divided into several key components. First, it includes an examination of the demographic trends of the country, including an in-depth analysis of emigration and immigration flow. Then it follows an overview of the political debate on the citizenship law, paying special attention to the 2024 debate. This involves scrutinizing legislative proposals, amendments, and the arguments presented by different political factions. This legislative analysis is essential for understanding the legal and political context in which

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<sup>51</sup> Ibidem

<sup>52</sup> Law 5 February 1992, n. 91, Law on the Acquisition of Citizenship

citizenship issues are framed and contested. The study employs a quantitative approach to analyse statistical data from reputable sources such as CENSIS and ISTAT. The study of quantitative analysis focuses on voting behaviour in recent national elections, aiming to uncover trends that reflect the population's sentiment towards citizenship issues. This analysis is crucial for establishing a factual basis for understanding public sentiment and its potential influence on political discourse and legislative outcomes. Complementing the latter is a qualitative exploration of the political debate surrounding citizenship law. This involves a discourse analysis of interviews with representatives from major political parties. The study is based on in-depth interviews with selected candidates, each lasting 30 minutes. The candidates are chosen based on their relevance and representativeness in the ongoing debate, ensuring a diverse range of viewpoints are captured. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a holistic and thorough understanding of the relationship between demographic trends, political discourse, and public sentiment regarding nationality law in Italy. By integrating legislative analysis, quantitative data, and qualitative insights, the research offers a multi-dimensional perspective that captures the complexities and nuances of citizenship debates in contemporary Europe. This comprehensive empirical strategy aims not only to elucidate the Italian case but also contributes to the broader academic discourse on citizenship, migration, and political identity in Europe.

## **Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter I “Ageing Countries and Migration” delves into the dual phenomena of ageing populations and migration transitions, establishing the demographic context essential for the subsequent case study. Chapter II “The Case of Italy” provides an in-depth analysis of Italy's demographic changes. It then focuses on the social role of citizenship law and the different legislative regimes present in Europe. It will conclude with an in-depth analysis of Italian citizenship law, characterised by a pure *ius sanguinis* principle. Chapter III “The Political Debate On Nationality Law” includes a qualitative analysis of the political discourse surrounding citizenship. It proposes a discourse analysis of interviews with representatives of the major political parties, paired with a study of the voting behaviour of the Italian population in the 2022 national election. The thesis concludes with a synthesis of the findings, reflecting on their broader implications for policy and future research.

# CHAPTER I – POPULATION AGEING AND MIGRATION

## Introduction

A 2024 Lancet study finds that before the end of the twenty-first century, almost all nations and territories outside of sub-Saharan Africa will have a declining population due to persistently low fertility, with fewer young people than older people. Precisely by 2050, 155 out of 204 nations and territories (76%) will have fertility below replacement levels<sup>53</sup>. By 2100, the number of nations and territories below replacement level is anticipated to rise to 198 out of 204 (97%) countries and territories. By the end of the century, more than three-quarters (77%) of live births are anticipated in low- and lower-middle-income nations, specifically Sub-Saharan countries<sup>54</sup>. The decline in fertility rates contributes to population ageing. Ageing is a natural outcome of reduced birth rates and increased life expectancy<sup>55</sup>. Due to a declining labour force and an increasing ratio of elderly individuals to the working-age population, the implications of population ageing will strain national health insurance, social security programs, and healthcare infrastructure unless governments devise innovative solutions or secure new sources of finance. A reduction in the working-age, tax-paying population will lead to decreased funding for these programs, exacerbating the issue<sup>56</sup>. The public's reactions to this event exhibit a spectrum of sentiments, ranging from optimism to apprehension. Predictions vary widely, encompassing notions of a "population disaster" and a "birth crisis", alongside potential implications for national security. In response, some policymakers have advocated for pro-natalist initiatives, which include enhancing maternal health services, providing child-related financial assistance and tax benefits, offering childcare subsidies, extending parental leave, ensuring reemployment rights, promoting gender equality, and alleviating financial obstacles to parenthood. Conversely, others have sought to implement policies that restrict access to contraception and impose bans or limitations on abortion and voluntary sterilisation. Often, the responsibility for these issues disproportionately affects women, who face criticism for rejecting conventional roles while simultaneously being urged to adopt more submissive femininity to restore the so-called "traditional" family structure and gender roles<sup>57</sup>. It is important to

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<sup>53</sup> The "replacement level" is the rate at which population size remains constant from generation to generation; this is defined as 2.1 births per woman (UNDP)

<sup>54</sup> Bhattacharjee, N. V., A. E. Schumacher, A. Aali, et al. "Global Fertility in 204 Countries and Territories, 1950–2021, with Forecasts to 2100: A Comprehensive Demographic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021." The Lancet, 2024

<sup>55</sup> UNFPA. State of the World Population 2023

<sup>56</sup> Bhattacharjee, N. V., A. E. Schumacher, A. Aali, et al. "Global Fertility in 204 Countries and Territories, 1950–2021, with Forecasts to 2100: A Comprehensive Demographic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021." The Lancet, 2024

<sup>57</sup> UNFPA. State of the World Population 2023

recognize that population dynamics are influenced by a multitude of factors beyond mere fertility rates. Numerous countries have experienced fertility rates below replacement level since the 1970s; however, this has not resulted in a population decline due to net immigration. UN demographers predict that this trend will persist. The 2022 World Population Prospects report indicates that migration will serve as the primary driver of population growth in high-income countries, as deaths are projected to surpass births in the coming decades (UN DESA, 2022). However, the success of this approach hinges on a transformation in both political and public attitudes towards immigration in these countries, alongside the establishment of sufficient incentives for individuals to relocate from nations with higher fertility rates<sup>58</sup>. According to the most recent worldwide migrant estimates (dated as of mid-2020), about 281 million individuals resided in a country other than their natal country. International migrants represent 3.6% of the world population<sup>59</sup>. Dao<sup>60</sup> provides a numerical migration model across nations with varying baseline populations and production. After calibrating the model to 180 nations' migratory and socio-economic features in 2010, they found that demographic changes mostly influenced historical migration patterns. According to their forecast, OECD nations' average percentage of immigrants will rise from 12% in 2010 to 25-28% by the 21st century if immigration policies remain consistent<sup>61</sup>. Additionally, this phenomenon is often met with apprehension, primarily stemming from economic and cultural concerns. Concerns range from issues related to the labour market, such as low-skilled migrants potentially driving down wages or "overqualified" migrants displacing domestic workers, contributing to rising income inequality. Finally, there are worries regarding rapidly evolving societal norms and the integration—or lack thereof—of migrants. Such anxieties can intensify ethno-nationalist sentiments, as they centre around questions of identity and belonging<sup>62</sup>. This situation underscores the importance of formulating ethical and effective immigration policies<sup>63</sup>. Over the last twenty years, the demographic landscape of Europe has undergone several significant transformations. The first major development was the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004 and 2007, which increased the EU's population from 381 million to 494 million. This enlargement allowed an additional 100 million individuals to move more freely across member states as EU citizens, thereby enhancing

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<sup>58</sup> Bhattacharjee, N. V., A. E. Schumacher, A. Aali, et al. "Global Fertility in 204 Countries and Territories, 1950–2021, with Forecasts to 2100: A Comprehensive Demographic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021." *The Lancet*, 2024

<sup>59</sup> IOM. *World Migration Report*, 2024

<sup>60</sup> Dao, T., F. Docquier, M. Maurel, and P. Schaus. "Global Migration in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries: The Unstoppable Force of Demography." *Review of World Economics* 157, no. 2, 2021

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>62</sup> UNFPA. *State of the World Population 2023*

<sup>63</sup> Bhattacharjee, N. V., A. E. Schumacher, A. Aali, et al. "Global Fertility in 204 Countries and Territories, 1950–2021, with Forecasts to 2100: A Comprehensive Demographic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021." *The Lancet*, 2024

internal migration. Another critical shift occurred due to external migration, particularly during the European Migrant Crisis that began in 2015. In that year alone, over one million refugees arrived in Europe, marking the largest influx of asylum seekers in the continent's history. Alongside the structural changes brought about by EU expansion and the substantial migration flows, the 2008 economic crisis and consequential recession profoundly affected the lives of many individuals across Europe, leading to broader implications for the overall population. Today, Europe is characterized by one of the highest percentages of elderly individuals within its demographic composition globally. The dynamics of the European population cannot be solely attributed to the specific occurrences at the onset of the twenty-first century; rather, they are shaped by enduring processes such as population ageing, mortality rates, fertility trends, and migration patterns<sup>64</sup>.

This first chapter aims to analyse the correlation between population ageing and migration. It is structured into two distinct sections. The first section will first define the age transition and migration transition. Then it will follow a comprehensive overview of the current demographic situation of Europe. Specifically, I analyse the demographic gap between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea and its implications. Finally, I will summarise the various policy measures adopted by the European Union and Member States concerning migration flows.

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<sup>64</sup> Deimantas, V. J., A. E. Şanlıtürk, L. Azzollini, and S. Köksal. "Population Dynamics and Policies in Europe: Analysis of Population Resilience at the Subnational and National Levels." *Population Research and Policy Review*, 2024

## 1.1. The age transition

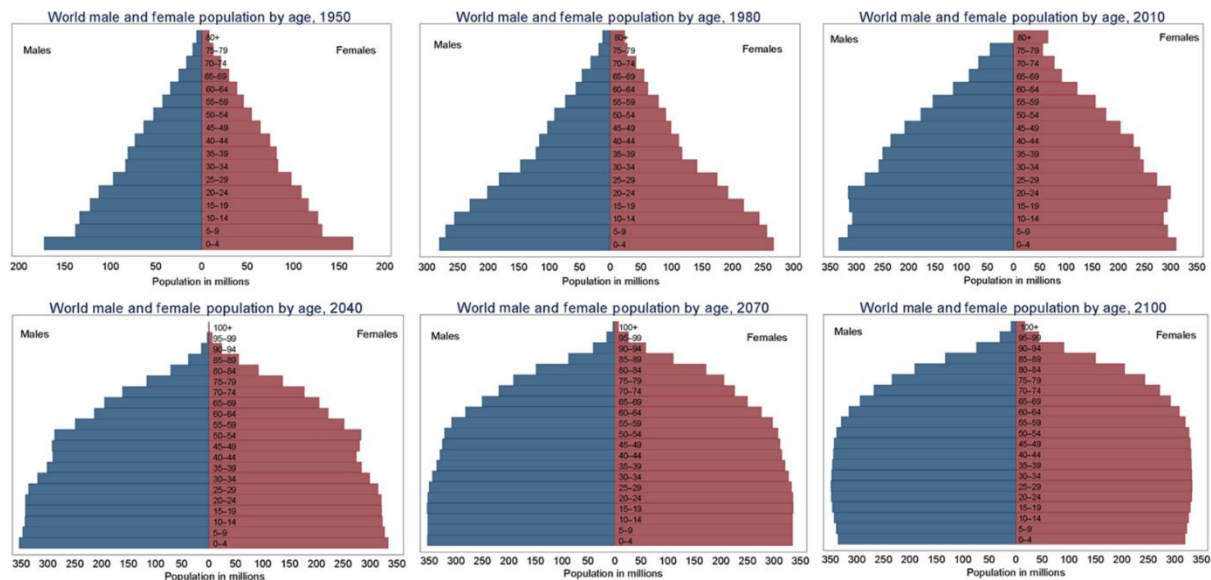


Figure 1: World population by age group, 1950–2100. Source: UN, *World Population Prospects*, 2015.

Over the past fifty years, the global population has experienced significant growth, more than doubling from approximately 2.5 billion in 1950 to over 8 billion today. The global population is anticipated to keep increasing for the next 50 to 60 years, ultimately reaching an estimated peak of approximately 10.3 billion individuals by the mid-2080. Following this peak, a gradual decline is expected, with projections indicating a decrease to about 10.2 billion by the century's end. Notably, in 63 countries and regions, which collectively account for 28% of the global population in 2024, the population has already reached its peak before this year. Additionally, in 48 countries and regions, representing 10% of the world's population in 2024, population peaks are forecasted to occur between 2025 and 2054. Conversely, in the remaining 126 countries and regions, population growth is likely to persist until at least 2054, with potential peaks occurring later in the century or even beyond 2100. The primary factor contributing to the global population growth through the middle of the century will be the demographic momentum established by previous growth patterns. The population of women aged 15 to 49 is anticipated to rise from nearly 2 billion in 2024 to a peak of about 2.2 billion in the late 2050s, sustaining population growth even if the birth rate per woman decreases to the replacement level. The current youthful demographic structure, a consequence of earlier growth, is expected to account for 79 % of the population increase by 2054, contributing an estimated 1.4 billion individuals (UN DESA, 2024). Notably, the growth rate among younger age groups (0–14 years) has stabilized in recent decades. Conversely, the working-age population (15–59 years) has steadily increased since 1950, primarily driven by developments in emerging economies. In contrast, more developed nations have seen a relatively stable proportion of individuals aged 15–59, with

forecasts suggesting a decline to about 50% by 2100. In stark contrast, the demographic segments of those aged 60 and above, particularly the 80 and older cohort, are expanding rapidly in both absolute numbers and as a percentage of the overall population, reaching unprecedented levels (Piggot, 2016). By the late 2070s, it is anticipated that the global demographic of individuals aged 65 and older will reach 2.2 billion, surpassing the population of children under the age of 18. Furthermore, by the mid-2030s, the number of individuals aged 80 and above (i.e. the "oldest old" population) is expected to exceed that of infants, totalling 265 million (UN DESA, 2024). The rapid increase in this age group, which is associated with higher incidences of severe chronic health issues that impose substantial financial and temporal burdens, poses critical challenges for individuals, families, and governmental bodies. Furthermore, older age groups are beginning to represent a significant portion of the total population, with individuals aged 60 and above anticipated to make up a larger share in all countries from 2000 to 2050. (Piggot, 2016). The age transition signifies a movement from a younger population, characterized by a higher number of males compared to females, to an older demographic where females outnumber males, as illustrated in Fig. 1. Factors such as fertility, mortality, and migration play significant roles in shaping the age and sex composition of a social group<sup>65</sup>. The transformation of the age structure within a population is a natural outcome of the demographic transition. This transition is typically divided into three distinct stages. Initially, in a Malthusian context characterized by high mortality and fertility rates, population growth remains negligible as elevated death rates counterbalance high birth rates. In the first stage of the demographic transition, mortality begins to decrease while fertility rates remain elevated. This decline in mortality predominantly affects younger age groups, leading to an increase in the proportion of children within the population. Consequently, this phase results in a younger demographic profile, a condition that may persist for several decades. Following this, the second stage witnesses a decline in fertility rates, which in turn causes a reduction in the overall population growth rate, although it remains positive. This stage can extend for 40 to 50 years, during which the working-age population expands at a rate that outpaces the total population growth, thereby decreasing the overall dependency ratio. In the third stage, both mortality and fertility levels stabilize at low rates, halting population growth, which may even lead to a decline. This stage is marked by increased longevity, resulting in a significant rise in the elderly demographic, while low fertility rates impede the growth of the working-age population. Upon the completion of all three stages, population growth approaches zero as both fertility and mortality rates stabilize at low levels. The entire demographic transition process generally spans over a century and

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<sup>65</sup> Goerres, A., and P. Vanhuyse. *Global Political Demography: The Politics of Population Change*, 2021.

culminates in a significantly larger population size. Projections indicate that this transition will be completed in all nations by the year 2100 (Piggot, 2016). A 2020 Lancet study showcases relevant projections regarding mortality rate, fertility rate and migration flows. Projections indicate an anticipated rise in life expectancy; however, the pace of this advancement is expected to decelerate<sup>66</sup>. As of 2024, the global life expectancy at birth has reached 73.3 years, reflecting an increase of 8.4 years since 1995. Since 2022, life expectancy has rebounded to levels observed before the COVID-19 pandemic in nearly all nations and regions (UN DESA, 2024). By the year 2100, significant disparities persist on a global scale, with estimates of life expectancy for both genders across various countries and territories varying from 69.4 years to 88.9 years in the reference scenario<sup>67</sup>. At present, the worldwide fertility rate is recorded at 2.3 live births per woman, a decrease from 3.3 births in 1990. More than half of the countries and regions across the globe exhibit fertility rates below 2.1 births per woman, which is the threshold necessary for a population to remain stable over the long term without the influence of migration. In fact, today approximately 20% of nations and regions, including China, Italy, the Republic of Korea, and Spain, are facing what is often termed "ultra-low" fertility, characterized by fewer than 1.4 live births per woman throughout her lifetime. The likelihood of returning to a fertility rate of 2.1 births per woman within the next three decades is exceedingly low (0.1%) in the 24 countries with ultra-low fertility rates as of 2024, which have already reached their peak. By the late 2030s, a significant portion of women in these countries, which have already experienced population peaks, will be beyond the natural childbearing age. Given the anticipated rapid decline in the proportion of women within the reproductive age bracket (approximately 15 to 49 years), the effectiveness of policies designed to enhance fertility rates is expected to wane over time (UN DESA, 2024). In the reference scenario, the global total fertility rate exhibited a consistent decline, ultimately arriving at 1.66 by the year 2100. The variation in global TFR across different scenarios was significant, ranging from 1.52 in the scenario aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to 2.59 in the scenario characterized by a slower progression. The disparity in TFR between the more rapid and the slower scenarios underscores the substantial influence of educational attainment and access to reproductive health services on the overall global fertility trajectory<sup>68</sup>. In fact, promoting gender equality and empowering

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<sup>66</sup> Vollset, S. E., E. Goren, Chun-Wei Yuan, et al. "Fertility, Mortality, Migration, and Population Scenarios for 195 Countries and Territories from 2017 to 2100: A Forecasting Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study." *The Lancet*, 2020

<sup>67</sup> Vollset, S. E., E. Goren, Chun-Wei Yuan, et al. "Fertility, Mortality, Migration, and Population Scenarios for 195 Countries and Territories from 2017 to 2100: A Forecasting Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study." *The Lancet*, 2020

<sup>68</sup> Vollset, S. E., E. Goren, Chun-Wei Yuan, et al. "Fertility, Mortality, Migration, and Population Scenarios for 195 Countries and Territories from 2017 to 2100: A Forecasting Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study." *The Lancet*, 2020



women are essential strategies for addressing the challenges posed by both rapid population growth and decline. Discriminatory practices and legal obstacles significantly hinder the access of women and adolescents to sexual and reproductive health services. By raising the legal age for marriage and incorporating family planning into primary healthcare systems, it is possible to improve women's educational opportunities, enhance their economic involvement, and decrease rates of childbearing. In nations where population growth has stabilized or is projected to stabilize within the next thirty years, implementing policies such as paid parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and affordable, high-quality childcare can bolster women's participation in the workforce. Additionally, these measures can provide comprehensive support for an aging population and promote an equitable distribution of caregiving and domestic responsibilities between genders, ultimately fostering family stability, encouraging higher birth rates, and enhancing economic security for both men and women in their later years (UN DESA, 2024). Regarding migration, the study indicate that by the year 2100, 118 out of 195 countries and territories are expected to experience net migration rates ranging from  $-1$  to  $1$  per 1,000 individuals. Additionally, 44 countries are anticipated to have net migration rates between  $-2$  and  $2$  per 1,000. The nations predicted to receive the highest absolute numbers of immigrants by 2100 include the United States, India, and China. Conversely, the countries expected to see the most significant emigration are Somalia, the Philippines, and Afghanistan. Furthermore, net immigration rates are projected to be the highest in Canada, Turkey, and Sweden, while the highest emigration rates are forecasted for El Salvador, Samoa, and Jamaica<sup>69</sup>. The study confirms that we are moving towards an older, slowly growing world. The ageing of the population leads to a higher percentage of elderly individuals<sup>70</sup> within society. This demographic shift results in significant alterations in societal structure, which stem in part from the biological changes that accompany individual ageing. The effects of this demographic transition are influenced by the ratio of young-old individuals, often referred to as the "third" age, to old-old individuals, known as the "fourth" age. The young-old demographic tends to exert a more pronounced social influence, while the old-old group is more closely associated with the biological aspects of ageing. It is important to note that population ageing does not equate to a scenario where all individuals are elderly; rather, it signifies a general trend towards an older populace. This phenomenon highlights that, historically, we are witnessing an unprecedented increase in the elderly demographic. Furthermore, age itself is largely understood as a social construct,

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<sup>69</sup> Vollset, S. E., E. Goren, Chun-Wei Yuan, et al. "Fertility, Mortality, Migration, and Population Scenarios for 195 Countries and Territories from 2017 to 2100: A Forecasting Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study." *The Lancet*, 2020

<sup>70</sup> The elderly population is the share of the population aged 65 years and over

shaped by discussions and definitions that prioritize social rather than biological criteria<sup>71</sup>. The interaction between decreasing fertility rates and increasing life expectancy during the demographic transition serves as the fundamental driver of population aging. Nevertheless, the effects of these factors on ageing and their subsequent implications differ significantly. A decline in fertility leads to a reduction in the number of young individuals, resulting in smaller cohorts of both youth and the working-age population over time, particularly as low birth rates persist. Assuming longevity remains unchanged, a decrease in fertility results in a higher old-age dependency ratio (OADR)<sup>72</sup>, potentially leading to increased resource demands on the population. Conversely, an enhancement in life expectancy elevates the average age of the population and the proportion of elderly individuals by increasing the number of older adults who survive. If the rise in longevity, attributed to decreased mortality rates among the elderly, is accompanied by improvements in their health and productivity, the economic challenges associated with population ageing may be mitigated (Piggot, 2016). An examination of the effects of age and gender on mortality reveals that declines in mortality rates influence individuals across all age groups and genders, with the youngest and oldest populations being particularly susceptible to mortality. In countries characterized by low maternal mortality rates, males exhibit a higher likelihood of death compared to females at any given age. The phenomena of migration and mortality impact individuals of all ages, albeit with differing consequences for men and women. In contrast, the effects of fertility do not parallel those of mortality or migration, which accounts for the more pronounced changes associated with fertility. Fertility rates significantly shape age structures across societies, from rudimentary to advanced, even when mortality rates remain stable. Goerres<sup>73</sup> provides a significant example, comparing two countries with comparable high female life. The United Arab Emirates maintained a high total fertility rate (TFR) of 4.9 in 2000, whereas Latvia experienced a markedly low TFR of 1.2. Consequently, the age distributions of these nations differ significantly; the UAE has sustained high fertility rates over an extended period, while Latvia, a former Soviet Union state, has faced low fertility for several years. In 2000, 33% of the UAE's population was under 15 years of age, in contrast to 19% in Latvia. Conversely, only 2% of the UAE's population was aged 65 or older, compared to 14% in Latvia. However, should fertility in the UAE decline to below replacement levels, akin to Latvia's situation, the age structure will inevitably adopt the barrel shape currently observed in Latvia, characterized by an increase in the average age and a decrease in the proportion of

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<sup>71</sup> Goerres, A., and P. Vanhuyse. *Global Political Demography: The Politics of Population Change*, 2021.

<sup>72</sup> The old-age dependency ratio is the ratio of the number of elderly people at an age when they are generally economically inactive (i.e. aged 65 and over), compared to the number of people of working age, i.e. 15-64 years old.

<sup>73</sup> *ibidem*

youth, while the elderly population will rise as a fraction of the total. This phenomenon illustrates the interplay between age transition and fertility transition within the broader context of demographic transition. Furthermore, when a population experiences net migration, whether in or out, its age and gender composition is likely to undergo significant alterations, a trend applicable to nearly all populations. Immigration generally leads to a rise in the population of young adults within the receiving region, while simultaneously decreasing the population in the area of origin. Over an extended period, migration exerts an indirect influence on reproductive patterns, as these young adult immigrants are typically at an optimal age for reproduction. Consequently, an influx of young adult immigrants in the current year is likely to produce a greater-than-average number of elderly individuals in the next three to four decades<sup>74</sup>. However, it is relevant to observe in countries where fertility rates are already below the replacement threshold, the emigration of individuals within the reproductive age group can exacerbate the decline in population growth. In these contexts, enhancing opportunities for decent employment and encouraging return migration may prove to be more effective strategies for curbing population decline in the short term than initiatives aimed at increasing fertility rates (UN DESA, 2024).

## **1.2. The migration transition**

Migrations are heterogeneous and differ in many respects, e.g. the motivations that drive individuals to leave their countries, the modalities, the routes chosen, etc. To better understand such a complex phenomenon, it is therefore appropriate to precisely define the extensive, and sometimes inappropriate, terminology used to describe it. It is also important to point out that the legal framework on migration is broad and diverse and that multiple branches of law contribute to defining norms and principles, such as, for example, Humanitarian Law, Law of the Sea or International Criminal Law<sup>75</sup>. Generally speaking, 'migration' is when a person moves from his or her place of residence to another place, either within or outside the State of residence, as he or she enjoys, as an inalienable right, freedom of movement. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of every State. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his own country (Art. 13, Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

However, it must be made clear that the right to freedom of movement does not imply an absolute right to enter and remain in a state other than the state of origin. Every state has the right to expel from its territory those who are not its nationals and to deny entry to foreigners.

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<sup>74</sup> Goerres, A., and P. Vanhuyse. *Global Political Demography: The Politics of Population Change*, 2021.

<sup>75</sup> IOM, *Key Migration Terms*, n.d., <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

However, this right of states encounters limits, established by customary and contractual norms. International law prohibits the expulsion of a foreign national to a state where his or her life would be seriously threatened on account of race, sex, language, religion, political opinion or other grounds. This prohibition, the 'obligation of *non-refoulement*', was enshrined in the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) also enshrines the prohibition of expulsion of an individual to a state where there is a well-founded suspicion that he or she may be subjected to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment. Movement, whether internal or international, can involve individuals, small groups or masses. Mass migration tends to involve entire families, and social or ethnic groups wishing to settle permanently in a new state. Migration can be 'spontaneous', induced, for example, by economic reasons, or 'forced or coerced'<sup>76</sup>. Forced migration can be dictated by political, religious or ethnic reasons, or by catastrophic events, such as the outbreak of an armed conflict, or natural events, e.g. an earthquake. A person who migrates is defined as a 'migrant', a very generic term not defined by international law, which indicates the displacement, permanent or temporary, of a person from their place of habitual residence. Depending on the reasons behind the displacement, International Law has identified well-defined legal categories of 'migrants', such as migrant workers, asylum seekers or refugees<sup>77</sup>. Concerning a person's motivations to migrate, two types of factors can be identified: 'push factors', i.e. those reasons that compel an individual to leave his or her place of residence, and 'pull factors', i.e. those reasons that motivate a person to reach a particular country. Push and pull factors can be grouped into three main categories: 'socio-political factors', 'demographic factors' and 'environmental factors'<sup>78</sup>. Socio-political push factors refer to particular situations such as ethnic, religious, racial, political or cultural persecution, conflict or potential conflict. Concerning pull factors, it can generally be said that migrants tend to choose countries with a more tolerant approach to reception. These people, if they cross national borders, are eligible for refugee status, although it is worth pointing out that, globally, conflicts and natural disasters drive people, first and foremost, to move within their state of residence, increasing the population of internally displaced persons. By the end of 2023, 75.9 million people were considered internally displaced. The number of individuals in this situation is on the rise, as those compelled to escape due to disasters, conflicts, or violence are added to the ranks of those who have been displaced for years or even decades, many of whom have yet to find a sustainable resolution. The region most affected remains Sub-Saharan Africa, which hosts 46% of displaced persons. Additionally,

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<sup>76</sup> Bertolotti, C. "Analisi dei flussi migratori nei Paesi del Maghreb: Le migrazioni di transito tra i Paesi dell'Area e nel Mediterraneo verso l'Europa." Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, 2019

<sup>77</sup> IOM, Key Migration Terms, n.d., <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

<sup>78</sup> European Parliament. Why Do People Migrate? Exploring the Causes of Migration Flows, 2020

the conflict in Palestine has led to an eightfold rise in conflict-related displacements across the Middle East and North Africa in 2023, reversing a trend of three years marked by continuous declines<sup>79</sup>. The second category of push factors includes all those demographic and economic changes that cause a person to leave their country of residence. An ageing or growing population affects job opportunities, unemployment and, more generally, the health of the economy, influencing the migration policies of both departure and destination countries. Attracting factors are greater job and study opportunities, higher wages, and better quality of life<sup>80</sup>. In this case, we speak more generally of 'labour migration' and include both migrants moving within the country and those crossing international borders. According to ILO estimates, in 2019, the world population of labour migrants was 169 million, constituting 4.9 per cent of the global labour force. One-third of migrant workers come from the Asia-Pacific region. The destination regions are Europe (24.2%), followed by North America (22.1%) and the Arab States (14.3%). Together, these three regions host 60% of migrant workers<sup>81</sup>. The third category of factors is 'environmental factors', such as earthquakes, floods or hurricanes. The International Organisation for Migrations defines 'environmental migrants' as those who, due to sudden or progressive changes in the environment, which adversely affect their life or living conditions, are forced to leave their place of usual residence or choose to do so, temporarily or permanently, and move within or outside their country of origin or usual residence. Within this category, a sub-category called 'climate migration' has been identified to indicate migration caused by climate change<sup>82</sup>. It is difficult to quantify environmental migrants, but it is estimated that by 2050 there will be between 25 million and one billion (European Parliament, 2020). In 2023, disasters resulted in 26.4 million new instances of internal displacement across 148 countries and territories, marking the third-highest total recorded in the past decade. Approximately one-third of these displacements occurred in China and Türkiye, primarily due to extreme weather events and significant earthquakes. Notably, displacements linked to weather-related disasters saw a reduction of one-third compared to 2022, a change attributed in part to the transition from La Niña to El Niño conditions during the year. While storms and floods generally caused fewer displacements throughout much of Asia, certain regions, particularly the Horn of Africa, experienced unprecedented levels of displacement due to flooding<sup>83</sup>. The extensive transnational migration observed today is an integral aspect of the migration transition, which itself is a facet of the larger demographic transition previously discussed. Changes in population growth alter the balance

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<sup>79</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), 2024

<sup>80</sup> European Parliament. Why Do People Migrate? Exploring the Causes of Migration Flows, 2020

<sup>81</sup> ILO. Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers, 2021

<sup>82</sup> IOM, Key Migration Terms, n.d., <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

<sup>83</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), 2024

between individuals and available resources, necessitating various forms of local adaptation. The dynamics of in-migration and out-migration can lead to rapid fluctuations in population size, significantly outpacing the effects of mortality or fertility. Moreover, even in scenarios where the number of individuals migrating into a region matches those leaving, the continuous movement of people can profoundly influence the social and economic structure of a community. In the premodern era, migration rates were generally low, paralleling the high levels of both birth and death rates. The demographic transition played a crucial role in facilitating migration, leading to a widespread migration transition that has occurred alongside changes in fertility and mortality rates across the globe<sup>84</sup>. According to the most recent worldwide migrant estimates (dated as of mid-2020), about 281 million individuals resided in a country other than their natal country, representing 3.6% of the world population. This figure represents a cumulative total of migration occurrences spanning several decades, yet it encompasses merely a small fraction of the global population. Consequently, the tendency to remain in one's country of origin is predominantly the standard. A significant majority of individuals do not engage in cross-border migration; instead, a far greater number relocate within their own countries. Migration corridors signify the aggregation of migratory activities over time, offering insights into the evolution of migration trends that have led to substantial foreign-born populations in particular host nations. The corridor from Mexico to the United States stands as the largest globally, encompassing nearly 11 million individuals. Following this, the second most significant corridor is that from the Syrian Arab Republic to Türkiye, primarily consisting of refugees displaced by the ongoing civil conflict in Syria. Additionally, the migration corridor between the Russian Federation and Ukraine ranks third and fifth among the largest corridors worldwide, influenced by a variety of historical and socio-political factors. Currently, there exists a higher number of male international migrants compared to females on a global scale, with this gender disparity having widened over the past two decades. In contrast, destination countries in Europe and Northern America, including the United States, Canada, France, Spain, and Italy, as well as India, exhibit a predominance of female international migrants. Conversely, in many Asian nations within the top 20, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, the male migrant population significantly outnumbers that of females, a phenomenon attributed to economic structures (notably in sectors like construction and security) as well as various social and human security considerations<sup>85</sup>. In various regions globally, international migration has emerged as a significant factor influencing demographic changes. Between 2000 and 2020, high-income nations experienced a net

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<sup>84</sup> Goerres, A., and P. Vanhuyse. *Global Political Demography: The Politics of Population Change*, 2021.

<sup>85</sup> IOM. *World Migration Report*, 2024

migration inflow of 80.5 million, surpassing the natural population increase of 66.2 million from births exceeding deaths. Looking ahead, migration is projected to be the primary catalyst for population growth in these affluent countries. Conversely, low-income and lower-middle-income nations are expected to continue experiencing population growth primarily due to a surplus of births over deaths in the foreseeable future. From 2010 to 2021, 40 countries or regions recorded a net migration inflow exceeding 200,000 individuals, with 17 of these surpassing 1 million. Notably, countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye saw significant immigration during this period, largely attributed to refugee movements, particularly from the Syrian Arab Republic. Additionally, ten countries reported a net outflow of migrants exceeding 1 million from 2010 to 2021. In many instances, these outflows were linked to temporary labour migration, as seen in Pakistan (net outflow of –16.5 million), India (–3.5 million), Bangladesh (–2.9 million), Nepal (–1.6 million), and Sri Lanka (–1.0 million). In contrast, countries like the Syrian Arab Republic (–4.6 million), Venezuela (–4.8 million), and Myanmar (–1.0 million) experienced significant outflows primarily driven by insecurity and conflict during this timeframe (UN DESA, 2022). In 50 nations and regions, immigration is anticipated to mitigate the reduction in population size resulting from persistently low fertility rates and an ageing demographic. For nations like Italy, Germany, and the Russian Federation, where population numbers have already reached their high point, this peak would have been attained earlier without the influence of immigration. Furthermore, immigration is expected to serve as the primary catalyst for population growth in 52 countries and regions until 2054, and in 62 by the year 2100, including nations such as Australia, Canada, and the United States. While emigration typically exerts minimal influence on the population size of countries, in 14 nations and regions facing extremely low fertility rates, it is likely to significantly contribute to population decline between now and 2054 (UN DESA, 2024)

### 1.3. A closer look: Europe

Population pyramids, EU 2008 and 2023  
(% of the total population)

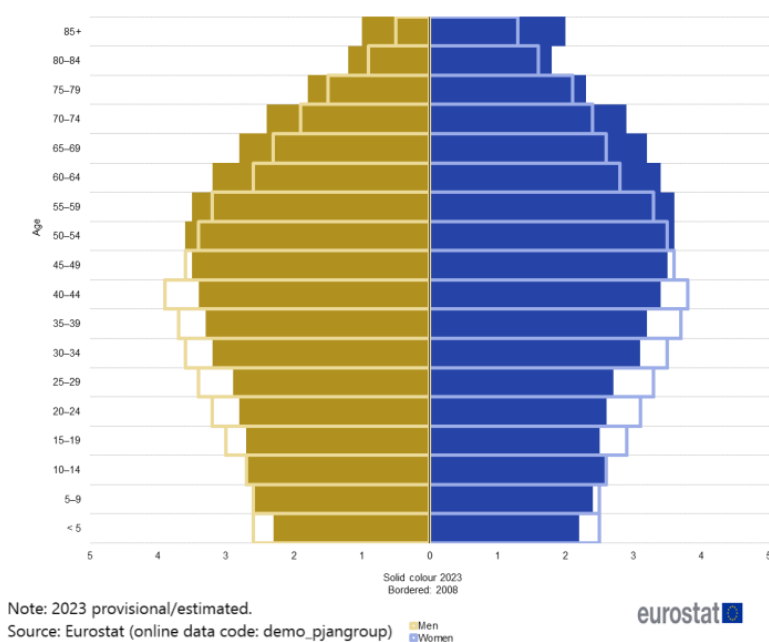


Figure 2: Population Pyramid EU, 2008-2023. Source: Eurostat

Population pyramids, EU, 2023 and 2100  
(% of the total population)

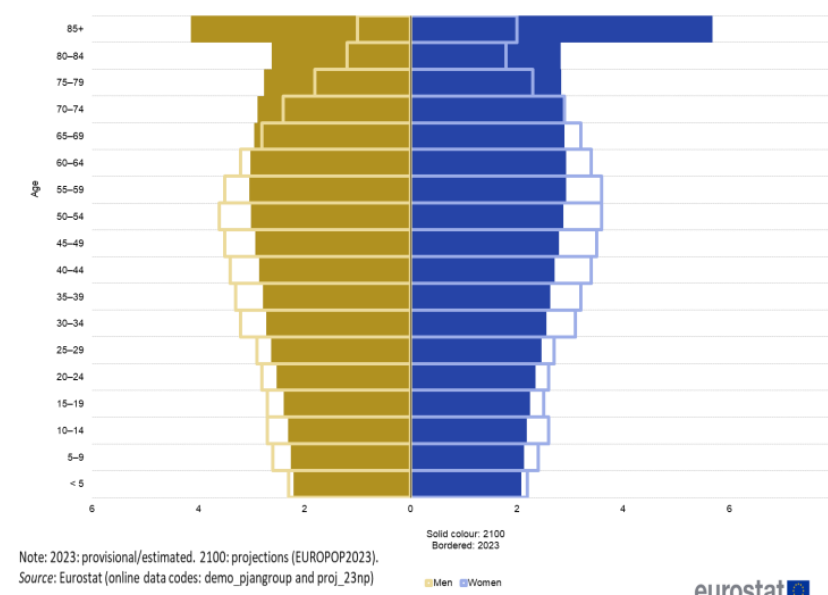


Figure 3: Population Pyramid EU, 2023-2100. Source: Eurostat

The demographic behaviour of the European population during the latter half of the 20th century and the early 21st century is marked by substantial transformations. The most pronounced changes include a decline in fertility rates, shifts in family dynamics, and changes in the age distribution within the population. The latter is primarily characterized by the phenomenon of ageing, with rejuvenation observed only during brief intervals. When analysing an ageing population, it is possible to identify two phenomena: (1) bottom-up ageing, i.e. changes in the share of 0-14 years old, that is attributed to a significant decrease in fertility rates; (2) top-down ageing process, i.e. changes in the share of the population 65+ years old. This is due to two demographic and social factors: the entry of numerous generations into post-reproductive age, and the increase in

life expectancy due to improved living standards, enhanced healthcare, and higher educational attainment<sup>86</sup>. The 2023 population pyramid of the European Union exhibits a constricted base

<sup>86</sup> Káčerová, M., J. Ondačková, and J. Mládek. "Time-Space Differences of Population Ageing in Europe." Hungarian Geographical Bulletin, 2014



and a rhomboidal shape, a consequence of the 'baby boom' generations that emerged from elevated fertility rates following World War II. The pronounced bulge from the 'baby boom' is ascending within the population pyramid, resulting in a narrower working-age demographic and a reduced base. As of the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2023, the population of the European Union (EU) stood at 448.8 million individuals. Germany emerged as the most populous nation within the EU, housing 84.4 million residents, (19% of the total EU population). France followed with a population of 68.2 million, representing 15%, and Italy had 59 million, accounting for 13%. Over the two decades from 1 January 2003 to 1 January 2023, the EU's population experienced an increase from 431.2 million to 448.8 million, marking a growth rate of 4%. Within this timeframe, 18 EU member states reported population growth, while 9 experienced declines. The most significant relative population increases were noted in Luxembourg, Malta and Ireland. Conversely, the most substantial relative decreases were found in Latvia (−18%), Bulgaria and Lithuania (both −17%). More specifically, the population grew from 1 January 2001 until 1 January 2020, then declined during the next two years, before growing again in 2022. The EU's natural population change (difference between live births and deaths) has however, been negative already since 2012. This is in large part due to the ageing population, as well as to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2022. The rate turned negative in 2012 and has continuously decreased to −2.9 in 2022. Concerning the composition of the population, the European Union recorded a population of 229 million women and 219 million men, resulting in a gender ratio of 104.6 women for every 100 men, indicating a surplus of 4.6% women compared to men. Between January 1, 2003, and January 1, 2023, the proportion of individuals aged 80 and older increased across all EU member states, rising from 3.7% to 6.0%. The most significant growth was observed in Greece and Latvia. During the same timeframe, the proportion of individuals aged 65 and older also increased in every EU country, moving from 16.2% to 21.3%. In contrast, the share of children and young adolescents<sup>87</sup> declined from 16.4% to 14.9%. This decline was evident in all EU nations, except for Czechia, Estonia and Slovenia. The most pronounced decreases were recorded in Malta and Cyprus. On January 1, 2023, Ireland had the highest proportion of children and young adolescents at 19.3%, while Italy had the lowest at 12.4%. Additionally, the share of young people<sup>88</sup> decreased across all EU countries from 22.6% to 20.1%. The median age within the European Union experienced a notable increase from 2003 to 2023, rising from 39.0 years in 2003 to 44.5 years in 2023. Italy recorded the highest median age at 48.4 years, followed by Portugal, Bulgaria and Greece. Conversely, the lowest median

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<sup>87</sup> Under 15 years old

<sup>88</sup> Age 0 to 19 years old

ages were found in Cyprus (38.4 years), Ireland (39.1 years) and Luxembourg (39.7 years)<sup>89</sup>. A notable aspect of age structures is their regional variation. In 1950, the level of aging exhibited significant differentiation, largely due to the presence of both very young and very old populations. This differentiation diminished by 2010, leading to a more homogeneous group of European countries. This trend toward convergence is expected to persist, resulting in significantly reduced disparities in ageing by 2060<sup>90</sup>. Projections for the population pyramid in 2100, as shown in Fig. 2 indicate a trend towards a shrinking and ageing population. Individuals aged 65 and above are projected to constitute 32% of the total population. Additionally, the pyramid shows a greater number of individuals over 80 years old than those under 20<sup>91</sup>. As previously discussed, the total fertility rate influences population structure the most. Overall, the fertility rate within the European Union has consistently remained below the replacement level since the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. European nations can be classified into two distinct groups: those exhibiting a total fertility rate (TFR) of approximately 1.8 children per woman and those with TFRs of around 1.4 children. The former group, characterized by relatively higher fertility rates, is likely to alleviate or at least delay the repercussions associated with an ageing population. A moderately elevated fertility rate can sustain both the demographic structure and population size over an extended period. Conversely, nations in the latter category are poised to encounter more pronounced challenges related to population ageing. Given their demographic constraints, these countries may witness an inversion of their population pyramids and potentially experience negative population momentum. Depopulation will persist despite any potential resurgence in fertility rates. Nevertheless, the detrimental cycle associated with sub-replacement fertility remains inadequately documented, primarily due to a scarcity of empirical evidence. Furthermore, the phenomenon of sub-fertility is relatively recent, thus its effects have yet to manifest in a significant and observable manner<sup>92</sup>. Notable disparities in fertility rates can be observed across different regions. Western Europe and the Nordic countries exhibit relatively higher fertility rates, whereas several Southern and Central-Eastern European nations struggle to exceed the lowest-low fertility threshold of 1.3<sup>93</sup>. In 2022, the overall TFR was recorded at 1.46. Among the member states of the European Union, France reported the highest TFR at 1.79 live births per woman, followed by Romania at 1.71 and Bulgaria at 1.65. Conversely, the lowest fertility rates were observed in Malta (1.08), Spain (1.16), and Italy (1.24). Additionally, the average age of first-time mothers in the EU has risen; in 2013, the average age was 28.8

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<sup>89</sup> Eurostat. Demography of Europe. 2024.

<sup>90</sup> Káčerová, M., J. Ondačková, and J. Mládek. "Time-Space Differences of Population Ageing in Europe.", 2014

<sup>91</sup> Eurostat. Demography of Europe. 2024.

<sup>92</sup> May, J. "Population Policies in Europe." *L'Europe en Formation*, 2015

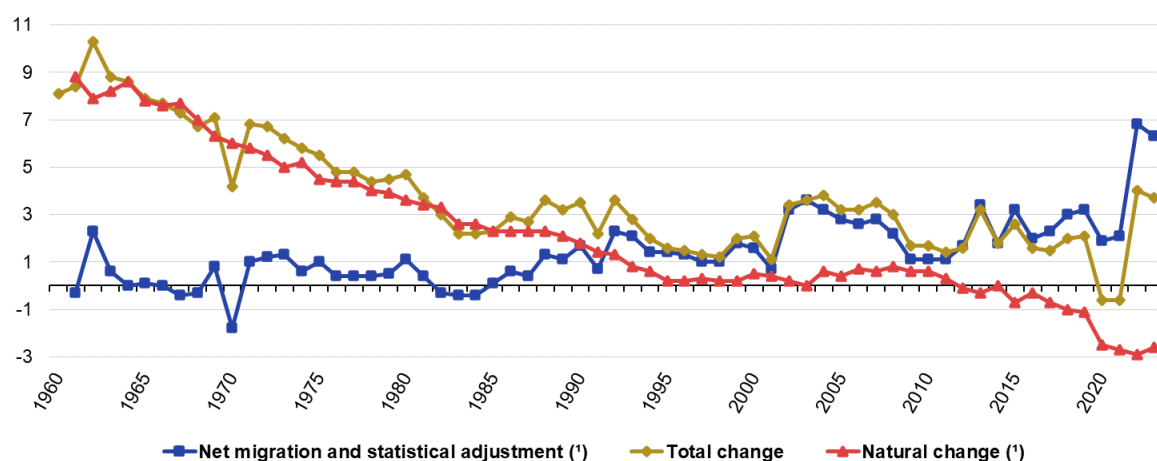
<sup>93</sup> Deimantas, V. J., A. E. Şanlıtürk, L. Azzollini, and S. Köksal. "Population Dynamics and Policies in Europe: Analysis of Population Resilience at the Subnational and National Levels.", 2024

years, which has increased annually by 0.1 years, culminating in an average of 29.7 years in 2022. Over the last century, life expectancy at birth has seen a significant increase due to various factors, including decreased infant mortality rates, enhanced living conditions, improved health practices, better educational opportunities, and advancements in healthcare and medical technology. In 2003, life expectancy at birth in the EU was 77.7 years, which rose to 81.5 years in 2023, reflecting an increase of 0.2 years compared to the pre-COVID-19 figure from 2019. Notably, women tend to outlive men, with 2023 data indicating a life expectancy at birth of 84.2 years for women and 78.9 years for men in the EU, resulting in a gender gap of 5.3 years. This trend is consistent across all EU countries, with the most pronounced disparities observed in Latvia and Lithuania, while the smallest differences are found in the Netherlands and Sweden.<sup>94</sup>

The rising ratio of the older population in comparison to the working-age demographic poses significant challenges for labour markets, social welfare, and healthcare systems. Immigration is often viewed as a potential remedy to this issue, as immigrants play a crucial role in addressing the shortfall in the working-age population. Due to the persistently low fertility rates observed in many developed regions, net migration has emerged as the primary driver of population growth in these countries. Should these trends continue, it is projected that by 2050, net

#### Population change by component (annual crude rates), EU, 1960-2023

(per 1 000 persons)



Note: Excluding French overseas departments up to and including 1997. Breaks in series: 1991, 1998, 2000-01, 2008, 2010-12, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021-2023

2023: Eurostat estimate

(<sup>1</sup>) 1960: not available.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo\_gind)

eurostat 

Figure 4: Population change EU, 1960-2023. Source: Eurostat

migration will be the sole contributor to population growth in the developed world (Piggot, 2016). Since the 1990s, net migration has become the primary factor influencing population

<sup>94</sup> Eurostat. Demography of Europe. 2024.

growth (see Fig. 3). Due to the travel restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the positive net migration failed to offset the negative population change. In 2022 and 2023, this trend experienced a reversal, leading once again to an increase of the total population<sup>95</sup>. In 2022, approximately 7 million individuals immigrated to countries within the European Union. Among these, 5.1 million originated from non-EU nations, while 1.5 million individuals relocated from one EU member state to another. Notably, Germany accounted for the highest proportion of immigrants, receiving 30% of the total influx into EU countries, followed by Spain with 18%, and both France and Italy, each hosting 6% of the immigrants<sup>96</sup>. Migratory patterns within Europe are diverse. Firstly, studies found that the freedom of movement within the EU has intensified intra-European migration and altered the patterns of cohort migration. Secondly, there has been a steady increase in international migration across Europe. It is anticipated that migration from outside the EU will either facilitate population growth or mitigate the effects of depopulation in the region. Nonetheless, internal migration remains a vital factor influencing subnational population dynamics<sup>97</sup>. In a scenario devoid of migration, projections indicate that the total population within the EU27 is expected to decrease by 11% by the year 2050, with a significant reduction of over 7% in the labour force anticipated by 2025. Furthermore, individuals under the age of 45 are forecasted to diminish across all EU member states, resulting in a phenomenon referred to as the ageing of skills. Conversely, should migration patterns revert to their pre-crisis levels, the overall population may experience a slight increase of 3% by 2050. However, this growth would be exclusively attributed to the rise in the oldest age cohort, while the population in the 20–65 age range is projected to decline, albeit at a lesser rate than in the no-migration scenario<sup>98</sup>. The net number of migrants in the EU is projected to rise from a deficit of 91,000 in 1950 to a surplus of 394,000 by 2050. In contrast, countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood are expected to experience a decline from a net gain of 3,000 in 1950 to a net loss of 30,000 by 2050. Similarly, the South Neighbourhood countries will see a shift from a net loss of 72,000 in 1950 to a more pronounced net loss of 138,000 by 2050. Finally, a comparative analysis of the two fifty-year periods, 1950–2000 and 2000–2050 reveals that the trend in net migration for the EU will not remain consistent. During the first period, the net migration rate in EU27 countries will rise to 3.7, followed by a decline to -1.6 in the subsequent period<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> Eurostat. *Population Structure and Ageing*. 2023

<sup>96</sup> Eurostat. *Demography of Europe*. 2024.

<sup>97</sup> Deimantas, V. J., A. E. Şanlıtürk, L. Azzollini, and S. Köksal. "Population Dynamics and Policies in Europe: Analysis of Population Resilience at the Subnational and National Levels.", 2024

<sup>98</sup> Piggott, J., and A. Woodland. *Handbook of the Economics of Population Ageing*, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Jakovljevic, M. M., Y. Netz, S. C. Buttigieg, et al. "Population Ageing and Migration – History and UN Forecasts in the EU-28 and its East and South Near Neighbourhood – One-Century Perspective 1950–2050.", *Global Health*, 2018

### 1.3.1. Population policies: pro-natalist and migration policies

Europe is currently grappling with three significant challenges: sub-replacement fertility, an ageing population, and immigration, all of which present considerable difficulties in terms of resolution. However, the policy measures implemented to tackle these demographic issues will have profound implications for the sustainability of the socioeconomic progress achieved by these countries. In numerous European nations, demographic concerns have not been accorded the urgency they warrant. A prevailing sense of indifference and a lack of engagement with these issues have often been observed. When discussions do take place, they are frequently characterized by controversy and heightened emotions. Advocates for non-intervention are met with opposition from those advocating for proactive measures. Demographic challenges are seldom examined in a pragmatic manner, devoid of political or ideological biases. Frequently, these issues are framed within the traditional dichotomy of Left versus Right. Additionally, the fragmentation of information sources and relevant stakeholders, particularly among public administrations addressing population matters, further complicates the situation<sup>100</sup>. In June 2023, the European Council emphasized the necessity of developing a comprehensive toolbox to tackle demographic challenges, particularly focusing on their implications for Europe's competitive advantage. By addressing demographic trends, Europe's overall resilience can be enhanced, as emphasized by EU citizens during the Conference on the Future of Europe. It is imperative that EU and national policies facilitate the realization of these aspirations for Europe. To achieve this, public policies and support mechanisms must be tailored to:

- better align family aspirations with professional commitments, particularly by ensuring access to high-quality childcare and promoting work-life balance, thereby advancing gender equality;
- support and empower younger generations to flourish, enhance their skills, and improve their access to the labour market and affordable housing;
- empower older generations and maintain their well-being through reforms and suitable labour market and workplace policies;
- when necessary, address labour shortages through managed legal migration, complementing the efforts to leverage talents from within the Union<sup>101</sup>

The Communication highlighted the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach across all levels of government, engaging all stakeholders within the economy and society in a manner that is both democratic and inclusive. Regulatory frameworks, policy guidelines, and funding

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<sup>100</sup> May, J. "Population Policies in Europe.", 2015

<sup>101</sup> European Commission. COM(2023) 577 final

should be effectively integrated with national and regional strategies to empower and support all generations in realizing their life choices and maximizing their potential within the economy and society<sup>102</sup>. Population policies are intended to alleviate, and where feasible, manage perceived demographic challenges by aligning population size and age distribution with the rights, needs, and aspirations of the population. Interventions may be classified as direct, such as vaccination initiatives, or indirect, such as providing incentives to encourage couples to increase their family size. The interventions proposed may target one or multiple aspects of demographic change, including mortality, fertility, population ageing, and migration<sup>103</sup>. Population policies have significantly influenced Europe's current demographic landscape. In response to declining fertility rates and an ageing population, numerous European nations have implemented a range of family-oriented policies aimed at alleviating future socio-economic challenges and, in some instances, enhancing the demographic resilience of their societies<sup>104</sup>. The primary challenge facing public policies designed to enhance fertility rates lies in the formulation of effective strategies and initiatives that address the underlying causes of fertility decline. The motivations influencing a woman or couple's decision to have children, or to refrain from doing so, are diverse and complex. These factors encompass, but are not limited to, marital status (including aspects such as divorce and cohabitation), the financial implications of raising children, opportunity costs for women (such as the potential hindrance to pursuing higher education or securing employment), the economic conditions of the household, and the accessibility of childcare services, particularly concerning women's workforce participation<sup>105</sup>. The European Union since its inception has prioritised European integration and economic collaboration. In modern times it has expanded its focus to include broader goals related to social policy. Historically, the EU has offered minimal guidance on family policy, which has largely been the responsibility of individual member states. In general, the EU's authority in the realm of social policy is characterised as "restricted and complementary." The European Commission articulates the EU's role in social matters as being governed by the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Specifically, subsidiarity dictates that the EU should intervene only when actions taken at the EU level would yield greater effectiveness than those at the national level. Meanwhile, the principle of proportionality stipulates that EU actions must be confined to what is essential for fulfilling the objectives outlined in the EU treaties. Nevertheless, there has been a notable evolution in EU policies in these domains over recent decades, driven by the introduction of new priorities

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<sup>102</sup> Ibidem

<sup>103</sup> May, J. "Population Policies in Europe", 2015

<sup>104</sup> Deimantas, V. J., A. E. Şanlıtürk, L. Azzollini, and S. Köksal. "Population Dynamics and Policies in Europe: Analysis of Population Resilience at the Subnational and National Levels.", 2024

<sup>105</sup> May, J. "Population Policies in Europe.", 2015

focused on social inclusion and the rights of children<sup>106</sup>. In 2017, the European Commission introduced the Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers as a component of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This initiative aimed to enhance maternity, paternity, and parental leave policies for the benefit of citizens throughout the European Union. By early 2019, the European Parliament and the European Council reached a provisional agreement on the Directive's specifics, which established a minimum requirement of 10 days of paid paternity leave, allocated 2 months of non-transferable parental leave for each parent, and granted care-givers 5 days of carer's leave annually. Recent trends in parental leave policies are designed to enhance gender equality within the workplace and to provide greater flexibility for both parents. However, the European landscapes of family policies remains fragmented, as shown by the following examples. Germany provides a comprehensive system where parents are entitled to 14 weeks of maternity leave (6 weeks before and 8 weeks after birth) and up to 3 years of parental leave per child, with job protection and the option to work part-time. Additionally, German parents can receive a parental allowance for up to 14 months, typically at 65-67% of their income. In contrast, Ireland offers 26 weeks of paid maternity leave, with an optional 16 weeks unpaid, and 2 weeks of paid paternity leave. Irish parents can also take up to 26 weeks of unpaid parental leave per child, available until the child is 12 years old. Spain provides 16 weeks of paid maternity leave and, as of 2021, 16 weeks of paid paternity leave. Spanish parents are also entitled to up to 3 years of unpaid parental leave per child, with job protection during the first year. Sweden offers 18 months of paid maternity leave, in addition to subsidized day-care and options for flexible and reduced working hours<sup>107</sup>. A majority of Member States extend financial assistance to families, yet there exists significant variation in the modalities of this support across different countries. Typically, such financial aid manifests as direct monetary transfers (such as child benefits and working family payments) and/or as fiscal incentives (including tax rebates and credits). The aims of these financial provisions for families also vary, encompassing objectives such as facilitating a more effective balance between work and family responsibilities, fostering child development, and alleviating child poverty and maltreatment. In Italy, mothers receive a maternity allowance at 80% of their salary for 5 months, alongside a "Bonus Bebè," which provides a monthly allowance ranging from €80 to €160 during the first year of the child's life, depending on family income. Poland offers a maternity benefit at 100% of the mother's average salary for 20 weeks or 80% for 52 weeks if both maternity and parental leave are taken, along with a one-time childbirth grant of PLN 1,000 (€220) for families below

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<sup>106</sup> Churchill, H., M. Sandbæk, A. Jackson, et al. "The Conceptualisation and Delivery of Family Support in Europe: A Review of International and European Policy Frameworks and Standards." EurofamNet, 2021.

<sup>107</sup> European Commission, Recent Trends in Child and Family Policy in the EU: European Platform for Investing in Children: Annual Thematic Report, 2019.

a certain income threshold. Hungary's support includes a maternity allowance at 70% of the mother's salary for 24 weeks and a childcare benefit (GYED) at 70% of the parent's salary until the child reaches 2 years, though it is capped at a certain level. Additionally, Hungary offers "Baby Bonds," a government contribution to a savings account for each newborn. In Spain, mothers receive a maternity benefit at 100% of their salary for 16 weeks, and a one-time child-birth allowance of €1,000 is available for large families, single-parent families, or in cases of multiple births<sup>108</sup>. Cook<sup>109</sup> conducted a comparative analysis of the prominent pro-natalist family policies implemented in Russia, Poland, and Hungary during the post-communist era. These policies include Russia's Maternity Capital, Poland's Family 500+, and Hungary's enhanced earned income tax credit, all of which are situated within the context of neo-familialist governmental narratives. While these pro-natalist initiatives have produced tangible, albeit limited, outcomes in terms of their primary objective—boosting fertility—they have also had significant, though varied, impacts on child poverty. Notably, although reducing family poverty was not an explicit aim, the programs have resulted in a 50% reduction in child poverty in Poland, a decrease in Hungary, and minimal change in Russia. Furthermore, the initiatives in both Russia and Hungary have tended to disadvantage the most impoverished families, particularly large families in Russia and ethnic Roma families in Hungary. The three governments have directed both financial and rhetorical resources towards pro-natalist, traditionalist, and familialist policies, urging women to increase their birth rates and to prioritise homemaking. However, these initiatives have not yielded significant or lasting improvements in fertility rates, as demographic decline persists across all three nations. It raises questions as to why these governments persist in allocating limited financial resources to these largely ineffective strategies. The lack of sufficient childcare options, particularly for children aged 0-3, aligns with their familialist discourse but has not led to a majority of mothers choosing to stay at home. In fact, over 60 % of mothers in Hungary and between 70 to 75 % in Poland and Russia are part of the workforce, including a significant number of those with children under two years old. While these governments have acknowledged the necessity of mothers' employment by providing subsidies for private childcare and implementing other measures to balance work and family life, such initiatives remain secondary. The traditionalist rhetoric of post-communist governments, coupled with their focus on pro-natalist incentives rather than on enhancing preschool childcare facilities that support maternal employment, has had limited success in reversing demographic

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<sup>108</sup> European Commission, Recent Trends in Child and Family Policy in the EU: European Platform for Investing in Children: Annual Thematic Report, 2019.

<sup>109</sup> Cook, L. J., E. R. Iarskaia-Smirnova, and V. A. Kozlov. "Trying to Reverse Demographic Decline: Pro-Natalist and Family Policies in Russia, Poland and Hungary." *Social Policy and Society*, 2022



decline or in re-establishing traditional roles for contemporary women<sup>110</sup>. Additionally, the exclusive emphasis on increasing birth rates, along with the anxiety-inducing narratives surrounding this issue, poses a risk to human rights, particularly women's reproductive rights and gender equality. Governments have exerted pressure on women to increase their childbearing, promoted a return to traditional gender roles, and implemented incentives encouraging women to prioritize motherhood<sup>111</sup>. The trends of smaller family sizes and high maternal labour force participation, which originated during the communist era and are prevalent in developed economies, have largely persisted<sup>112</sup>. Currently, France's pronatalist policies are cited as the one of the most successful examples in Europe. These policies encompass various provisions, including maternity leave, child benefits, family allowances, a single-parent allowance, an adoption allowance, and housing assistance for families with three or more children. Additionally, couples benefit from substantial maternity and paternity leave. Specifically, female employees are entitled to 16 weeks of paid and job-protected leave for their first two children, with an extension of leave for the third child. Following the conclusion of maternity leave, parents have the option to take further leave until their child turns three, with guaranteed reintegration into the workforce. France boasts a comprehensive network of public childcare facilities, one of the largest in Europe, which offers full-day care starting at ages two or three. Between 1995 and 1998, the country allocated 2.3 % of its gross domestic product to family benefits. Despite these extensive measures, France's cohort fertility rate has experienced a gradual decline, although there has been a slight increase in recent years, with a total fertility rate of 2.0 recorded in 2015. While France's generous pronatalist initiatives have not succeeded in restoring fertility to replacement levels, the country performs better than many of its European counterparts<sup>113</sup>. A 2024 Lancet study<sup>114</sup> concluded that the impact of such programs on fertility has been weak, with empirical evidence pointing to no more than 0.2 extra live births per female. However, projections imply that pro-natal policies may keep certain nations' fertility from falling below the lowest-low (<1.3 TFR) or very-low (<1.6 TFR) levels in the future. Furthermore, while increasing birth rates is the primary goal of pro-natal policies, they also benefit society in other ways, depending on the context and policy design. These benefits include improved maternal health outcomes, higher rates of female labour force participation, lower childcare costs, higher

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<sup>110</sup> Cook, L. J., E. R. Iarskaia-Smirnova, and V. A. Kozlov. "Trying to Reverse Demographic Decline: Pro-Natalist and Family Policies in Russia, Poland and Hungary.", 2022

<sup>111</sup> UNFPA. Demographic Resilience Programme for Europe & Central Asia, 2020

<sup>112</sup> Cook, L. J., E. R. Iarskaia-Smirnova, and V. A. Kozlov. "Trying to Reverse Demographic Decline: Pro-Natalist and Family Policies in Russia, Poland and Hungary.", 2022

<sup>113</sup> May, J. "Population Policies in Europe.", 2015

<sup>114</sup> Bhattacharjee, N. V., A. E. Schumacher, A. Aali, et al. "Global Fertility in 204 Countries and Territories, 1950–2021, with Forecasts to 2100: A Comprehensive Demographic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021." *The Lancet*, 2024

rates of household gender equality, and better quality of life. Crucially, policies that restrict access to modern contraception or abortions, or other harsh measures that restrict reproductive rights, should not be justified by low reproduction rates. For instance, coercive policies during and after Romania's restrictions on the sale of contraceptives and abortion during the 1960s and 1980s resulted in several negative outcomes, including long-term trauma to women and children, a significant increase in the number of children placed in orphanages, detrimental long-term effects on the labour market and educational outcomes for the population born under the restrictions, and dramatic increases in maternal mortality rates from illegal abortions. Modern contraceptive availability is not only essential to the concepts of reproductive justice and basic human rights but it has been shown to have significant economic consequences; access to and usage of contraceptives is positively correlated with formal labour force participation and better salaries<sup>115</sup>. In conclusion, experts remain divided regarding the efficacy of public policies in enhancing fertility rates. While certain European fertility initiatives have yielded modest and transient outcomes, they have largely been ineffective in effecting substantial changes in fertility levels. Often, policy measures aimed at addressing fertility issues are implemented only to be later abandoned due to their high costs. A case in point is Spain, which once introduced generous financial incentives for new births but ultimately had to retract them due to unsustainable financial implications. The prevailing view among policy analysts is that the impact of transfer-based pronatalist policies is minimal. Traditional financial incentives and tax reductions are generally insufficient to cover the comprehensive costs associated with childbearing and, more critically, child-rearing. For sub-replacement fertility policies to be effective, they must encompass a broader array of costly and complex family and social interventions. Current pronatalist strategies, despite their high costs, are frequently regarded by parents and prospective parents as temporary measures. As these stakeholders tend to capitalize on the benefits as soon as they are available, any increases in fertility are often short-lived. For policies aimed at enhancing fertility to achieve lasting success, policymakers need to integrate robust financial support with flexible work arrangements and family-oriented incentives<sup>116</sup>. Nonetheless, pronatalist fertility policies are increasingly receiving governmental endorsement. Conversely, more contentious approaches, such as replacement migration policies, have encountered public opposition<sup>117</sup>. According to the Gallup Migrant Acceptance Index, the global landscape is increasingly characterized by a decline in acceptance towards migrants, with several European Union nations ranking among the least welcoming countries worldwide. This trend is

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<sup>115</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>116</sup> May, J. "Population Policies in Europe.", 2015

<sup>117</sup> Deimantas, V. J., A. E. Şanlıtürk, L. Azzollini, and S. Köksal. "Population Dynamics and Policies in Europe: Analysis of Population Resilience at the Subnational and National Levels.", 2024

particularly evident in European countries like Belgium and Switzerland, where right-wing, anti-immigration political factions have gained traction since 2016. In 2019, the countries exhibiting the lowest levels of acceptance for migrants included multiple EU member states, such as Hungary, Croatia, Latvia, and Slovakia<sup>118</sup>. However, only nations that have successfully attracted immigrants have been able to sustain or achieve population growth. Immigration policies appear to have the most substantial impact on mitigating population ageing or decline in Europe. Piggott<sup>119</sup> remarks on three key points. Firstly, the demand for migrants will be most acute in rapidly ageing nations such as Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Poland. Secondly, in various new member states, demographic decline is anticipated to be more severe due to ongoing emigration, necessitating even greater numbers of immigrants in these regions. Lastly, the data indicates that the required immigration figures are substantial, with projections suggesting that over 84 million immigrants will be needed in the EU27 by 2050. For instance, projections indicate that Germany would require an influx of an additional 18.5 million temporary migrants aged 20–65 between 2010 and 2050, in contrast to the 10.7 million foreign-born individuals residing in the country as of 2011<sup>120</sup>. Nonetheless, European governments strive to reconcile the necessity of immigration with the concerns and fears that are growing among native populations by, for example, introducing quotas and qualification criteria<sup>121</sup>. European nations face the pressing challenge of financing their rapidly expanding retired populations. Pension funds are currently under significant pressure, with the potential for insolvency looming. To fulfil pension commitments, productivity enhancements must be paired with extraordinary increases in profitability across the EU. As previously discussed, individuals in the richest nations who are currently over 60 have a substantial likelihood of reaching the age of 90, and projections indicate that half of today's newborns may live to 105. When state pensions were first established in late 19th-century Germany by Otto von Bismarck, an industrial worker reaching 65 would typically live only a few years post-retirement. Today, young Europeans entering the workforce must allocate over 10% of their earnings to pension savings, yet they may not achieve a comfortable retirement until the age of 85. In the knowledge economy, skilled individuals have numerous opportunities to continue working, leading to a growing demographic of Owls (Older, Working Less, Still earning). However, those with lower skills and qualifications face a starkly different reality; they are less likely to secure employment as they age and often lack private pension provisions<sup>122</sup>. Even though the digital revolution is and will

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<sup>118</sup> Esipova, N., A. Pugliese, and J. Ray. "World Grows Less Accepting of Migrants." *Fihel*, 2020

<sup>119</sup> Piggott, J., and A. Woodland. *Handbook of the Economics of Population Ageing*, 2016.

<sup>120</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>121</sup> Deimantas, V. J., A. E. Şanlıtürk, L. Azzollini, and S. Köksal. "Population Dynamics and Policies in Europe: Analysis of Population Resilience at the Subnational and National Levels.", 2024

<sup>122</sup> Merritt, G. *People Power: Why We Need More Migrants*, 2021.

change the job market, catering for the needs of an older population is also poised to exacerbate existing challenges within the labour market. Current research from the United States indicates that men lacking a college degree who have faced job loss possess only a one in six likelihood of securing new employment. This situation contributes to a significant fiscal shortfall, with many governments facing a 10 % deficit in their budgets. These alarming statistics emerge at a time when Europe, already struggling with the ramifications of globalization before the COVID-19 pandemic, must confront these economic realities. Furthermore, they highlight a critical flaw in the prevalent assumption that economic growth in this century will mirror the patterns observed in the twentieth century. The post-World War II economic model has traditionally linked growth to output, which in turn is dependent on the workforce size. While this relationship is valid for a nation's tax revenue—where an increased workforce translates to higher public service funding—it remains uncertain whether this will similarly apply to value creation and competitiveness in the global economy<sup>123</sup>. To mitigate the pressure on public finances, the influx of young labour through immigration is often proposed. In the year 2000, the United Nations projected an excessively high level of “replacement migration” required to sustain the proportion of the population aged 15–64 relative to those aged 65 and older from 2000 to 2050, assuming that migrants exhibit fertility rates similar to those of the native population. Nonetheless, the extent to which immigrants can ease the fiscal load is contingent upon several factors, including their engagement in the labour market, skill proficiency, duration of their working life in the host nation, and their overall lifetime contributions to public finances<sup>124</sup>. The prevailing view is that migrants significantly contribute to a nation's productivity, primarily due to their youth, ambition, and diverse skill sets. The rationale for increasing migrant intake largely hinges on the expectation that future job-seekers from non-EU regions will mirror the influx from Eastern and Central Europe, who sought better wages in Western Europe through the freedom of movement. However, this assumption may not hold true, particularly concerning migrants from Africa. For the EU, the post-coronavirus economic landscape will hinge on the ability to enhance productivity. Merely increasing the number of low-skilled, low-wage migrants is unlikely to address the stagnation in productivity growth and could potentially worsen the situation. While the arrival of migrants may not resolve Europe's productivity challenges, it is expected to provide an economic boost. The anticipated influx of newcomers will necessitate substantial investments in housing, training, and support services, leading to significant construction initiatives and comprehensive educational programs aimed at equipping language instructors and skills trainers for incoming migrants and refugees. In 2016, Swedish political

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<sup>123</sup> Ibidem

<sup>124</sup> Piggott, J., and A. Woodland. Handbook of the Economics of Population Ageing, 2016.

scientist Bo Rothstein emphasized the significance of his nation's remarkable economic growth during a period marked by an unprecedented influx of immigrants. He critiqued the narrow focus of traditional accounting-based economic analysis, which often prioritizes immediate costs. Rothstein highlighted that Sweden's growth rate for that year was approximately double the average of the OECD and four times greater than that of its Nordic counterparts<sup>125</sup>. Additionally, it is important to recognize that if migrants return to their home countries post-retirement, they may still qualify for pensions in the host nation, thereby impacting the social security frameworks<sup>126</sup>. Regardless of the last points raised, a substantial body of research supports the notion that immigration is beneficial for economic growth. OECD economists analyzed the costs and advantages associated with immigrant labour, concluding unequivocally that the benefits outweigh the costs<sup>127</sup>. The McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) projected that the influx of immigrants during 2015-2016 would contribute around €65 billion annually to the EU economy, which was anticipated to reach a GDP of €20 trillion at that time. The MGI analysts provided a range of forecasts; the optimistic scenario suggested an annual economic benefit of €67-€76 billion, contingent upon a significant number of graduates entering the EU workforce from the largely Syrian immigrant group. Conversely, a more conservative estimate projected a contribution of €55-€63 billion annually, should integration challenges result in a workforce predominantly composed of less qualified individuals (MGI, 2016). In conclusion, numerous research efforts have alerted European governments since the onset of the 21st century to the difficulties associated with an ageing population, thereby reinforcing the economic rationale for immigration and endorsing initiatives like the then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel's "wir schaffen das" in 2015<sup>128129</sup>.

## Conclusion

Over the past 50 years, the global population has more than doubled, growing from 2.5 billion in 1950 to over 8 billion today. This growth is expected to continue until the mid-2080s, peaking at around 10.3 billion, before slightly declining to 10.2 billion by 2100. The working-age population has steadily increased in emerging economies, while the elderly population, particularly those aged 60 and above, is expanding rapidly. By the late 2070s, the number of individuals aged 65 and older will surpass the number of children under 18. The global fertility rate has

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<sup>125</sup> Merritt, G. *People Power: Why We Need More Migrants*, 2021.

<sup>126</sup> Piggott, J., and A. Woodland. *Handbook of the Economics of Population Ageing*, 2016.

<sup>127</sup> Merritt, G. *People Power: Why We Need More Migrants*, 2021.

<sup>128</sup> First pronounced by German Chancellor Angela Merkel on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2015. Considered at the base of the *Willkommenskultur* or "open-door" policy that Germany adopted during the 2015 migration crisis. In 2015 and 2016, Germany took in about 1.2 million asylum seekers in total (Politico, 2020)

<sup>129</sup> Merritt, G. *People Power: Why We Need More Migrants*, 2021.

declined from 3.3 births per woman in 1990 to 2.3 in 2024, with many countries now experiencing "ultra-low" fertility rates below 1.4 births per woman. Despite efforts to increase fertility, these rates are unlikely to return to replacement levels. The demographic transition, characterized by declining fertility and mortality rates, is leading to an older global population, which will require new strategies for economic stability and social support. Migration will also significantly impact demographic shifts. Immigration is expected to play a crucial role in mitigating population decline in ageing societies and will be a key factor in population growth in many countries through the 21st century. The phenomenon of migration is highly complex and diverse, involving various motivations, methods, and routes. Accurately understanding migration requires clear definitions of the often misused terminology. Migration, broadly, refers to the movement of individuals from one place to another, either within or across national borders, driven by factors like socio-political, demographic, or environmental reasons. While individuals have the right to freedom of movement, states also have the right to control their borders, with certain limitations under international law, such as the prohibition of non-refoulement, which prevents sending individuals back to places where they face serious harm. Push factors, such as violence or economic hardship, compel people to leave their homes, while pull factors, like better job opportunities, attract them to specific destinations. Labour migration is significant, with millions moving for work, particularly from Asia to Europe, North America, and the Gulf States. Environmental changes are increasingly causing migrations, with climate change predicted to drive millions more from their homes by 2050. Globally, migration patterns vary, with corridors like Mexico to the U.S. and Syria to Turkey being among the largest. The demographic landscape of Europe has undergone significant changes from the late 20th century to the early 21st century, marked by declining fertility rates, an ageing population, and shifts in family dynamics. These trends have led to an increasingly elderly population, driven by both lower birth rates and increased life expectancy due to improved living conditions and healthcare. Europe's population pyramid reflects these shifts, with a narrowing base and an expanding older population. Population ageing has led to increased attention on population policies within the EU. Pro-natalist policies, aimed at boosting fertility rates, have seen limited success, often only marginally increasing birth rates. Nonetheless, a growing body of evidence suggests that certain policies can exert a considerable influence, particularly when implemented in appropriate contexts. For instance, paid family leave, especially when both parents are motivated to utilize it, has contributed to maintaining fertility rates in Scandinavian nations, complemented by a robust, means-tested childcare system. These nations seem to have achieved the aspirations of the child development community regarding optimal family care during early childhood and the provision of social and educational enrichment for preschool-aged children.

Consequently, a potential path forward may involve the development of policies that harmonize work commitments with child-rearing responsibilities, situated within the larger framework of societal values<sup>130</sup>. Migration has become a key driver of population growth in the EU, particularly as fertility rates remain below replacement levels. The EU's population grew primarily due to net migration, which became the dominant factor influencing demographic changes after 2011. By 2050, net migration is expected to be the sole contributor to population growth in many developed regions. However, sustaining this growth will require ongoing immigration, as migrants themselves will age, necessitating a continuous influx of younger workers. The central argument presented is that the infusion of new labour is crucial for the broader European economy. The presence of migrants is directly correlated with economic expansion; conversely, a decline in migrant numbers leads to diminished growth and a deterioration in living standards. The current demographic challenge, exemplified by the ratio of four workers to every pensioner, which is projected to decrease to two to one by the middle of the century, presents dire consequences. Consequently, it is imperative for governments to persuade the public that labour shortages pose a significant risk, despite the prevailing high unemployment rates resulting from the pandemic-induced recession. This necessitates a significant shift in communication strategy, as there has been a failure to adequately convey this message for over a decade, despite clear indicators of the impending crisis. Such statistics often fail to garner sufficient media coverage to incite political debate. Nonetheless, it is essential for politicians to grasp these fundamental economic dynamics to prevent future generations from facing stagnation and poverty. The current political narrative increasingly diverges from economic realities, as prominent examples emerge of how migration has exacerbated the rift between sound economic principles and populist rhetoric<sup>131</sup>. This topic will be further analysed in the next chapter, focusing on the Italian case.

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<sup>130</sup> May, J. "Population Policies in Europe.", 2015

<sup>131</sup> Merritt, G. *People Power: Why We Need More Migrants*, 2021.

## CHAPTER II – THE ITALIAN CASE

### Introduction

In the past three decades, Italy has experienced one of the most significant economic downturns among developed nations, as evidenced by its per capita GDP, productivity levels, technological advancement, employment rates, and pronounced disparities across territorial, social, generational, and gender lines, all coinciding with one of the most pronounced demographic declines globally. Throughout the 20th century, Italy underwent a phase of modern economic development characteristic of demographic transition, marked by a gradual decline in mortality rates followed by a decrease in birth rates, thereby opening a demographic window of opportunity. This pattern of demographic expansion experienced a notable stagnation during the final two decades of the 20th century, with only a modest resurgence in the new millennium attributed to immigration. The sustained decline in both birth and death rates has profoundly influenced the age composition of the population, leading to its gradual ageing<sup>132</sup>. As introduced in the previous chapter a critical implication of this trend is the contraction of the working-age population, which will lead to a rise in structural dependency ratios. This ratio reflects the relationship between the inactive segments of the population—namely, individuals under 14 and those over 64—and the active workforce, typically defined as individuals aged 15 to 64 (or more specifically, 25 to 64). The decline in population, driven by fertility rates insufficient to maintain generational replacement, results in each successive generation being smaller than its predecessor. The situation is exacerbated by rising expenditures on welfare and pensions, leading to adverse effects on economic vitality, innovation, and productivity. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, Italy experienced a series of public policies that were largely disconnected from, and at times directly opposed to, the demographic realities of the nation, rendering them economically and generationally unsustainable<sup>133</sup>. The primary issue is not the overall decline in population or its longevity, but rather the notable decrease in the number of young individuals within Italian society, a consequence of the declining birth rate. Within the current “demographic winter” the presence of foreign nationals is often recognized as a significant factor in both alleviating the population decline and addressing the demographic ageing that has persisted for an extended period. In this regard, the data from 2022 indicate a positive natural balance (the difference between births and deaths) for foreign residents, alongside their numerical increase. In contrast, the Italian demographic remains firmly in negative territory, despite

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<sup>132</sup> Giordano, A. "L'impatto del Calo delle Nascite sul Sistema Economico." In *La Salute della Donna: La Sfida della Denatalità*. Libro Bianco, 2020

<sup>133</sup> *ibidem*



a notable rise in citizenship acquisitions—from 121,000 in 2021 to 214,000 in 2022. While it is evident that immigration plays a more critical role today in counteracting the effects of our 'demographic winter' than in the past, this shift is largely attributable to the ongoing decline in the birth rate among the native population<sup>134</sup>. Nevertheless, this surge of migrants does not entirely compensate for the emigration of young Italians. The departure of young, educated individuals—often referred to as “brain drain”—raises particular concerns, as it not only diminishes the labour force but also undermines the nation’s capacity for innovation and economic advancement. The exodus of young Italians, especially those with higher education, intensifies the demographic and economic challenges, resulting in a net depletion of human capital. This deficit is not balanced by the comparatively lower educational qualifications of incoming immigrants, creating a gap that further hinders Italy’s competitiveness in the global market<sup>135</sup>. A third concurrent phenomenon is the growth of the population of new citizens, particularly children and young adolescents who have since acquired Italian citizenship. The complexity of our society has evolved beyond previous paradigms, rendering the Italian/foreigner dichotomy inadequate for categorizing populations and social phenomena. Increasingly, incidents of discrimination based on religion or skin colour affect not only foreigners but also individuals of Italian nationality. A notable example is the occurrence of racist chants directed at footballers and other athletes, many of whom are Italian by birth, yet face prejudice due to their skin colour. Thus, understanding the demographics of new Italians is essential for comprehending the dynamics of immigration and demographic shifts in Italy, as well as for delineating the contours of the growing social complexity that is steering Italy towards a multi-ethnic society, analogous to the experiences of countries like France and the United Kingdom<sup>136</sup>.

To develop pertinent questions for the in-depth interviews, I conducted a review of recent and relevant statistical studies on the subject matter. This examination is intended to validate and enhance the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. The primary objective of this analysis is to test the hypothesis formulated, i.e. due to their saliency in the public discourse, demographic challenges have a lesser impact on nationality law compared to migration issues. This chapter is structured as follows. Initially, I will outline the current demographic composition of Italy, paying particular attention to the age distribution and immigration and emigration flows. Then it will follow a caveat on the methodological obstacles that researchers encounter when studying ethnic statistics. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with an analysis of the nationality laws, with a focus on the Italian legislative framework.

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<sup>134</sup> Fondazione ISMU ETS. Ventinovesimo Rapporto sulle Migrazioni, 2024

<sup>135</sup> Fondazione Migrantes della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana. Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo, 2023

<sup>136</sup> Strozza, S., C. Conti, and E. Tucci. Nuovi Cittadini: Diventare Italiani nell’Era della Globalizzazione, 2021

## 2.1. Italy's population structure: a country of immigration and emigration

Italy Population Pyramid - 1 January 2024

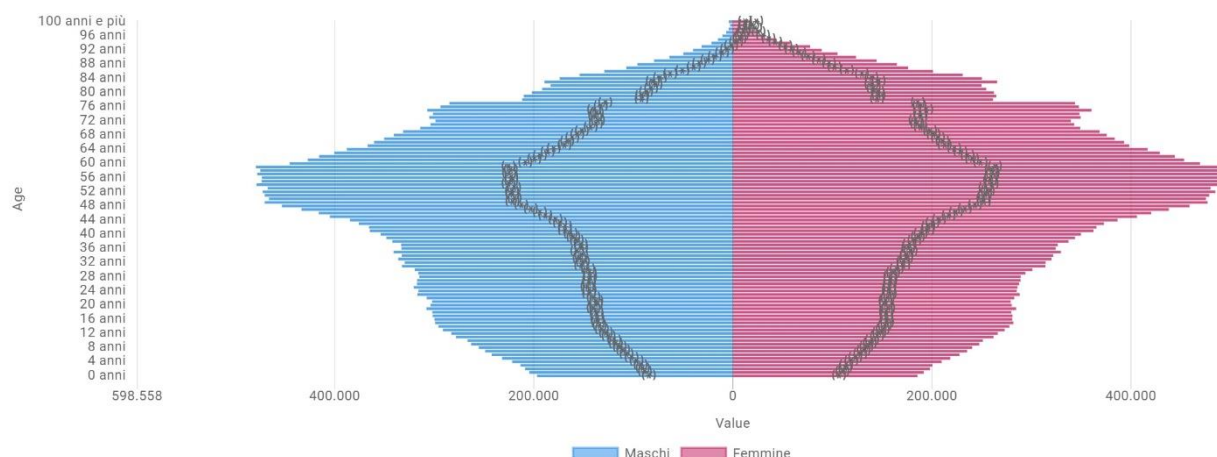


Figure 5: Population Pyramid Italy 2024. Source: ISTAT.

As of January 1, 2024, Italy's resident population stood at 58,990,000, reflecting a negative decline of 7,000 individuals compared to the same date in the previous year. This trend corroborates findings from 2022. However, it was registered a deceleration in the overall population decline that characterised the nation from 2014 to 2021. The demographic changes observed in 2023 present a varied landscape across different regions. In the South, the population experienced a negative change of -4.1 per thousand, while the North saw an increase of 2.7 per thousand. The Central region remained relatively stable. 2023 recorded a historical low in births, with only 379,000 newborns. This trend of declining fertility has persisted since 2008, when there were 577,000 births. Additionally, the number of deaths decreased to 661,000, representing an 8% reduction from 2022, aligning more closely with pre-pandemic figures. Consequently, the natural balance remains significantly negative, with a deficit of -281,000<sup>137</sup>. As mentioned above, the trend of declining births persists into 2023. 2008 was the last year to witness an increase in births. Since then the total birth rate diminished by 197,000, representing a decline of 34.2%. This negative trend affects both Italian citizens and foreign nationals alike. Foreign nationals account for 13.3% of all newborns, totalling 50,000, which is a decrease of 3,000 newborns compared to 2022. The decline in resident births in 2023 can be attributed to a significant drop in fertility rates and a reduction in the female population of childbearing age (15-49 years), which has shrunk from 13.4 million in 2014 to 11.5 million as of January 1, 2024. Similarly, the male population in the same age group has also experienced a decline, falling from 13.5 million in 2014 to 12 million currently. Consequently, the average number of children per woman has decreased from 1.24 in 2022 to 1.20 in 2023, nearing the historical low

<sup>137</sup> ISTAT. Indicatori Demografici - Anno 2023, 2024

of 1.19 recorded in 1995. This decline in the average number of children per woman is evident across the entire country, although the South maintains the highest total fertility rate at 1.24 among the various regions. In this context, the postponement of childbirth has emerged as a significant factor contributing to the overall decline in fertility. After two years of relative stability, the average age of mothers at childbirth has risen to 32 in 2023<sup>138</sup>. As of January 1, 2024, the average age of the resident population was 46.6 years, reflecting an increase from the previous year. As Figure 5 shows, the largest age groups are the cohorts 50-54 and 55-59. Both the over-65, representing 24.3% of the overall population, and the over 80 are increasing. What is relevant is that the latter has outnumbered children under the age of 10. Furthermore, the estimated count of ultra-centenarians (individuals aged 100 years and older) has reached a historical peak at the beginning of 2024. This demographic shift is significant, as the current ratio of elderly to children is below parity, contrasting sharply with the ratios of 2.5:1 25 years ago and 9:1 50 years ago. Additionally, there has been a decline in the working-age population and younger cohorts. Those aged 15-64 decreased from 37 472 000 to 37 447 000 (representing 63.5% of the total population), while the number of children up to 14 years fell from 7 million 344 to 7 million 185 (12.2%)<sup>139</sup>. By the year 2050, Italy is projected to experience a significant demographic decline, with an estimated loss of 4.5 million residents, equivalent to the combined populations of its two largest cities, Rome and Milan. This decline will stem from a reduction of 9.1 million individuals under the age of 65, including a decrease of 3.7 million among those under 35, alongside an increase of 4.6 million individuals aged 65 and older, with an additional rise of 1.6 million in the population aged 85 and above. Today, the number of women of childbearing age<sup>140</sup> stands at 11.6 million; by 2050, this figure is expected to drop by over 2 million, posing a significant barrier to any immediate efforts aimed at reversing the declining birth rate. Furthermore, it is anticipated that there will be nearly 8 million fewer individuals in the working-age population, leading to a labour shortage that will inevitably affect the cost structure of the production system and the value-generating capabilities of both the industrial and service sectors. Concerns also arise regarding the sustainability of the welfare system, as public expenditure is projected to reach 177 billion euros in 2050, a substantial increase from the current 131 billion euros<sup>141</sup>. As exposed in the previous chapter, advancements in hygiene, nutrition, healthcare, and health protection have mitigated the challenges associated with ageing, rendering the experience of old age increasingly manageable. This improvement has contributed to a longer lifespan, with Italy boasting one of the highest life expectancies in the

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<sup>138</sup> Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali ISTAT. Indicatori Demografici - Anno 2023, 2024.

<sup>139</sup> Ibidem

<sup>140</sup> Number of women between 15 and 49 years old

<sup>141</sup> CENSIS. 57° Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese, 2023

European Union. Life expectancy at birth was 83.1 years in 2023, reflecting an improvement of six months compared to 2022. For males, life expectancy at birth was estimated at 81.1 years, also showing a six-month increase from the previous year. In contrast, females have a life expectancy of 85.2 years, with a marginally smaller gain of five months relative to 2022<sup>142</sup>. Today, the designation of "elderly" is not solely based on retirement age or reaching a specific chronological milestone, but rather on the onset of dependency in daily activities, including personal care. Consequently, the elderly population can be broadly categorized into two groups: active seniors and those who are non-self-sufficient. Among the 13.7 million individuals aged 65 and older, over 2.8 million are classified as non-self-sufficient, accounting for 20.7% and representing 81% of the total non-self-sufficient population in Italy<sup>143</sup>. In Italy, the framework of social protection includes components such as social security, assistance, and health services. In 2022, the allocation for social protection reached 30.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The ISTAT analysis of the period from 2018 to 2022 reveals an overall increase of 1.7 percentage points, although there was a decline of 1.3 percentage points in the most recent year, attributed in part to the cessation of income and household support initiatives that were implemented to mitigate the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The distribution of social benefits indicates that almost half, 47.9%, is directed towards old age provisions. Additionally, per capita social benefits have also seen a decline, amounting to € 6,231.4. In 2021, pension expenditures disbursed by pension institutions, excluding amounts allocated to individuals residing abroad, accounted for 17.1% of GDP, a reduction from 18.4% in the previous year. The retirement rate for 2021, defined as the ratio of total pensions to the population, stood at 37.9%, reflecting a modest increase. It is noteworthy that social contributions only partially finance social benefits, as evidenced by the rise in the social security coverage ratio to 68.8% in 2021, up from 66.0% in 2020. Furthermore, the relative benefit ratio, which measures the share of average income per inhabitant derived from pension benefits, decreased to 45.1% in 2021 from 48.9% the previous year. This index has experienced a gradual increase since 2000, primarily due to demographic ageing<sup>144</sup>. The annual "Report on the Social Situation of the Country," prepared by CENSIS since 1967, is considered one of the most authoritative and comprehensive tools for interpreting Italian society. The 2023 CENSIS report is blunt and unforgiving. It describes Italian society as one that:

[drags] its feet; walks close to the wall; fears the encounter with the unrelated; guards, jealously, small prerogatives; keeps the pitch low; gives up on exploring the world or thinking about the

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<sup>142</sup> ISTAT. Indicatori Demografici - Anno 2023, 2024

<sup>143</sup> CENSIS. 57° Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese, 2023

<sup>144</sup> ISTAT. Noi Italia 2024, 2024a

future. And it consoles itself by noting that ours is the land of a thousand wonders [...]; ignoring how entangled it is in all its backwardness if seen from the bottom<sup>145</sup>

### 2.1.1. Emigration flows

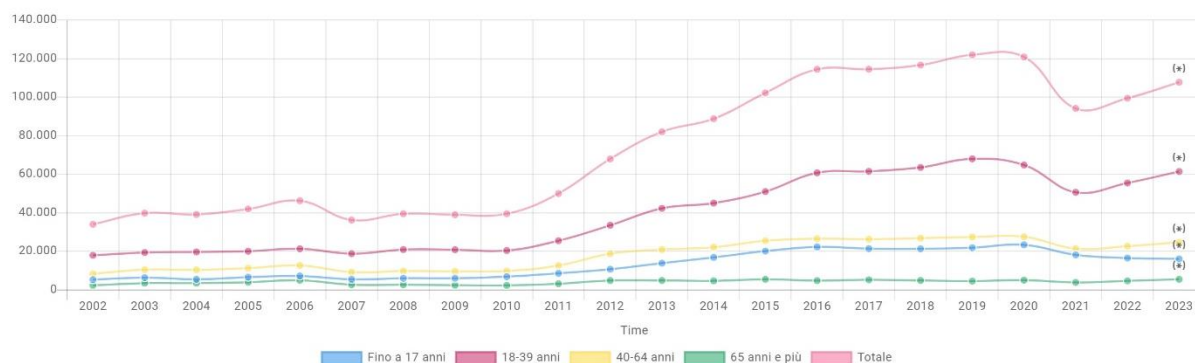


Figure 6: Emigration flows from Italy 2002-2023. Source: ISTAT

Italy continues to be a country of emigration, with over 5.9 million Italians currently residing abroad, rather than immigration, with 5 million foreigners residing in Italy<sup>146</sup>. As of today, the Italian population residing outside the nation's borders is approximately 6 million individuals. This figure represents a significant increase of 91% since 2006. The number of Italians living abroad has nearly doubled, with a growth rate of 99.3%. Additionally, the population of minors has risen by 78.3%, while those aged over 65 have seen an increase of 109.8%. The cohort of individuals born abroad has expanded by 175%, and the acquisition of citizenship has surged by 144%. Furthermore, the rate of expatriation departures has grown by 44.9%, and transfers from other AIRE registrations have increased by 70%. Recent data from Istat indicates that from 2002 to 2021, approximately 1.4 million Italians emigrated, averaging over 71,000 individuals annually. The number of expatriates has shown a notable upward trend, particularly between 2011 and 2020, culminating in a peak of 122,000 departures in 2019<sup>147</sup>. In 2022, the phenomenon of migration experienced a notable increase reflecting a growth of 4% relative to 2021 and a 10% rise compared to 2020. Among those who emigrated between January and December 2022, 44% were young Italians aged 18 to 34. While Italy continues to experience a decline in its resident population, with a loss of 132,405 individuals over the past year (equating to a decrease of 0.2%), the Italian diaspora is still expanding, albeit at a slower pace than in previous years. Notably, in contrast to the demographic trends within Italy, the population of Italians living abroad is becoming increasingly younger<sup>148</sup>. Throughout Italian demographic history, emigration has been a persistent phenomenon, often regarded as the norm rather than

<sup>145</sup> Ibidem, p. 4

<sup>146</sup> CENSIS. 57° Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese, 2023

<sup>147</sup> ISTAT. Migrazioni, 2024b

<sup>148</sup> Fondazione Migrantes della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana. Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo, 2023

the exception, particularly until the latter half of the 1960s, when the migratory balance of Italians effectively ceased to exist. Subsequently, there was a notable decline in the movements of Italian citizens to and from foreign countries, reaching minimal levels by the late 1980s, which persisted until after the Great Recession of 2009. The resurgence of emigration among Italian citizens began in conjunction with the onset of the sovereign debt crisis in 2011, further exacerbating the Italian recession. Currently, the demographic profile of those emigrating is characterized by a younger age group (20-34 years), a trend that is not unprecedented, and a higher educational attainment level, with 30% of graduates in this age cohort compared to 28% for the overall population<sup>149</sup>. The proportion of graduates among expats aged 25-34 has significantly increased from 33.3% in 2018 to 45.7% in 2021. This brain drain is not part of a positive and desirable scenario of talent circulation, given that the migratory balance of graduates aged 25-34 in Italy remains consistently negative. However, there was a sharp decline in 2021, with a net loss of -6,969 young graduates, after two years when the figure exceeded 10,000 units<sup>150</sup>. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that a quarter of those who emigrate have not completed their high school education.<sup>151</sup> In 2023, nearly 108,000 Italians relocated abroad. It is crucial to acknowledge that these figures may be underestimated. As of January 1, 2023, there were 5,933,418 Italian citizens registered with AIRE, constituting 10.1% of the 58.8 million Italians residing within Italy. In fact, there is a growing segment of individuals who find themselves in a state of indecision, caught between their lives in Italy and abroad. This group includes those who have relocated and are employed overseas, yet maintain a connection to Italy by not fulfilling the requirement to register with the Registry Office of Italians Resident Abroad (AIRE)<sup>152</sup>. In 2023, the proportion of Italians choosing to emigrate to Europe has decreased to 72%, a decline from 83% in 2021. The United States is the most favoured destination, attracting 20% of emigrants, followed by the United Kingdom at 13.2%, Germany at 12.3%, and Switzerland at 10%. Notably, the highest rates of emigration are observed among the youth. ISTAT categorizes migrants into four distinct age groups: individuals under 17, those aged 18 to 39, those between 40 and 64, and those over 65. Between 2002 and 2021, 52% of Italian expatriates fall within the 18 to 39 age range, while 24% are aged 40 to 64 and 18% are under 17. Men exhibit a higher propensity to emigrate compared to women. Over the past two decades, approximately 810,000 Italians have repatriated, averaging more than 40,000 individuals annually. In terms of emigration, Italy experienced a net loss of around 600,000 citizens between

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<sup>149</sup> Latmiral, L., L. Paolazzi, and R. Brunello. *Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics: Un'indagine per Comprendere le Reali Dimensioni della Diaspora dei Giovani Italiani*. Fondazione Nord Est, 2023.

<sup>150</sup> CENSIS. *57° Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese*, 2023

<sup>151</sup> Latmiral, L., L. Paolazzi, and R. Brunello. *Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics: Un'indagine per Comprendere le Reali Dimensioni della Diaspora dei Giovani Italiani*, 2023.

<sup>152</sup> Fondazione Migrantes della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana. *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo*, 2023

2002 and 2021, which translates to an average annual loss of 30,000 individuals. The rate of returnees to Italy after residing abroad saw a decline from 2003 to 2008, remaining stable until 2016 when a resurgence in returns began. The highest number of repatriations occurred in 2021, with roughly 74,800 individuals returning to the country. Among the returnees, 38% were aged between 18 and 39, 29% fell within the 40 to 64 age bracket, and 21% were under the age of 17. Regarding geographical distribution, 45% of returnees settled in Northern regions, 36% in Southern regions and 18% in Central regions. Notably, the proportion of individuals returning to live in the South and the Islands has decreased over the past 15 years<sup>153</sup>. Italians often perceive themselves as constrained by their professional circumstances. The younger cohorts exhibit the lowest levels of engagement, the highest stress levels at 49%, and a significant sense of sadness at 27%. Many express a lack of alternative employment options, leading to a pronounced resignation regarding their professional futures. Among the youth, particularly those aged 18 to 34, Italy stands out as the most affected country in Europe, with nearly half of this age group—approximately 4.8 million individuals—experiencing at least one form of deprivation. The most challenging areas for these young people are education and employment. Furthermore, a concerning 1.7 million young Italians fall into the NEET category<sup>154</sup>. Comparatively, Italian workers earn about 3,700 euros less than the European average, and over 8,000 euros less than their German counterparts. This situation highlights a significant crisis affecting Italy encompassing various dimensions, including identity, existential concerns, employment, and social engagement. While this issue is frequently discussed, there remains a critical need for more effective action<sup>155</sup>. There are compelling reasons to assert that the recent surge in emigration among Italians is substantial and significantly contributes to the decline in the country's growth potential. This phenomenon initiates a vicious cycle characterised by diminished growth, increasing disparities in employment and living conditions relative to other European regions, and an exacerbated exodus of Italians. The migration of young individuals from Italy coincides with the onset of demographic stagnation, during which the younger segments of the population are not only decreasing in proportion but also in absolute numbers. It is unnecessary to engage in forecasting to recognise that, excluding new migration trends, the Italian population within the 20-34 age demographic is projected to be 580,000 fewer (-8%) by 2030 compared to current figures, a projection already reflected in existing population data. Consequently, while emigration in previous decades occurred amidst a robust increase in the youth

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<sup>153</sup> ISTAT. Migrazioni, 2024b

<sup>154</sup> Not in education, employment or training

<sup>155</sup> Fondazione Migrantes della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana. Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo, 2023

population, the current situation intensifies the depletion of young Italian cohorts<sup>156</sup>. This decline, however, may be offset quantitatively by an influx of young individuals of foreign nationality from other European countries. In the global competition for talent acquisition, Italy is positioned as a net supplier, primarily through the emigration of its highly educated youth. To articulate this in economic terms, there exists a net outflow of human capital. Specifically, the emigration of young Italians to other developed European countries is not counterbalanced by a similar influx of young citizens from those nations into Italy. Furthermore, the arrivals from less developed countries consist of individuals with significantly lower educational qualifications compared to those departing from Italy. Notably, one-third of young Europeans migrate to Switzerland, a trend largely influenced by the preferences of Germans (48.7%), French (32.4%), and Italians (27.7%). Geographical proximity also significantly impacts the migration choices of the French towards Spain and Belgium, as well as those of the Dutch, Belgians, Danes, and Swedes. In contrast, Italy ranks last among the preferred destinations, trailing significantly behind Denmark. It is possible to conclude that there exists a European network regarding the mobility of young individuals; however, Italy does not feature prominently in terms of attractiveness and is instead a major contributor to the outflow of youth<sup>157</sup>. The presence of this circuit highlights another structural distinction in the context of the emerging Italian diaspora: the formation of the European Union. On an institutional level, the EU has unequivocally acknowledged and enacted the right to free movement for individuals. However, the implications extend beyond mere legal provisions; the existence of the Union has fostered a consciousness among younger generations regarding their identity as European citizens, thereby enhancing their mental freedom to select their place of residence across various European regions<sup>158</sup>. The primary and most apparent outcome of such a diaspora is the depletion of human capital. Looking at the migratory balance of Italians aged 25-64, between 2011 and 2021, Italy experienced a loss of € 38 billion in human capital, equivalent to a reduction of two percentage points in GDP. It is important to note that this figure likely underrepresents the actual loss, as it does not account for individuals with lower educational attainment and fails to capture the enhanced innovative potential of those who emigrate, given their greater inclination towards change and risk-taking. A second significant consequence of this phenomenon is a decline in innovation: the diaspora diminishes the labour force in Italy, depriving businesses of the skilled professionals necessary for executing growth initiatives and investments. This stagnation in enterprise

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<sup>156</sup> Latmiral, L., L. Paolazzi, and R. Brunello. *Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics: Un'indagine per Comprendere le Reali Dimensioni della Diaspora dei Giovani Italiani*, 2023.

<sup>157</sup> Latmiral, L., L. Paolazzi, and R. Brunello. *Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics: Un'indagine per Comprendere le Reali Dimensioni della Diaspora dei Giovani Italiani*, 2023.

<sup>158</sup> *ibidem*



growth, in turn, renders these businesses less appealing to younger generations, thereby perpetuating a cycle of further emigration. Closely related to this issue is a third serious consequence: a declining birth rate. It is crucial to highlight that the reduced birth rate among enterprises further hampers innovation. The fourth and fifth critical consequences pertain to demographic trends: a continued decline in the already low birth rate and an accelerated ageing of the population. Young emigrants often establish families in their new countries, resulting in their offspring being born abroad. Although the emigration of youth reduces the average age statistically, it also alters consumption patterns and household investment dynamics. A reduction in youth leads to a final consequence: the challenge of implementing green and digital revolutions. Young individuals typically exhibit heightened environmental awareness and are digital natives. Collectively, these consequences contribute to a diminished potential for growth in Italy's GDP, which in turn affects the sustainability of public debt<sup>159</sup>. Between 2012 and 2021, the repatriation of Italian citizens from abroad experienced a significant increase, rising from 29,000 in 2012 to approximately 75,000 in 2021, marking a growth of 154%. Nevertheless, the influx of returning citizens has not been adequate to offset the population decline resulting from expatriations, which saw a notable increase throughout the same timeframe, culminating in a substantial negative migration balance, with losses peaking at 77%. The year 2021 was particularly noteworthy due to the implementation of new tax incentives aimed at attracting human capital back to Italy (DL 34/2019). This policy led to a doubling of returnees, with numbers soaring from an average of 2,000-3,000 annually to over 6,500. The increase in repatriations has been more pronounced in the southern regions of Italy, particularly in Campania, which has attracted the largest share of returnees over the past three years, followed closely by Apulia and Sicily. The enhanced benefits, both in terms of amount and duration, alongside a focus on permanent residency, proved effective. The appeal of these new tax incentives is further underscored by the increasing proportion of highly skilled foreign nationals opting to relocate to Italy, which rose from 3.8% in 2018 to 7.8% in 2022, effectively doubling<sup>160</sup>. The repatriation of skilled individuals from abroad incurs no costs for the Italian tax authorities, as the associated benefits pertain to income that was not previously generated within Italy. However, through contributions to the National Institute of Social Security (Inps) and the National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (Inail), the State stands to gain up to one billion euros annually, not accounting for the evident positive demographic impacts<sup>161</sup>. Relevant to this

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<sup>159</sup> Latmiral, L., L. Paolazzi, and R. Brunello. *Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics: Un'indagine per Comprendere le Reali Dimensioni della Diaspora dei Giovani Italiani*, 2023.

<sup>160</sup> Fondazione Migrantes della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana. *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo*, 2023

<sup>161</sup> Bassetto, J., and G. Ippedico. "Can Tax Incentives Bring Brains Back? Returnees Tax Schemes and High-Skilled Migration in Italy." *CESifo*, 2023

research is the comment provided by “Gruppo Controesodo”, an expat community of highly qualified workers, researchers and students that since 2015 has represented the requests and ideas of emigrants workers to the institutions. In late 2022, “Gruppo Controesodo” carried out a survey targeting its community members. It emerges that the legislative focus on the concept of “rooting” or long-term staying, as implemented in 2019, based on tax incentives, has successfully established a medium-term perspective. To transition towards a long-term strategy, a significant advancement in family policies is required. Supporting families not only fosters deeper long-term staying but also serves as a countermeasure against the demographic winter facing the nation. Furthermore, promoting higher birth rates generates substantial induced income for the families involved, which in turn yields beneficial effects for the overall national system<sup>162</sup>. However, the new Legislative Decree (Dlgs. 209/2023) has reduced tax incentives for returnees to 50% and has notably limited their applicability to individuals meeting unspecified criteria of high qualification or specialization. This change excludes those who remain employed by the same multinational corporation and introduces a stringent requirement that mandates individuals who do not reside in Italy for a minimum of five years to repay all benefits received, along with interest and penalties. Furthermore, the new decree abolishes the incentives for repatriates established under DL 34/2019, which were deemed excessively burdensome and distorting. Additionally, it is once again missing a long-term perspective to encourage repatriation, as individuals or families are unlikely to relocate without a clear plan. In this regard, “Gruppo Controesodo” advocates for a system based on incentives rather than punitive measures.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Fondazione Migrantes della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana. Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo, 2023

<sup>163</sup> Gruppo Controesodo. Lettera Aperta al Vice Ministro On. Prof. Maurizio Leo, 2023

## 2.1.2. Immigration flows

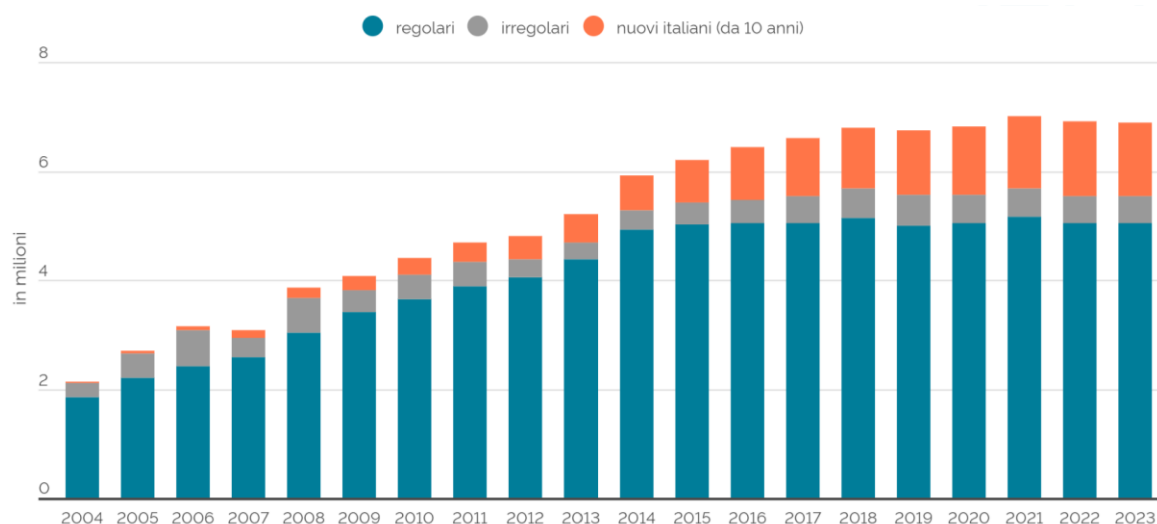


Figure 7: Foreign nationals and new citizens residing in Italy (2004-2023). Source: ISPI

The significant revisions affecting the demographic composition of the foreign population, carried out by ISTAT during the 2021 census and the subsequent recalculation of resident figures as of January 1, 2022, concluded that after peaking at 5 million 962 thousand foreign nationals in early 2019, there has been a steady decrease over the subsequent years<sup>164</sup>. As of January 1, 2023, 5 million 775 thousand foreign nationals were living in Italy, accounting for 8.7% of the overall resident population. This figure represents a 2.2% increase compared to the previous year. The natural balance contributed to approximately 43,000 individuals, whereas the migratory balance accounted for around 286,000<sup>165</sup>. In 2023, approximately 212,100 migrants and refugees attempted to cross the central Mediterranean Sea from Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia. This figure represents a 52% rise in comparison to 2022, marking the highest incidence since 2017. The preferred route remains the central Mediterranean Sea accounting for 150,273 individuals. Among those who attempted to depart 71% (151,500 individuals) successfully disembarked in Europe, while 29% (60,600 individuals) were either intercepted and disembarked in North Africa, with 21% in Tunisia and 8% in Libya. Italy experienced a marked rise in sea arrivals from Tunisia in 2023, surpassing those from Libya. There was a significant rise in the arrival of nationals from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Sudan, many of whom were likely seeking international protection and as the ongoing conflict in Sudan persists this trend is destined to grow. In 2023, over 3,105 migrants and refugees are reported to have died or gone missing at sea while attempting to reach Europe via the three Mediterranean routes (eastern, central, and western), an increase from the more than 2,500 deaths recorded in 2022. In the 20203 Joint

<sup>164</sup> Fondazione ISMU ETS. Ventinovesimo Rapporto sulle Migrazioni, 2024

<sup>165</sup> ISTAT. Stranieri Residenti e Nuovi Cittadini: Caratteristiche Demografiche e Distribuzione Territoriale - Anno 2021, 2023

Annual Overview, IOM and UNHCR express profound concern regarding the persistently elevated number of fatalities occurring in the central Mediterranean Sea. They highlight the irregular and unpredictable nature of search and rescue (SAR) and disembarkation processes in certain regions of this maritime area. Furthermore, the report highlights a significant deficiency in viable solutions for regular and safe pathways<sup>166</sup>. To understand the impact of migration on the demographic evolution of the country, the analysis inclusive and exclusive of foreign nationals of the Foundation proves valuable. Over the past two decades, the increase in the proportion of individuals aged 65 and older would have been more pronounced in the absence of foreign residents; specifically, as of January 1, 2023, the percentage of elderly individuals would be nearly two percentage points higher (25.8% versus 24.1%) without the foreign demographic. A similar trend can be observed in relation to the working-age population. Between 2002 and 2022, the overall number of residents within this age bracket decreased by over three percentage points (from 61.9% to 58.5%). However, when focusing solely on Italian citizens—who exhibit lower proportions of individuals aged 20 to 64 compared to the total resident population—the decline is even more pronounced, exceeding four percentage points (from 61.6% to 57.3%)<sup>167</sup>. In recent years, the discourse surrounding immigration has garnered significant attention from the media, non-governmental organizations, political entities, and the general public, particularly focusing on issues such as arrivals, fatalities at sea, and the plight of individuals escaping conflict and persecution. The political discourse on immigration in the country has generally oscillated between two contrasting and somewhat extreme viewpoints. The first perspective regards immigration as a temporary phenomenon, advocating for a connection between the presence of immigrants and their engagement in labour activities or their need for international protection due to conflict and persecution. Conversely, the second viewpoint perceives immigrants as essential contributors to the economy and as integral members of society. Within this framework, the discussion shifts towards the integration processes of newcomers, inevitably addressing their opportunities and challenges in attaining Italian citizenship. It is plausible that both elements coexist, with some individuals opting for voluntary repatriation to their countries of origin (or relocation to another nation), while others view their migration as a long-term investment. For these individuals, the aspiration is likely to be full integration as Italians, along with the associated rights<sup>168</sup>. At the start of 2023, 3,727,706 non-EU citizens legally resided in Italy, representing almost 75% of foreign nationals present on the Italian territory. Among them 60% hold long-term residence permits. In 2022, nearly 449,000 new residence permits were

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<sup>166</sup> IOM and UNHCR, *Migrant and Refugee Movements through the Central Mediterranean Sea in 2023: Joint Annual Overview for 2023*

<sup>167</sup> Fondazione ISMU ETS, *Ventinovesimo Rapporto sulle Migrazioni*, 2024

<sup>168</sup> Strozza, S., C. Conti, and E. Tucci. *Nuovi Cittadini: Diventare Italiani nell'Era della Globalizzazione*, 2021

granted to non-EU nationals, marking an 86% increase from 2021, largely attributed to the refugee influx resulting from the war in Ukraine<sup>169</sup>. The largest communities are the Albanians, followed by Moroccans and Chinese. There are currently 2.6 million households in Italy with foreign citizens (9.8% of the total), and 1.8 million families (7% of the total) consist exclusively of foreign citizens. Currently, the largest percentage of those who hold a residence permit are those under 18. 767,809 foreign minors are residing in Italy, representing 8.5% of the under-18 population<sup>170</sup>. In 2023 there were over 2.3 million immigrant workers, constituting 10.3% of the total workforce, contributing more than 9% to the national GDP, with contributions exceeding 14% in sectors such as agriculture and construction. Following the pandemic, which disproportionately affected immigrant women, there has been a notable recovery in immigrant employment, indicating a greater adaptability compared to the native population. Nevertheless, several structural issues persist within the Italian labour market. Primarily, Italy attracts predominantly unskilled labour, often relegated to seasonal and manual positions (Fondazione L. Moressa, 2023). Even when skilled workers are present, they frequently find themselves in low-level roles, a phenomenon referred to as “overqualification”. In 2023 Italy presented the second-highest “overqualification” rate in the UE, specifically among young non-EU nationals. Additionally, the rates of over-qualification were notably higher among non-EU citizens in comparison to nationals, affecting both male and female populations. The most pronounced disparities were recorded in Italy, where the over-qualification rates stood at 58.5% for men and 68.7% for women among non-EU citizens, contrasted with 16.3% for men and 23% for women among nationals. In November 2020, the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027<sup>171</sup> was established to respond to the necessity for EU policies to be accessible and beneficial to everyone, particularly migrants and EU citizens of migrant descent. This plan outlines measures aimed at enhancing effective integration and inclusion across all sectors at the EU, Member State, and regional levels, with a particular focus on the youth demographic<sup>172</sup>. This situation fosters social immobility, curtailing genuine opportunities for social integration and resulting in a misallocation of skills. Among employed individuals with tertiary education, 19.1% of natives occupy low or medium-skilled jobs, while this figure rises to 46.9% for EU foreigners and 67.1% for non-EU foreigners. Furthermore, the prevalence of precarious employment is significantly higher among immigrants, with 9.7% of native workers at risk of poverty compared to 20.3% of EU foreigners and 31.2% of non-EU foreigners. The pandemic has also triggered an increased demand for labour from businesses, prompting a revision of the entry quotas

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<sup>169</sup> ISTAT. Noi Italia 2024, 2024a

<sup>170</sup> ISTAT. Indicatori Demografici - Anno 2023. 2024.

<sup>171</sup> European Commission, COM(2016) 377 final

<sup>172</sup> Eurostat. Migrant Integration Statistic – Over Qualification, 2024

established by the “flows-decree” (*Decreto Flussi*) (Fondazione L. Moressa, 2023). The Italian government, through a decree issued by the President of the Council of Ministers, periodically establishes the maximum quotas for foreign nationals permitted to enter Italy for both subordinate and autonomous employment, as mandated by the “flow decree” introduced by Law no. 40/1998<sup>173</sup>. After years of limiting entries to 30,000 annually (including seasonal workers), the quotas were set at 69,000 for 2022 and 82,000 for 2023, with an additional 40,000 seasonal workers anticipated throughout the year, culminating in a total of 452,000 planned entries for the three years from 2024 to 2026. The labour market in Italy is heavily reliant on foreign workers, specifically if we take into consideration that a substantial proportion of the Italian population (72.8%) recognizes that migrants fulfil crucial roles that natives are often reluctant to accept, with this figure increasing to 76.0% in the southern regions of the country<sup>174</sup>. The rise of immigrant entrepreneurship, characterized by the inclination of immigrant workers to establish their own businesses, is becoming increasingly prominent. This trend signifies both a continuation of the journey towards autonomy and stability, while simultaneously posing various challenges, particularly in terms of integration and the fostering of synergies with the existing native economic framework. An analysis of the past twelve years (2010-2022) reveals a stark contrast in entrepreneurial activity between individuals born in Italy, who experienced a decline of 10.2%, and those born abroad, who saw an increase of 39.7%. By 2022, 761,255 foreign-born entrepreneurs were operating in Italy, representing 10.1% of the total entrepreneurial landscape. Although a significant disparity in average income persists between immigrants and native citizens, the fiscal contributions of the immigrant population remain favourable, with their taxes and contributions surpassing the welfare services allocated to them by 1.8 billion euros. This indicates that immigrants are primarily engaged as workers and taxpayers, contributing to the economy while exerting minimal pressure on public expenditure. It is important to recognize that while the tax contributions and demographic presence of immigrants provide tangible benefits, they are insufficient to address the prevailing socio-economic trends in the country. Current demographic projections suggest an impending balance between the number of workers and retirees, a situation that is unsustainable under the present system<sup>175</sup>. The phenomenon of demographic ageing appears to be on an unrelenting trajectory. The percentage of individuals aged 65 and older, which stood at 3% two decades ago, is projected to increase from the current 5.7% to 13.5% by January 1, 2043. In numerical terms, this translates to nearly 700,000 senior citizens, a significant rise from the present figure of 291,000.

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<sup>173</sup> Ministero dell’Interno, Circolare decreto flussi, 2024

<sup>174</sup> Fondazione Leone Moressa. Rapporto Annuale 2023 sull’Economia dell’Immigrazione, 2023

<sup>175</sup> Ibidem

Additionally, a notable shift is anticipated in the proportion of the working-age population, which has already experienced a decline of approximately one percentage point since the turn of the century, decreasing from 73.3% to 72.5%, and is expected to further diminish to 68.7%. By 2043, there will be around 250,000 fewer foreign residents of working age compared to 2023; however, this decline is likely to be offset by an increase in new Italian citizens through naturalization. This demographic exchange must be considered when assessing the projected moderate decrease in the total number of foreign residents, estimated at a reduction of 69,000 by January 1, 2043. Over the two-decade span, ISTAT data, focusing on the median variant, anticipates a net influx of 3.5 million immigrants, while Eurostat suggests a higher total of 5.3 million, with 3.9 million being of working age. The implications for potential labour force support are significant. Specifically, while ISTAT forecasts a decline of 6.223 million residents of working age from 2023 to 2042, Eurostat's estimates, although confirming a reduction, project a smaller loss of 4.175 million. To fully counterbalance the anticipated decrease in the population aged 20-64 between January 1, 2023, and January 1, 2043, an average annual migration contribution exceeding half a million individuals would be necessary, as derived from extrapolating the various scenarios outlined in the ISTAT forecasting model. Specifically, annual net immigration of 543,000 individuals would be required to maintain the total potential labour force in Italy at its current level over the next two decades<sup>176</sup>.

## **2.2. Ethnic minorities and integration policies**

Immigration, integration and citizenship both in academic and political discourse are closely interrelated. In migration studies, these concepts provide a framework for analysing the complexities of today's globalised society, its territories, and populations within the context of national governance and specifically its interrelation with the liberal democratic model. Koopmans<sup>177</sup> argues that today the liberal nation-state is increasingly threatened by two significant processes: the external diminishment of sovereignty and the internal emergence of cultural diversity, both largely influenced by immigration. The definitions of migrant status and citizenship, established by state categories, highlight the significance of inclusion and exclusion in comprehending their current forms and historical evolution<sup>178</sup>. Arguments moved by contemporary critical migration studies emphasise the selective and exclusionary practices,

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<sup>176</sup> Fondazione ISMU ETS. Ventinovesimo Rapporto sulle Migrazioni, 2024

<sup>177</sup> Koopmans, R., and P. Statham. "Challenging the Liberal Nation-State? Postnationalism, Multiculturalism, and the Collective Claims Making of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Britain and Germany." *American Journal of Sociology*, 1999

<sup>178</sup> Schrover, M. and W. Schinkel. *The Language of Inclusion and Exclusion in Immigration and Integration*, 2014

highlighting the persistence of mechanisms of injustices and racialised migration<sup>179</sup>. As stated in both the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 and the New Pact on Migration and Asylum effective integration and inclusion policies as key components of a well-managed migration framework are essential for social cohesion and economic dynamism<sup>180</sup>. As integration is a two-way process, the manner in which a nation approaches integration is crucial. Integration policies are among the most influential elements determining the public's acceptance and willingness to engage with immigrant communities. Furthermore, these policies significantly impact immigrants' own perceptions, sense of belonging, and even their health within their new environment. Restrictive policies can create a detrimental cycle of exclusion, fostering fear and division. When immigrants are framed as threats, it leads to a broader societal perception of immigrants as dangers, resulting in harmful treatment that undermines their integration. Such restrictive measures often correlate with increased xenophobia and Islamophobia, alongside diminished social trust, which in turn reduces opportunities for positive interactions with immigrants. Conversely, inclusive policies foster a beneficial cycle of integration that encourages openness and engagement. In nations where inclusive policies regard immigrants as equals and view integration as a societal opportunity, both immigrants and the public are more inclined to interact and perceive one another as equals. These inclusive measures not only enhance positive attitudes and interactions between the public and immigrants but also cultivate a general sense of belonging, well-being, and trust<sup>181</sup>. Within the European Union, the governance of immigration and the integration of immigrants predominantly fall under the jurisdiction of individual national governments. From a normative point of view, Article 42 of the Consolidated Act on Immigration states that in collaboration with sector associations and the authorities from the countries of origin, the State, regions, and local autonomies actively promote the integration of foreign citizens who are legally residing in Italy. This is achieved through various programs that offer information regarding rights and integration opportunities, facilitate language, civic, and professional training, and encourage participation in the labour market. Territorial councils for immigration are responsible for monitoring the presence of foreign nationals and their socio-occupational integration levels and serve as a vital link between the central government and local communities. They aim to foster targeted local integration policies in collaboration with other institutions and private social organizations<sup>182</sup>. Politically, the interest in integration policies in Italy has exhibited fluctuations over time, marked by two notable

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<sup>179</sup> Favell, A. Immigration, integration and citizenship: elements of a new political demography. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2022

<sup>180</sup> European Commission. Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027. COM(2020) 758 final, 2020

<sup>181</sup> Solano, G. and T. Huddleston. Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020

<sup>182</sup> Ministero dell'Interno, Sistema di accoglienza sul territorio, n.d.



peaks: the first occurring from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, coinciding with the active role of the Commission for Immigrant Integration Policies under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, and the second from 2011 to 2014, during which specialized ministries dedicated to integration were established (notably, the Ministry for International Cooperation and Integration under Andrea Riccardi in the Monti administration, followed by the Ministry for Integration led by Cécile Kyenge in the Letta government)<sup>183</sup>. When discussing migrant communities, citizenship, integration and inclusion policies, a point of reflection is needed. The enumeration and classification of individuals from foreign backgrounds, as well as the identification of ethnic minorities, frequently presents a sensitive challenge. The categorization of specific social and ethnic groups in statistical censuses serves as an important instrument for formulating effective policies, particularly in monitoring discrimination and disparities in opportunities. While the intention behind such data collection is often to enhance the circumstances of those being counted, historical instances reveal that census data and statistical information have been misused to isolate 'foreign' populations, leading to their containment, mistreatment, or, in extreme cases, extermination. Consequently, discussions surrounding the assessment of ethnicity or foreign status tend to elicit intense emotional responses<sup>184</sup>. Anthropologists describe ethnicity as an indicator that differentiates “us” from “them”, encompassing shared language, cultural practices and customs. Despite appearing to be a neutral analytical tool, statistics are frequently shaped by specific social and political contexts, including prevailing integration philosophies and dominant citizenship narratives. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century states employed classification systems that were inherently racist, reflecting the prevailing racist ideologies. A notable example is the Jim Crow laws in the United States, which included the one-drop rule, asserting that any non-white ancestry disqualified an individual from being considered fully white. The European panorama on ethnic statistics is complex and diversified. For example, Belgium refrains completely from compiling ethnic statistics. France simplifies the categorization of individuals to a distinction between citizens and non-citizens<sup>185</sup>. In Italy, the collection of ethnic statistics is not explicitly permitted due to privacy regulations and the nation's historical context regarding race and ethnicity, particularly influenced by the events of World War II and the Fascist regime. The Italian Constitution and legal framework emphasize individual rights and equality, aiming to prevent categorization based on race or ethnicity. The Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), which is responsible for national statistical data, gathers information on demographic aspects such as citizenship, place of birth, and nationality, but does not

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<sup>183</sup> Strozza, S., C. Conti, and E. Tucci. *Nuovi Cittadini: Diventare Italiani nell'Era della Globalizzazione*, 2021

<sup>184</sup> Jacobs, D., M. Swyngedouw, M. Hanquinet, et al. "The Challenge of Measuring Immigrant Origin and Immigration-Related Ethnicity in Europe." *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 2009

<sup>185</sup> *ibidem*

compile or disseminate data on ethnic or racial identity. Instead, it relies on citizenship and country of origin data to examine migration trends, population diversity, and integration. This methodology is consistent with Italian privacy laws, including the Data Protection Code, which limits the collection of "sensitive data" related to race, ethnicity, religion, or political beliefs unless specifically mandated for particular purposes and safeguarded by stringent regulations<sup>186</sup>. Researchers aiming to conduct studies on immigrants or ethnic minorities in Europe inevitably encounter a multitude of national statistical data types, necessitating ad hoc solutions. The comparability of data concerning immigrants and ethnic minorities across Europe is hindered by the diversity in national methodologies. Existing frameworks predominantly differentiate between nationals and non-nationals, a distinction that proves insufficient given the varying nationality laws throughout Europe. While no European Union member state enforces a complete ban on the gathering of data pertaining to ethnic origin, all nations have aligned their domestic regulations with the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation<sup>187</sup>. This regulation restricts the processing of personal data that discloses racial or ethnic background, political beliefs, religious or philosophical convictions, union affiliations, as well as genetic and biometric information intended for the unique identification of individuals. However, this prohibition is not absolute; exceptions exist whereby these sensitive categories of personal data may be processed with the explicit consent of the individuals involved and for specific purposes, particularly when such processing is deemed necessary for relevant public interest, including statistical, scientific, or historical research. Recently, there has been considerable debate within Europe regarding the potential for broadening the scope of data collection on descent or ethnicity, particularly with an emphasis on the inclusion of minority groups, as seen in other immigration-oriented nations such as Australia, Canada, and the United States. Consequently, it is plausible that in the future, additional data may be collected to enhance the understanding of populations of foreign origin<sup>188</sup>. Although the European Commission's Regulation offers some assistance, it falls short of adequately addressing the identification of second-generation immigrants or long-standing ethnic minority communities. In countries such as the Netherlands and the Nordic countries, the practice of utilizing parental birthplace to identify ethnic minorities has been in place since the 1990s. While this method is effective in illustrating issues of discrimination and social exclusion, it may inadvertently contribute to societal racialization and present challenges, particularly in the classification of individuals with mixed heritage. The absence of a definitive threshold for determining when an individual ceases to be regarded as part of an ethnic minority

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<sup>186</sup> Strozza, S., C. Conti, and E. Tucci. *Nuovi Cittadini: Diventare Italiani nell'Era della Globalizzazione*, 2021

<sup>187</sup> European Commission, Regulation (EU) 2018/1725

<sup>188</sup> Strozza, S., C. Conti, and E. Tucci. *Nuovi Cittadini: Diventare Italiani nell'Era della Globalizzazione*, 2021

complicates categorization efforts. Self-identification places the responsibility on individuals, who may wish to define their identity differently from external perceptions. Both objective categorisation and self-categorization approaches risk severing the link between identity and the lived experience of discrimination, which is fundamentally shaped by societal perceptions. Strozza<sup>189</sup> raises a similar point in relation to the Italian context, supporting the production of statistics that encompass individuals of foreign descent, not solely those classified as foreigners at the time of the survey or event, but also those who were previously foreigners prior to acquiring citizenship. As of early 2020, Italy's resident population comprises nearly 55 million Italians and over 5 million foreigners, based on citizenship criteria. However, when examining the population through the lens of place of birth, the figures shift: there are fewer than 54 million individuals born in Italy and more than 6 million born abroad. Data regarding place of birth is instrumental in identifying the so-called immigrant population. The intersection of citizenship and place of birth prompts a fundamental observation: not all foreigners are immigrants, and conversely, not all immigrants are classified as foreigners. By analyzing the resident population based on both place of birth and citizenship, it becomes possible to differentiate between Italians born in Italy (fewer than 53 million) and foreigners born abroad (over 4.3 million), as well as to identify two additional groups. The first group consists of foreigners born in Italy, more than 860,000 at the beginning of 2020. This group includes the offspring of foreign immigrants who, in many instances, have not undergone a migration experience, are fluent in Italian (and in some cases, speak only Italian), yet do not possess the same rights as their Italian passport-holding peers. The second group is composed of immigrants who hold an Italian passport (in total about 2 million people in 2020). Those who have acquired it sum just under 1.2 million, an indicative figure that underestimates the total size of immigrants who have become Italian in recent decades. There are also immigrants with Italian citizenship from birth (about 800,000), among whom there are the descendants of Italians who emigrated abroad<sup>190</sup>. Numerous studies have indicated that, despite possessing the same rights as native Italians, new citizens often exhibit higher levels of vulnerability, even among second-generation immigrants. As emphasized by various scholars, the attainment of citizenship is frequently not the culmination of the integration journey but rather a significant milestone that does not shield individuals from potential discrimination. Citizenship does not provide immunity against the discriminatory impacts associated with the so-called 'three A's': (1) Appearance, which can reveal non-European origins; (2) Accent, which may indicate an immigrant background; and (3) ancestry, where

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<sup>189</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>190</sup> Strozza, S., C. Conti, and E. Tucci. *Nuovi Cittadini: Diventare Italiani nell'Era della Globalizzazione*, 2021

surnames may disclose distant heritage<sup>191</sup>. Ethnic categorization carries the risk of essentializing and solidifying social groups, mirroring prevailing notions of inclusion and exclusion that evolve over time. Nevertheless, the necessity for reliable data remains paramount in assessing racial discrimination and social exclusion. Despite its inherent risks, ethnic classification is crucial for formulating policies aimed at fostering equal opportunities and combating racism. No perfect system exists, but reliable data on the country of birth of parents across Europe would improve research on immigrant groups. A two-speed approach might be beneficial, where countries with established systems agree on basic definitions, with others gradually adapting. Combining external classification and self-identification methods could provide a more comprehensive framework for both recent immigrant waves and long-established ethnic minorities<sup>192</sup>.

Integration policies are traditionally classified through Barry's model of acculturation. Berry developed a framework for understanding acculturation that classifies individual adaptation strategies across two key dimensions. The first dimension addresses the extent to which individuals choose to retain or reject their native culture, posing the question: "Is it deemed important to preserve one's identity and cultural characteristics?" The second dimension examines the decision to adopt or reject the host culture, asking: "Is it valued to maintain connections with the broader society?" These inquiries give rise to four distinct acculturation strategies: Assimilation occurs when individuals embrace the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture at the expense of their original culture. Separation takes place when individuals opt to reject the dominant or host culture in favour of preserving their culture of origin, often facilitated by residing in ethnic enclaves. Integration is characterized by individuals adopting the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture while simultaneously maintaining their original culture, leading to a state often referred to as biculturalism. Marginalization arises when individuals dismiss both their culture of origin and the dominant host culture. Research indicates that the acculturation strategies individuals employ may vary between their private and public spheres. For example, a person might reject the values and norms of the host culture in their private life (separation) while adapting to the host culture in public contexts (i.e., integration or assimilation). Furthermore, attitudes toward acculturation and the various strategies available have shown inconsistency over time<sup>193</sup>. The integration policy landscape has become increasingly fragmented, lacking a cohesive representation of a singular policy paradigm. Instead, it now mirrors the dynamics of party political power and policy compromises. The pace of change has

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<sup>191</sup> Ibidem

<sup>192</sup> Jacobs, D. "Categorising What We Study and What We Analyse, and the Exercise of Interpretation." In *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies*, 2018

<sup>193</sup> Worthy, L. D., T. Lavigne, and F. Romero. *Culture and Psychology*, 2020.

accelerated due to the heightened importance of immigrant integration for both right-wing and left-wing parties. It is important to acknowledge that the multicultural policy framework has faced persistent scrutiny and criticism in recent years. Does this imply the demise of multiculturalism in Europe and a shift towards a uniform assimilationist approach? Not necessarily<sup>194</sup>. While distinct national policy traditions and prevailing narratives regarding immigrant integration persist, notable new convergences in specific areas, such as policies addressing newcomers, are evident. For instance, the relationship between state and religion, as well as the public expression of religious beliefs, remains a significant topic. Policies are not immutable; issues like national identity can become identifying symbols for parties, leading to potential policy alterations. Notably, a degree of convergence toward a more assimilationist and restrictive approach can be observed across Western Europe, which is not attributable to explicit EU policy direction. While European institutions have been instrumental in establishing standards for anti-discrimination policies, their influence on integration policies has been relatively limited<sup>195</sup>. A valuable tool to understand migrations and integration is the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). The fifth edition, MIPEX 2020, covers the period from 2007 to 2019 and analyses policies across eight critical dimensions: labour market mobility, family reunification, education, political participation, permanent residency, access to nationality, anti-discrimination measures, and health services. The MIPEX interprets the interconnections between policies, outcomes, and public sentiment, drawing insights from international research. Furthermore, the index tracks the evolution of national policies by comparing them against both European and international best practices. The integration policies across the 56 MIPEX countries exhibit an average score of only 49 out of 100, indicating a balance that is only moderately favourable. This suggests that, on average, the policies in these nations present an equal number of challenges and opportunities for immigrants seeking to integrate and establish themselves in their new environments. While immigrants are afforded a range of fundamental rights, reflected in an average score of 62, and some degree of long-term security, with a score of 56, they still encounter significant disparities in equal opportunities, which score only 41<sup>196</sup>. Migrant workers, reunited families, and permanent residents benefit from fundamental security, rights, and safeguards against discrimination. What is relevant is that within Europe, national policies exhibit greater robustness and alignment in the domains governed by EU legislation. Conversely, significant weaknesses are evident in the realms of education and political engagement.

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<sup>194</sup> Jacobs, D., and A. Rea. "OPEN FORUM: The End of National Models? Integration Courses and Citizenship Trajectories in Europe.", 2007

<sup>195</sup> Jacobs, D., and A. Rea. "OPEN FORUM: The End of National Models? Integration Courses and Citizenship Trajectories in Europe.", 2007

<sup>196</sup> Solano, G. and T. Huddleston. Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020

Regarding education, the majority of immigrant students receive minimal additional assistance in navigating the educational system, catching up academically, acquiring language proficiency, and, understanding some of the linguistic norms of their home language. Teachers and peers often have limited exposure to issues of diversity or the experiences of immigrants. In terms of political participation, immigrants, face significant barriers to influencing and enhancing the policies that impact their daily lives, as most authorities formulate policies ‘for’ them without adequate input or accountability. On average, immigrants tend to feel more disheartened than motivated to engage through conventional civic avenues, facing restricted local voting rights, ineffective consultative mechanisms, and insufficient support for immigrant-led organizations<sup>197</sup>. The effectiveness of a country's integration policies can be partially attributed to its democratic health, economic status, and historical context regarding immigration. Emerging destination countries, particularly those with limited immigrant populations and prevalent anti-immigration sentiments—such as those in the Middle East, Asia, the Baltics, the Balkans, and Central and Eastern Europe—tend to impose greater barriers on immigrants, as evidenced by an average score of 41 out of 100 for the EU13. Conversely, wealthier and more established destination countries typically offer immigrants more equitable rights and opportunities, as seen in highly developed democracies with an OECD average of 56, Western Europe with an EU15 average of 58, and traditional immigration countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, which collectively average 75 out of 100. Only four EU countries (Portugal, Sweden, Belgium and Ireland) are in the 10 highest-scoring countries. On the lowest spectrum figure six EU countries (Croatia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Cyprus), emphasising the diversity within the European context. Italy scores 58 points out of 100, providing immigrants with fundamental rights and equal opportunities. However, they lack a solid future perspective in the country. The policies implemented promote the perception of immigrants as equals and neighbours, yet simultaneously categorize them as outsiders rather than prospective citizens<sup>198</sup>.

### **2.3. Citizenship: definitions and modes of acquisition**

The concept of citizenship is a fundamental organizing principle in the functioning of the State. It establishes a legal relationship between individuals and the State, conferring upon the former specific rights and responsibilities. According to the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, a State must possess not only a defined territory, a governing body, and the ability to engage with other states, but also a stable population. The significance of

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<sup>197</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>198</sup> *ibidem*

citizenship, often referred to as nationality in legal contexts, is underscored by the rights granted to a select group of individuals, the most critical of which is the unconditional right to enter and reside within the State's territory. Additional privileges typically include exclusive access to public positions and the right to engage in democratic elections, as well as eligibility for certain welfare benefits. A third aspect of citizenship pertains to active engagement in political life and the cultivation of civic virtues, which are the qualities that foster civic participation and promote the common good. Depending on historically specific factors, demographic shifts, and political dynamics, citizenship regimes may exhibit inclusivity or exclusivity towards either emigrants or immigrants<sup>199</sup>. The debate on citizenship regimes typically can be divided into three theoretical frameworks. The first, known as the “national regimes”, articulated by Brubaker, underscores the lasting importance of national citizenship models, which are deeply entrenched in the historical evolution of statehood. The second perspective, Soysal's “convergence” theory, posits that the emergence of post-national citizenship, propelled by international human rights standards and supranational entities like the EU, is gradually eroding national sovereignty, rendering traditional citizenship concepts less relevant. The third perspective, designated as “local variation”, draws on Berry's acculturation model to illustrate how different regions within nation-states adopt distinct strategies for immigrant integration, redefining the concept of “citizenship”. This diversity highlights the cultural differentiation within States and reflects the overarching tension between national sovereignty and the trends of pluralization and globalization that challenge the liberal nation-state<sup>200</sup>. Citizenship regimes across Europe exhibit significant variation along two primary dimensions, which can be understood as corresponding to the fundamental principles of birthright: *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*. The first dimension distinguishes citizenship regimes based on their territorial inclusiveness. Regimes that rank highly on this dimension typically incorporate some form of *jus soli* at birth, allowing children and grandchildren of immigrants to gain citizenship automatically or with relative ease due to their birth within the state's territory. Furthermore, these regimes demonstrate inclusivity towards immigrants through naturalisation processes that feature comparatively tolerant requirements regarding residence, language proficiency, and economic resources, alongside the absence of a mandate to renounce original citizenship. Additional attributes include the acceptance of dual citizenship for emigrants, straightforward reacquisition of citizenship for individuals who have previously lost or renounced it, and uncomplicated voluntary renunciation of citizenship. The second dimension distinguishes citizenship regimes based on their level of ethnocultural

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<sup>199</sup> Vink, M. P., and R. Bauböck. "Citizenship Configurations: Analysing the Multiple Purposes of Citizenship Regimes in Europe." *Comparative European Politics*, 2013

<sup>200</sup> Koopmans, R., and P. Statham. "Challenging the Liberal Nation-State? Postnationalism, Multiculturalism, and the Collective Claims Making of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Britain and Germany.", 1999

inclusivity. States that achieve high scores in this dimension typically exhibit a robust *jus sanguinis* principle, which facilitates the straightforward transfer of citizenship from parents to their children. These regimes are marked by the ease of reacquiring citizenship, accessible pathways to citizenship based on cultural connections, significant barriers to voluntary renunciation of citizenship, and tolerance for living abroad (for instance, there is no automatic loss of citizenship after a specified duration of residence outside the nation)<sup>201</sup>. Furthermore, there has been a significant trend towards the acceptance of dual citizenship across various regime types in Europe over the last three decades. Existing literature frequently posits a negative correlation between these two principles, suggesting a mutually exclusive dichotomy between civic-territorial and ethnocultural frameworks. Vink<sup>202</sup> shows that citizenship regimes cannot be reduced to this exclusive dichotomy through a comparative analysis of citizenship laws across thirty-six European countries. The analysis identifies a cluster encompassing the United Kingdom, Malta, the Netherlands, and Belgium characterized as relatively strong *ius soli regimes* with minimal *ius sanguinis* components. In contrast primarily Central and Eastern European nations, along with Mediterranean countries, can be classified as ‘ethnocultural’ *jus sanguinis* regimes, exhibiting considerable variation on the ‘territorial’ dimension<sup>203</sup>. Nonetheless, in Europe, the predominant method of acquiring citizenship is through descent at birth. In 25 out of the 28 EU member states prior to Brexit, this form of citizenship acquisition is granted without restrictions for individuals who reside in those countries. Between 2013 and 2020, significant reforms regarding citizenship acquisition via *ius sanguinis* were implemented in ten EU member states: Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Portugal. A notable trend in several nations has been the removal of restrictions on the transmission of paternal citizenship to children born outside of marriage, alongside a growing recognition of diverse partnerships and parental arrangements. Additionally, some countries have broadened the criteria concerning the degree of kinship for descendants and the residency status of ancestors who hold citizenship, with specific regulations addressing cases where the ancestor's departure was forced, such as during the Nazi regime for individuals of Austrian descent. It is important to note that no European nation offers automatic and unconditional citizenship to individuals born within its territory (*ius soli*). Typically, the activation of *ius soli* is contingent upon the residency of the parents—either one or both—within the country for a specified duration, which ranges from three to ten years prior to the child's birth. For instance, in Germany, citizenship is automatically conferred at birth not only to children of at least one

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<sup>201</sup> Vink, M. P., and R. Bauböck. "Citizenship Configurations: Analysing the Multiple Purposes of Citizenship Regimes in Europe.", 2013

<sup>202</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>203</sup> *ibidem*



German citizen parent but also to children of foreign nationals, provided that at least one parent has resided permanently in Germany for a minimum of eight years and has held an indefinite residence permit for at least three years. In both France and Spain, a child may obtain citizenship through *ius soli* if at least one parent was born in the respective country (*double ius soli*)<sup>204</sup>. Individuals who migrate to a country may obtain citizenship through ordinary naturalization, which necessitates a specified period of residence in the host nation, typically ranging from three to ten years. For instance, France and Belgium are often regarded as more liberal in their approach, whereas Italy and Spain are seen as more restrictive, with Germany occupying a middle ground with an eight-year requirement. Alternatively, special naturalization is available, which is contingent upon different criteria, such as familial connections and exceptional merit. In addition to the varying residency requirements, numerous European nations mandate that citizenship applicants demonstrate compliance with specific civic integration standards, including proficiency in the local language, understanding of the national constitution, and a clean criminal record. In recent years, at least nine EU member states have implemented integration courses, citizenship examinations, and/or citizenship pathways as components of their civic integration strategies for immigrants. A prominent example of this trend is observed in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. A noteworthy commonality across these countries is the official narrative, which consistently asserts that the integration courses and citizenship tests are not intended to promote assimilation. These programs generally include language instruction and some form of civic education. In several instances, vocational training and professional guidance are also integrated into the curriculum. One primary objective of the integration courses is to enhance socio-economic inclusion and promote the independence of immigrants. Some countries take this a step further by linking participation in integration programs to eligibility for social benefits and imposing conditions related to residence permits. In the cases of Denmark, the Netherlands, and Germany, there appears to be an additional focus on acculturation, as the content of the integration courses emphasizes knowledge of the history and culture of the host society<sup>205</sup>. Furthermore, European countries acknowledge the acquisition of citizenship through marriage, which entails different minimum durations of marital union. Over time, the process of obtaining citizenship via marriage has become increasingly stringent. Concerns regarding staged unions as a tool to obtain citizenship have prompted legislative changes in countries such as Italy and France. For example, in 2009, Italy implemented several legal modifications aimed at discouraging marriages of convenience. The minimum residency duration

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<sup>204</sup> Strozza, S., C. Conti, and E. Tucci. *Nuovi Cittadini: Diventare Italiani nell'Era della Globalizzazione*, 2021

<sup>205</sup> Jacobs, D., and A. Rea. "OPEN FORUM: The End of National Models? Integration Courses and Citizenship Trajectories in Europe.", 2007

for a foreign spouse to acquire Italian nationality was increased from six months to one year in cases involving children, and from six months to two years for marriages without offspring. Additionally, a stringent regulation concerning the residency status of both partners was introduced, which aimed to deter marriages of convenience involving both foreign and Italian citizens. This legislative change was later deemed constitutionally illegitimate in mid-2011. Finally, affluent migrants can potentially obtain citizenship without relocating, as certain EU countries (namely Cyprus, Malta, and Bulgaria) offer citizenship in exchange for substantial investments. However, in October 2020, the European Commission initiated infringement proceedings against this practice of citizenship acquisition<sup>206</sup>. As introduced before, MIPEx Index places significant focus on the citizenship aspect of immigrant integration policies. This dimension encompasses various elements, including eligibility criteria for applications, conditions for obtaining citizenship, the security of status which ensures the likelihood of application approval, and the acknowledgement of dual citizenship. As of 2019, Portugal and Sweden exhibited particularly favourable conditions regarding citizenship policies, while France, the United Kingdom, and Belgium presented moderately favourable circumstances. Germany's situation was classified as intermediate yet still favourable. Conversely, Spain, Italy, and Greece were characterized by moderately unfavourable conditions and Austria unfavourable. Notably, Italy experienced a positive shift in its score from 33 to 40 out of 100 between 2007 and 2019, although other nations such as Finland, Luxembourg, and Portugal demonstrated even more significant advancement.<sup>207</sup>

Italy's citizenship law (Law 91/1992<sup>208</sup>) is primarily based on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, where a child inherits Italian citizenship if at least one parent is Italian, regardless of the place of birth. This approach reflects Italy's emphasis on maintaining ties with its global diaspora, allowing descendants of Italians abroad to claim citizenship. However, Italy also allows citizenship acquisition through other means, such as naturalization, which requires a lengthy residency period—10 years for non-EU citizens—and the demonstration of sufficient integration into Italian society. The law also includes provisions for *jus soli* in a limited form, granting citizenship to children born in Italy to foreign parents if they reside in Italy until adulthood and declare their desire to become citizens before their 19th birthday<sup>209</sup>. In 2022, 214,000 foreigners obtained Italian citizenship, reflecting a significant rise of 76.9% from 2021. To grasp the magnitude of this phenomenon, one must realise that the foreign population, which expanded by

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<sup>206</sup> Strozza, S., C. Conti, and E. Tucci. *Nuovi Cittadini: Diventare Italiani nell'Era della Globalizzazione*, 2021

<sup>207</sup> Solano, G. and T. Huddleston. *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020*

<sup>208</sup> Law 5 February 1992, n. 91, Law on the Acquisition of Citizenship

<sup>209</sup> Strozza, S., C. Conti, and E. Tucci. *Nuovi Cittadini: Diventare Italiani nell'Era della Globalizzazione*, 2021

720,000 between 2012 and 2019, would have surged by approximately 1.78 million had there been no acquisition of Italian citizenship<sup>210</sup>. The current legal framework for children of immigrants presents a crucial opportunity when one parent secures citizenship while the child remains a minor, as this allows for the potential extension of citizenship to the child. The decision by some immigrant parents to forgo citizenship applications, along with the extensive waiting periods associated with naturalization, often leads to migrant children reaching adulthood before their applications are processed. This reality has significantly curtailed the effectiveness of this citizenship pathway. However, it is essential to remember that the Italian legal system ensures that all minors, regardless of nationality, are entitled to essential rights<sup>211</sup>. Nevertheless, two observations can be made. The first observation pertains to the challenges faced by individuals who obtain citizenship after reaching eighteen years old. This transition is not instantaneous; having been raised within a framework that safeguards minors, these individuals suddenly find themselves in a new legal status. While awaiting citizenship, they lack not only the political rights granted to adults but also must validate their residency, a situation that presents numerous challenges and creates an unreasonable 'gap' in their integration process. The second observation highlights that for those born in Italy or who arrived as children, acquiring citizenship post-childhood may occur too late to facilitate effective integration. In the early years, individuals may not contemplate their belonging to a state; however, during adolescence, this issue often emerges, sometimes conflicting with a broader identity as a 'citizen of the world,' particularly when their origins are perceived as 'foreign.' This is especially evident within the school environment, where the formation of one's public identity is crucial. Consequently, under the current legal framework, while Italian minors naturally engage with citizenship that is already conferred upon them, minors born in Italy to foreign parents, as well as foreign minors who have relocated to Italy through family reunification or other means, must navigate a dissonance between the emergence of their identity as potential Italian citizens and the legal timeline established for citizenship acquisition. A divergence may be perceived by them as a rejection, which poses the risk of these minors developing a sense of alienation from their environment<sup>212</sup>. In 2019, MIPEX recorded a decline of one point in its score, attributed to stringent modifications in naturalisation and health care policies. The Decree Law no. 113/2018 establishes a B1 language proficiency as a prerequisite for naturalisation. The legislation enacted on December 1, 2018, which transformed Law Decree n.113, overhauled the international protection

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<sup>210</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>211</sup> Codini, E. "Ius culturae - Brevi note a proposito dei progetti di riforma dei modi d'acquisto della cittadinanza concernenti i figli degli immigrati." *Fondazione ISMU*, 2021

<sup>212</sup> Codini, E. "Ius culturae - Brevi note a proposito dei progetti di riforma dei modi d'acquisto della cittadinanza concernenti i figli degli immigrati.", 2021

framework by abolishing humanitarian protection and introducing special residence permits as an alternative. Consequently, since 2018, the process for asylum seekers and refugees to access health care has become increasingly intricate and subject to discretion<sup>213</sup>. Italy's citizenship law has been the subject of ongoing debate, particularly regarding the integration of immigrants and the potential for reform to incorporate a stronger element of *jus soli*, reflecting the country's evolving demographic landscape. This debate, its main proposal and main actors will be analysed in the third and concluding chapter of this thesis.

## Conclusion

The first part of this chapter described the recent demographic evolution of Italy. Over the last thirty years, Italy has entered a “demographic winter”. A significant concern is the ageing population, which stems from decreasing birth rates and low fertility levels that fail to ensure generational replacement. Consequently, the workforce is diminishing, while escalating pension and welfare expenditures exert pressure on the economy. Although immigration has been instrumental in mitigating population decline, it has not completely counterbalanced the outflow of young, educated Italians—a phenomenon often referred to as “brain drain”—which undermines Italy's potential for innovation and economic growth. Italy is also a country of immigration. The rising trend of naturalization among foreign nationals illustrates the growing multi-ethnic character of Italy, mirroring patterns observed in other European nations such as France and the United Kingdom. Integration policies are typically analysed through Berry’s acculturation model, which classifies individual strategies based on their retention of native culture and the adoption of the host culture. These strategies encompass assimilation, separation, integration (biculturalism), and marginalization. While integration policies differ among countries, there is a noticeable trend towards more assimilationist approaches in Western Europe, even as multiculturalism continues to exist. The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) assesses the effectiveness of policies in various domains, including labour mobility, education, and political participation. The effectiveness of integration policies varies significantly among European nations; for instance, Portugal and Sweden achieve high scores, whereas Greece and Poland score considerably lower. Italy, with a score of 58 out of 100, grants basic rights to immigrants but falls short in establishing comprehensive integration pathways, often regarding them as outsiders rather than potential citizens. Citizenship represents a fundamental legal connection between individuals and the state, conferring rights that include residency, political participation, and access to public services. In Europe, citizenship is either determined by birthright through *ius soli* or *ius sanguinis* principles. In recent decades, reforms have broadened access

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<sup>213</sup> Solano, G. and T. Huddleston. Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020

to citizenship, particularly through avenues such as dual citizenship and naturalization, although the specific conditions for these processes can differ widely. Integration courses and civic education initiatives are becoming increasingly prevalent. Nonetheless, challenges to inclusivity persist, particularly in nations like Italy and Spain, which adopt more restrictive approaches compared to more liberal countries such as France and Belgium. Finally, Italy's citizenship legislation, established under Law 91/1992, primarily adheres to the principle of *ius sanguinis*, which permits individuals to inherit citizenship from an Italian parent, irrespective of their place of birth. Additionally, citizenship may be obtained through naturalization, a process that generally necessitates a decade of residency for non-EU nationals, alongside the fulfilment of integration criteria. Children born in Italy to foreign parents can acquire citizenship if they reside in Italy until they reach adulthood and submit an application before the age of 19. In 2022, there was a notable increase in the number of foreigners acquiring Italian citizenship, with 214,000 individuals obtaining it, compared to the previous year. Nonetheless, the lengthy delays associated with processing naturalization applications often result in immigrant children reaching adulthood without citizenship, which can impede their integration and foster feelings of alienation.

## CHAPTER III – THE POLITICAL DEBATE ON NATIONAL-ITY LAW

### Introduction

The determination of citizenship is governed by the prerogative of individual states. As highlighted by the Council of State, "the foreigner does not possess a subjective right to acquire citizenship"<sup>214</sup>. This status is contingent upon legal stipulations, reflecting the legislative intent of Parliaments that possess the authority to define the requisite criteria for citizenship. Consequently, if an individual is not recognised as a citizen due to the absence of the legally specified criteria, they are not entitled to assert a claim to citizenship<sup>215</sup>. Over the past two decades, numerous efforts have been made to amend Italy's citizenship legislation, all of which have ultimately been unsuccessful. The recent political crisis, which culminated in the dissolution of Draghi's government in July 2022, has once again stalled these reform initiatives<sup>216</sup>. Various associations and networks representing 'second-generation' immigrants, which have been vocal advocates for changes in citizenship law, expressed their support for the latest proposal while also highlighting its limitations, as noted by the newly established network 'Rete per la Riforma della Cittadinanza'. Should the reform be enacted, it is projected to impact at least 280,000 children, with some estimates suggesting even higher figures. The discourse surrounding Italy's citizenship law emphasises two potential avenues: *ius culturae*, and *ius scholae*. These proposed reforms seek to enhance the integration of immigrant children and diminish the number of young adults who must navigate the conventional naturalisation process. Both legislative initiatives encountered obstacles in either the Senate or the Chamber of Deputies during the years 2017 and 2022. A crucial factor influencing the success of this proposal is the nature of the governing coalition, including the political affiliation and its size<sup>217</sup>. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2022, Fratelli d'Italia (FDI) led coalition won the national election capturing around 26% of the total votes. The success of Meloni can be attributed to a growing dissatisfaction among citizens with current political leaders, particularly in times of crisis. Additionally, the ability of political parties to mobilize support and the significance of her leadership in an era characterized by increasingly personalized politics are also critical factors. Notably, the prominence of certain issues and the perceived credibility of leaders in addressing these concerns may have

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<sup>214</sup> Council of State (Consiglio di Stato), Sentence no. 5679 of 2 August 2021

<sup>215</sup> Broglio, C. "La cittadinanza ignorata.", 2022

<sup>216</sup> Testore, G. "Italy: Government Crisis Means Uncertainty for the Future of Citizenship Law." European Website on Integration (EWSI), 2022

<sup>217</sup> Codini, E. "Ius scholae - Luci e ombre di un progetto." Fondazione ISMU, 2022.

significantly influenced public opinion in this context<sup>218</sup>. As noted by Testore<sup>219</sup> with the victory of the far-right coalition, the likelihood of such a reform being approved appears exceedingly low. Interestingly, public sentiment surrounding this issue is less divisive than one might expect. A survey conducted by ActionAid<sup>220</sup> and supported by the 2023 CENSIS Report June revealed that more than 60% of participants support the *ius scholae* reform. While Italian politicians may hesitate to champion citizenship reform, a majority of the population, encompassing both citizens and non-citizens, appears to be in favour of it. Indeed, the debate on the reform of nationality law is entering a new phase. On September the 4<sup>th</sup> 2024, a coalition of associations and political figures submitted a referendum question to the Supreme Court, seeking to expand the parameters of Italian citizenship. In contrast to the legislative proposals concerning *ius scholae* and *ius soli*, which intend to repeal the stipulations of Law 91/1992—mandating 18 years of continuous residence alongside birth in Italy for citizenship eligibility—the referendum does not address the specifics of *ius soli* or *ius scholae*. Instead, it seeks to modify the provision relating to the residency requirement, which today allows citizenship to be granted to foreigners in good standing with a residence permit after ten years of residency in Italy<sup>221</sup>. In order to investigate the contemporary and historical discussions regarding the reform of Italy's nationality law, a total of eight interviews were carried out with representatives from the political parties that were elected in September 2022. These interviews are analysed through the framework of discourse analysis, with the aim of emphasizing the issue yield theory as articulated by De Sio and Weber<sup>222</sup>. The central aim is to substantiate the hypothesis:

H1: the debate on nationality law has a higher saliency than migration issues

H2: the debate on nationality law has a lower saliency than migration issues

This conclusive chapter is structured as follows. The first part outlines the trajectory of the nationality law discourse, highlighting the significant contributions of political activism among foreign-born youth in Italy. The second part focuses on the 2022 elections, which represented a pivotal moment in the Italian political scene, especially with the victory of Fratelli d'Italia (FdI). By adopting the selected theoretical framework, i.e. issue yield theory, I will contextualize the electoral achievements of FdI and the possible implication for the ongoing dialogue surrounding citizenship. Lastly, the chapter delves into the current discourse, integrating

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<sup>218</sup> Improta, M., E. Mannoni, C. Marcellino, and F. Trastulli. "Voters, Issues, and Party Loyalty: The 2022 Italian Election under the Magnifying Glass." Quaderni dell'Osservatorio Elettorale, 2022

<sup>219</sup> Testore, G.. "Italy: Government Crisis Means Uncertainty for the Future of Citizenship Law.", 2022

<sup>220</sup> ActionAid. Sondaggio Quorum/YouTrend per ActionAid, 2022

<sup>221</sup> Gagliardi, A. "Dalla Proposta di FI al Referendum Depositato Oggi: Quali Sono le Norme della Legge sulla Cittadinanza che si Punta a Cambiare." Il Sole 24 ORE, 2024.

<sup>222</sup> De Sio, L., and T. Weber. "Issue Yield: A Model of Party Strategy in Multidimensional Space", 2014

perspectives from qualitative interviews conducted in 2024 with party representatives. This analysis offers a micro-analysis perspective into the prevailing political attitudes toward nationality law reform.

### 3.1. The political debate on nationality law

As clearly explained in 2021 by Sentence No. 5679 of the Council of State the decision to grant citizenship reflects the sovereign authority of the State to determine its citizenry, leading the Administration to conduct a broadly discretionary assessment after confirming the applicant meets the necessary conditions. A foreign national does not possess an inherent right to acquire Italian citizenship; rather, they may hold a legitimate interest in such a status. The conferral of citizenship significantly alters the legal standing of the individual and simultaneously impacts the national interest, which is deemed paramount. The acquisition of Italian citizenship necessitates the foreigner's effective integration into the national community, along with the complete assumption of the rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship. While the foreigner seeks to become a vital member of the national community, the State is equally tasked with evaluating their suitability in the collective interest<sup>223</sup>. As explained in the previous chapter, Law 91/1992<sup>224</sup> regulates the acquisition of Italian citizenship. The debate on the reform of the latter is developing in three different directions in the past decade. The first line of the proposal entails a moderated form of *ius soli*, where citizenship is obtained by virtue of birth within the territory, yet is contingent upon additional familial conditions. This approach aims to enhance the family unit as a potential factor for integration, thereby echoing the traditional principles of *ius sanguinis*, while also mitigating the risk of increased irregular migration that could arise from an unqualified application of *ius soli*. The second proposed intervention would focus on extending citizenship rights to those born in Italy and to foreign minors who have entered the country. This concept, referred to as *ius culturae* aligns with a civic understanding of citizenship, emphasising the importance of education as a foundational element. The Citizenship Bill 2092, which was approved by the Chamber of Deputies in October 2015 but halted in the Senate in 2017 by Fratelli d'Italia and the League, proposed citizenship for foreign minors born in Italy or who arrived before the age of 12, provided they had regularly attended educational institutions within the national system for at least five years or completed three- or four-year vocational training programs, also requiring successful completion of primary education<sup>225</sup>. Similarly, the concept of *ius scholae* connects the attainment of citizenship to the successful

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<sup>223</sup> Marconi, I. "Stranieri e Cittadinanza: L'Interesse Nazionale Prevale su Quello del Richiedente." *Altalex*, 2021

<sup>224</sup> Law 5 February 1992, n. 91, Law on the Acquisition of Citizenship

<sup>225</sup> Codini, E. "Ius culturae - Brevi note a proposito dei progetti di riforma dei modi d'acquisto della cittadinanza concernenti i figli degli immigrati.", 2021



completion of an educational program. It stipulated that foreign minors born in Italy or who arrived before the age of 12, and who have legally resided in Italy without interruption while attending school for at least five years, are eligible for Italian citizenship. For those in primary education, the successful completion of the educational cycle is mandatory. This reform, proposed in March 2018, aimed to amend the citizenship law but was stalled in the Chamber of Deputies in June 2022 due to a change in government<sup>226</sup>. On June 24 2022, the Parliament was scheduled to initiate the procedures for the approval or rejection of the proposed reform of citizenship law, specifically the introduction of *ius scholae*. This initiative was based on a text presented to the Chamber by rapporteur Giuseppe Brescia, a deputy from the 5 Star Movement. The text had undergone extensive discussion in committee, resulting in a version that was further moderated from an already cautious proposal. Following the submission of 1,500 amendments by the League, some of which were deemed absurd or even troubling—such as those mandating a written examination on the nativity scene and an oral assessment on local Italian festivals for citizenship applicants—the Chamber, with the support of the PD parliamentarians, decided to postpone the vote on the citizenship law reform until September. However, the resignation of Council President Draghi and the premature conclusion of the legislature led to an indefinite postponement<sup>227</sup>. It seems that Italian politicians believe that the electorate is hesitant to endorse any modifications of the nationality law. However, is this perception accurate? Donnaloja and Vink<sup>228</sup> from the Global Citizenship Programme (European University Institut), surveyed nearly 1,500 Italian citizens to determine their support for granting citizenship to various hypothetical child profiles. The findings indicate that public sentiment largely favours granting citizenship to children of immigrants born in Italy, contingent upon specific criteria. Italians predominantly support *ius soli* for children whose immigrant parents are employed, possess a residence permit, and have resided in Italy for over five years. These stipulations are prioritized by the public over other factors related to ethnicity and integration, such as language proficiency. When presented with the profile of a child born to parents who have lived in Italy for five years and hold a residence permit—similar to previous proposals for *ius soli*—an overwhelming majority of right-wing voters also support citizenship. In fact, 90% of voters advocate for either unconditional (25%) or conditional (65%) *ius soli*, with only 10% opposing any form of it. This suggests that the Italian population is less polarized on the issue than the ongoing inter-party discussions. Consequently, Italy should shift its focus from debating the necessity of *ius soli* reform to discussing the specific conditions under which citizenship should be

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<sup>226</sup> Codini, E. "Ius scholae - Luci e ombre di un progetto." 2022.

<sup>227</sup> Broglio, C. "La cittadinanza ignorata.", 2022

<sup>228</sup> Donnaloja, V., and M. Vink. "Italians Support Citizenship for Migrants' Children (Ius Soli), Conditionally." Global Governance Programme, 2022

granted<sup>229</sup>. Similarly, on June 24, just prior to the vote on *ius scholae*, Action Aid presented the President of the Republic with survey results indicating that approximately 60% of Italians supported the reform. The data also highlighted a significant lack of awareness among Italians regarding the criteria for citizenship acquisition and the number of non-citizen students in Italian schools<sup>230</sup>. Indeed, the presence of students from migrant backgrounds in Italian schools has been a longstanding phenomenon, receiving increasing public attention. Recent statistics from the Ministry of Education and Merit indicate that in the school year 2022/2023 there were 914,860 students with non-Italian citizenship enrolled in all educational institutions, representing 11,2% of all students. It is relevant to note that the overall student population experienced a decline of nearly 103,000, primarily attributed to a significant reduction in the number of Italian students, which decreased by over 145,000, whereas the foreign student population grew by 42,500 units. The enrolment rates for non-Italian students are comparable to those of their Italian counterparts. A fundamental element of the school inclusion process for students with non-Italian citizenship is their allocation across schools and, within those schools, among different classes. To prevent the clustering of students with a migratory background in specific institutions and to promote a more equitable distribution, Ministerial Order No. 2 dated January 8, 2010, defines that the proportion of students with non-Italian citizenship who possess limited proficiency in the Italian language should not typically exceed 30% of the total enrolment in each class and school. Nonetheless, exceptions are permitted under particular circumstances. The 30% threshold may be increased—upon the discretion—when there are students with non-Italian citizenship who already demonstrate sufficient language proficiency, such as those born in Italy. However, schools are prohibited from denying a child's enrolment solely based on the surpassing of a specified percentage of students of immigrant origin. In line with demographic trends, data from the 2022/2023 academic year indicate a reduction in the number of schools without any students of non-Italian citizenship and the analysis of class-level concentration reveals a consistent, albeit modest, rise in the proportion of classes where over 30% of students hold non-Italian citizenship. Particularly, primary schools exhibit the highest incidence. Over the five years from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023, the number of students with non-Italian origins born in Italy increased markedly, rising from 553,176 to 598,745, representing a percentage change of +8.2%, in contrast to the +10.8% observed during the previous five-year period from 2017/2018 to 2021/2022. Approximately 200 countries are represented as the origins of students holding non-Italian citizenship. An analysis of the data by continent reveals that the predominant group of students, accounting for 44.42%, continues to be of European descent,

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<sup>229</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>230</sup> ActionAid. *Sondaggio Quorum/YouTrend per ActionAid*, 2022

reflecting a slight increase compared to previous years. This is followed by students from Africa, comprising 27.25%, and those from Asia, making up 20.27%. Within Europe, Romanian citizenship remains the most prevalent, despite a gradual decline over recent years, with nearly 150,000 students. Collectively, students from Romania, Albania (nearly 119,000), and Morocco (over 114,000) constitute more than 40% of the total non-Italian student population. Notably, Moroccan students represent the largest community in Africa and rank as the third largest group in Italy. Egypt follows as the second largest African contributor, with more than 37,000 students. In the Asian category, China retains its position as the largest community, although it has experienced a consistent decrease in student numbers over the past few years<sup>231</sup>. Interestingly, once informed about the specifics of the reform of Law 91/1992, survey participants, regardless of their political affiliations, expressed support for the promotion of *ius scholae*. This included a majority of right-wing voters (those aligned with Lega, Fratelli d'Italia, and Forza Italia), who favoured granting citizenship to the minor children of foreign parents, in contrast to the positions of their respective parties, which continued to oppose the reform<sup>232</sup>. Furthermore, the 2023 CENSIS report attested that regarding the recognition of Italian citizenship for foreign minors, 72.5% of Italians supported the introduction of *jus soli*, granting citizenship to minors born in Italy, while 76.8% supported *jus culturae*, granting citizenship to foreigners born or arrived in Italy before the age of 12 who have completed an educational path in our country<sup>233</sup>. The persistent disconnect between political entities and their constituents is increasingly evident. Among the various challenges currently facing Italy, the citizenship legislation fails to address the societal transformations and demographic shifts that have occurred. According to Broglio<sup>234</sup> this legislation is increasingly viewed as regressive, even myopic, in comparison to other European Union member states. Public opinion surveys indicate that the population is more progressive than their representatives, particularly when the discourse shifts from mere ideological slogans to substantive debate. Furthermore, it is important to note that the proposed *ius scholae* reform would represent a moderate adjustment relative to the standards observed in nearly all EU nations, where a form of a “conditional” *ius soli* is practised. In these countries, being born on the territory alone does not guarantee citizenship; rather, additional criteria, such as the parents' legal residency status or a minimum duration of residence in the country (typically five to ten years) are required to qualify for citizenship<sup>235</sup>. According to Codini<sup>236</sup> the choice to pursue a reform based on the *ius scholae* seems appropriate based on two key considerations. The

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<sup>231</sup> Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito. Gli Alunni con Cittadinanza Non Italiana A.S. 2022/2023, 2024

<sup>232</sup> ActionAid. *Sondaggio Quorum/YouTrend per ActionAid*, 2022

<sup>233</sup> CENSIS. *57° Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese*, 2023

<sup>234</sup> Broglio, C. "La cittadinanza ignorata.", 2022

<sup>235</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>236</sup> Codini, E. "Ius scholae - Luci e ombre di un progetto.", 2022.

proposed citizenship regime allows for the acquisition of citizenship prior to reaching the age of majority at the request of parents. This provision would notably decrease the number of young individuals, specifically children of foreign nationals, who are either born in Italy or raised there, yet reach adulthood without obtaining citizenship under the current regulations. Recent statistics indicate that approximately 40 thousand foreign minors have annually acquired citizenship through their parents who have become Italian citizens, as per Article 14 of Law No. 91. However, many young individuals born or raised in Italy do not experience this transition, resulting in their reaching adulthood without citizenship. Over ten thousand individuals born in Italy, on average each year, obtain citizenship only after reaching adulthood, as stipulated in Article 4 of Law No. 91, facing the daunting challenge of pursuing ordinary naturalization. Secondly, the implementation of the *ius scholae* would enable many children of immigrants to associate the prospect of acquiring Italian citizenship with their educational environment, which should serve as a foundation for civic education and the development of a civic understanding of citizenship. Similarly, various European countries (Greece, Belgium and France) offer pathways to citizenship linked to school attendance for foreign minors, which are accessible either prior to or immediately upon reaching adulthood<sup>237</sup>. Codini<sup>238</sup> in his analysis raises two problems. Initially, the stipulation required legal and continuous residence from birth or upon arrival in Italy. The mention of legal residence warrants scrutiny. According to Article 1 of the implementing regulation of Law No. 91, legal residence is defined as the status of individuals who reside in Italy after meeting the conditions outlined in the regulations governing the entry and residence of foreigners, as well as those pertaining to civil registration. This reference is perplexing because, within the legal framework, the distinction between regular or irregular residence does not apply to minors, who are generally treated similarly to other minors present in the country. Secondly, the provision stipulating that citizenship acquisition prior to reaching the age of majority must occur “following a declaration of will expressed to that effect by both parents legally residing in Italy or by the individual exercising parental responsibility” raises concerns from two distinct perspectives. It remains unclear why circumstances such as the parent's resident status should affect the child's “eligibility”, especially since the latter is linked to school attendance. Moreover, this provision prioritizes the intentions of the parents over those of the child<sup>239</sup>.

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<sup>237</sup> Codini, E. "Ius scholae - Luci e ombre di un progetto.", 2022.

<sup>238</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>239</sup> *ibidem*

### **3.2. The 2022 election: a left-leaning electorate electing a right-wing coalition**

The Italian general election of 2022 represented a pivotal transformation in the nation's political dynamics. Conducted on September 25<sup>th</sup> 2022, the election culminated in a decisive triumph for a right-wing coalition, with Giorgia Meloni's party, Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia or FDI from now on), emerging as the preeminent political party. Once a marginal party with approximately 4% of the vote in 2018, Meloni's party ascended to prominence, capturing around 26% of the total votes. The right-wing coalition, spearheaded by FDI and including Matteo Salvini's Lega (League) and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, collectively collected over 44% of the vote, thereby securing a robust parliamentary majority. Conversely, the centre-left Democratic Party (PD), under the leadership of Enrico Letta, faced a substantial setback, obtaining roughly 19% of the vote. Additionally, the 5-Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle), which had previously held a dominant position in Italian politics, suffered considerable losses, obtaining around 15%. Efforts to establish a centrist third force, particularly through Matteo Renzi's Italia Viva and Carlo Calenda's Azione, failed to gain meaningful support<sup>240</sup>. Meloni and her right-wing coalition centred their campaign around pivotal issues such as immigration, national sovereignty, and security. They committed to enforcing stricter immigration policies and taking a more assertive stance on European Union regulations. Economic topics, particularly inflation, rising energy prices, and the challenges of post-pandemic recovery were also central to the discussion. Meloni promoted economic nationalism, highlighting the importance of protecting Italian industries and reducing reliance on European fiscal policies. Furthermore, FDI's campaign strongly emphasized Italy's cultural heritage, traditional values, and a rejection of what she referred to as "woke ideologies". While Meloni softened her earlier Eurosceptic stance, her party continued to push for increased autonomy from Brussels. Nonetheless, she reassured global markets of Italy's dedication to remaining within the European framework, which is vital for maintaining stability in financial markets. The 2022 election represented a significant political transformation in Italy, highlighted by Giorgia Meloni's ascension as the nation's first female prime minister, a landmark achievement in the country's political landscape. Despite her affiliation with far-right ideologies, her personal milestone received considerable recognition. The election also signified a resurgence of far-right politics, marking the first instance since World War II in which a party with connections to post-fascism assumed a prominent position in Italian governance. Although Meloni sought to distance her party from fascist ideologies, the success of FDI was interpreted as a broader endorsement of nationalist and populist sentiments

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<sup>240</sup> Improta, M., E. Mannoni, C. Marcellino, and F. Trastulli. "Voters, Issues, and Party Loyalty: The 2022 Italian Election under the Magnifying Glass." 2022

within Italy, building upon the momentum initiated by figures such as the League of Salvini in previous years. Furthermore, the election highlighted the disintegration of traditional centrist parties and the fragmentation of the left, emphasizing the ongoing decline of established entities like Forza Italia, led by Berlusconi, and the Democratic Party's challenges in achieving leftist unity (Impota, 2022).

### 3.2.1. Who voted for who: a sociodemographic analysis

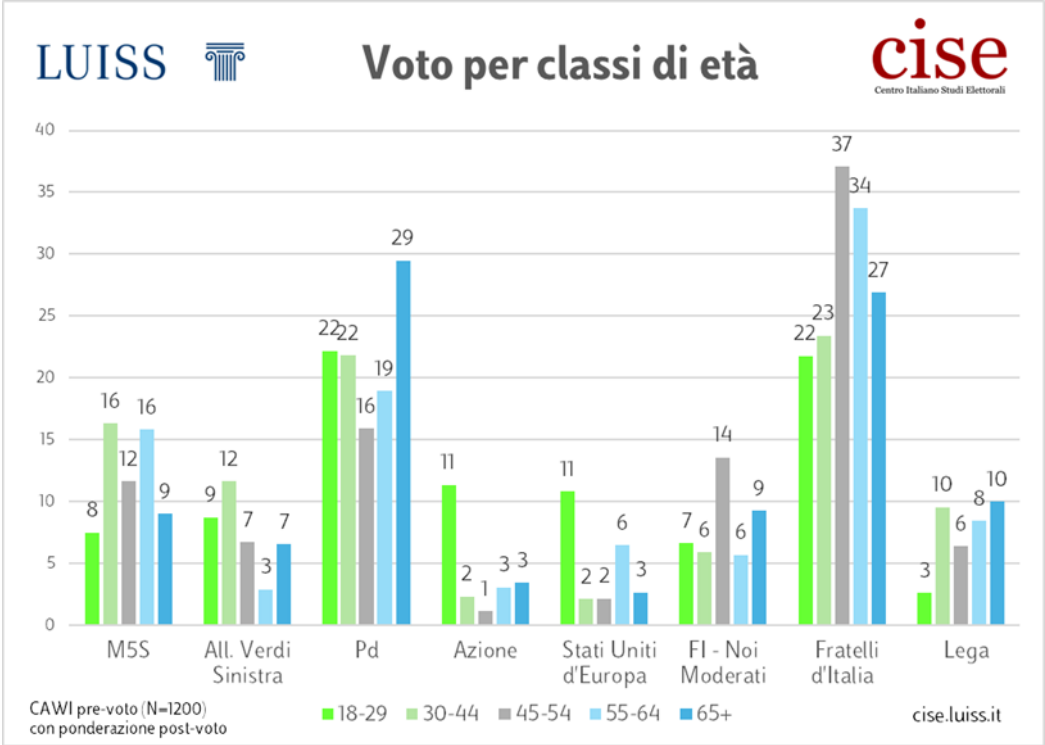


Figure 8: Voting by age group. From De Sio (2024)

The concept of vote choice is typically understood as a function of three primary factors: (1) the attributes of the voter, (2) the political party options available within the electoral landscape, and (3) a decision-making framework that outlines how the evaluations of utility based on the first two factors culminate in a specific voting decision<sup>241</sup>. Furthermore, the relationship between age and voting behaviour is significant due to two effects elaborated in electoral studies: (1) the generational effect, which posits that individuals within the same age cohort are consistently influenced in their political behaviours by the historical context in which they were politically socialized, (2) and the life cycle effect, which suggests that individuals alter their behaviours based on their current life stage, with younger individuals typically holding more radical political views compared to their older counterparts. Analysing voting patterns across different age groups is compelling for several reasons, particularly because research indicates that young people represent one of the most electorally mobile social segments and are also more likely to

<sup>241</sup> Impota, M., E. Mannoni, C. Marcellino, and F. Trastulli. "Voters, Issues, and Party Loyalty: The 2022 Italian Election under the Magnifying Glass." 2022

abstain from voting. While it is true that older individuals provide a more "secure" electoral base for political parties—especially in a demographically ageing country like Italy—it is equally true that younger individuals are more open to changing their opinions, making them potentially pivotal in electoral outcomes<sup>242</sup>. A survey conducted by the CISE prior to the general elections reveals several insights into electoral behaviour. Fratelli d'Italia (FDI) garners support from various age demographics, exhibiting a slight preference among older voters. While there is no significant link between gender and age regarding FdI's voter base, a notable relationship exists between educational attainment and social class. Voters with lower levels of education are more inclined to support FdI, whereas the majority of its electorate identifies as middle class<sup>243</sup>. This finding aligns with existing research that highlights the tendency of less educated demographic groups to gravitate towards conservative parties and ideologies<sup>244</sup>. In fact, individuals with lower educational backgrounds also show support for Matteo Salvini's party. Forza Italia, under the leadership of Silvio Berlusconi, reflects a comparable trend concerning education but tends to attract a higher proportion of votes from upper social classes, distinguishing it from the profiles of FdI and Lega supporters. Interestingly, Forza Italia demonstrates considerable backing among younger voters, although the likelihood of voting within this demographic does not reach statistical significance. The Five Star Movement (M5S) enjoys substantial support from younger individuals, reinforcing its status as a political entity with considerable appeal in this age group. The Democratic Party (PD) secures the highest levels of support among both young voters and those aged over 65, yet it faces challenges in attracting middle-aged constituents. The socio-economic characteristics of the Democratic electorate remain consistent with historical patterns, showing stronger backing from more educated and relatively affluent segments of society<sup>245</sup>. The abovementioned results are confirmed by a post-vote analysis made by Ipsos (2022a). At a generational level, there is often discussion about the voting behaviour of young people. It is crucial to specify the age group being referred to, as significant differences emerge between the very young (Generation Z, up to 26 years old) and young adults (Millennials, between 27 and 41 years old). Notably, among students, the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the Democratic Party (PD) receive nearly half of the total support, with an increase in support also noted for the alliance between Sinistra Italiana and Verdi (approaching 10%). Conversely, parties on the centre-right appear less appealing. The voting pattern among workers leans heavily towards Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), with over a third of support, while the Lega receives

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<sup>242</sup> Maggini, N.. "Il Voto e l'Età: 'Ringiovanimento' del PD, 'Invecchiamento' del M5S, Netta Avanzata della Lega tra Anziani e Adulti." CISE, 2018

<sup>243</sup> Angelucci, D. "L'identikit degli elettori italiani 2022: i principali partiti a confronto." CISE, 2022

<sup>244</sup> Improta, M., E. Mannoni, C. Marcellino, and F. Trastulli. "Voters, Issues, and Party Loyalty: The 2022 Italian Election under the Magnifying Glass." 2022

<sup>245</sup> Angelucci, D. "L'identikit degli elettori italiani 2022: i principali partiti a confronto." CISE, 2022

moderate support (above 13% among blue-collar workers), and centre-left parties - PD, SI/Verdi, and the third pole - collectively fall short of 18%. The national trends for M5S and Forza Italia are consistent within this demographic. The PD, however, gains ground among retirees, competing closely with FdI for the top spot. In this category, M5S is notably underrepresented, hovering around 10%. Another noteworthy variable is educational attainment. Among graduates, the PD notably prevails, approaching 25%. FdI falls just below 20%, while SI/Verdi and the third pole nearly double their support. The interpretation of the vote based on economic status is particularly significant. The most pronounced differences concern voting for PD and M5S: while the former performs notably better among affluent classes, the M5S leads among those facing economic difficulties. A similar dynamic, albeit even more pronounced, is observed for SI/Verdi and especially for the third pole. Conversely, support for the Lega and Forza Italia is notably higher among those facing economic challenges<sup>246</sup>. The socio-economic profile is a relevant factor for choosing either party. If we look more closely at the attitude of each cohort, in their optimism, GenZ<sup>247</sup> displays a profile of attitudes similar to older generations, particularly in their interest in politics: indeed, Generation Z, Boomers<sup>248</sup>, and the Silent Generation<sup>249</sup> are the cohorts where this aspect reaches satisfactory levels, while Millennials<sup>250</sup> and Generation X<sup>251</sup> are notably lower. This observation was already noted by Ipsos during the 2021 local elections: a shared participation between "grandparents and grandchildren." Conversely, the intermediate age groups ("late Millennials" and Generation X in particular) tend to abstain or opt for protest voting. More specifically, the Ipsos study highlights how the younger generations, Millennials and GenZ are hardly comparable. Firstly, younger individuals, especially those still in education, often inhabit a sheltered environment, shielded from the realities of the working world, initial disappointments, failures, or the challenges of moving out or purchasing a home. They may not perceive economic issues with the same urgency as Millennials, as many still revolve within the orbit of the family nucleus. This is evident in their prioritization of topics. Millennials (and GenX) consider issues like taxes, employment, and occupation as fundamental. Conversely, for Generation Z, these concerns hold less significance. Environment, education, university, and civil rights are relatively more weighty for the youngest cohort. Secondly, there's another aspect tied to lived experiences. Millennials and GenX were politically socialized during a time (late 20th and early 21st century) marked by ideological and bipolar confrontations. In the past 20-30 years, we have witnessed a decline in public discourse

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<sup>246</sup> Ipsos. "Elezioni Politiche 25 Settembre 2022: I Risultati Elettorali e le Analisi Post-Voto di Ipsos.", 2022a

<sup>247</sup> Those who are born in the years 1997-2012. Source: <https://www.britannica.com/science/cohort-analysis>

<sup>248</sup> Those who are born in the years 1946-1964. *Ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> Those who are born in the years 1928-1945. *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> Those who are born in the years 1981-1997. *Ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> Those who are born in the years 1965-1980. *Ibid.*



and a shift in politics from a clash of ideals and values to a personalized confrontation devoid of grand visions and aspirations. Generation Z hasn't directly experienced this decline. In their perspective, the abandonment of ideologies, and the diminishing significance of the traditional "left" and "right," carries little weight or is even viewed positively. Their political engagement is characterized by fluidity and a weaker attachment to parties and ideologies<sup>252</sup>. Another relevant trend that must be considered is the role of abstention. The crisis of the ideology can partially explain the growing trend. Demographics also play a role. Older individuals, socialized in times when participation was a deeply rooted habit or even a duty, are exiting the scene, while young people entering the electoral market are less interested in politics and tend to abstain<sup>253</sup>. In conclusion, the results show that the relationship between education and social class is a crucial determinant of political party preference. For instance, parties such as Fratelli d'Italia and Lega receive substantial backing from individuals with lower educational backgrounds and those belonging to the working class, whereas wealthier and more educated constituents are more inclined to support the Democratic Party and other political parties like Sinistra Italiana and Verdi. This division along educational and socio-economic dimensions highlights a significant trend in which socio-economic status is closely linked to party affiliation. Furthermore, the results indicate a transformation in political participation, particularly among younger voters, who tend to adopt a more issue-oriented and less ideologically constrained perspective on politics. This shift suggests a reconfiguration of the political arena, where the traditional dichotomy of left versus right is becoming less salient, especially among Generation Z.

### 3.2.2. Issue yield

The data obtained from the pre-electoral phase of the 2022 CISE/ICCP survey indicated that the Italian electorate in 2022 exhibited (1) a set of shared, non-polarizing concerns that were assigned significant priority and (2) a tendency towards progressive viewpoints on a range of topics, including economic and civil rights issues<sup>254</sup>. This observation makes the outcomes of the 2022 Italian elections particularly perplexing. It raises the question of how predominantly progressive preferences resulted in the most unfavourable performance for the Italian left in its history and the ascendance of a right-wing coalition spearheaded by a radical right party. As introduced by the issue-yield theory<sup>255</sup>, valence issues are characterized as policy objectives that do not prompt stark divisions within the electorate, thereby enjoying broad support among

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<sup>252</sup> Ipsos. "Elezioni Politiche 25 Settembre 2022: Il Confronto tra Generazione Z e Millennials.", 2022b

<sup>253</sup> D'Alimonte, R. "Crisi dei partiti e demografia: Perché aumenta l'astensionismo in Italia." CISE, 2022.

<sup>254</sup> Mannoni, E., and D. Angelucci. "I Flussi Elettorali tra Politiche 2018 e 2022: Lega e M5S Alimentano FdI." CISE, 2022

<sup>255</sup> De Sio, L., and T. Weber. "Issue Yield, Campaign Communication, and Electoral Performance: A Six-Country Comparative Analysis.", 2020

voters. These objectives are commonly endorsed by both political parties and the electorate, transcending ideological differences and varying political positions. Consequently, in the context of a valence issue, the dynamics of party competition hinge not on the specific positions that parties adopt but rather on the perceived credibility. In 2022, the primary concern for the Italian electorate was closely tied to the energy crisis and the resulting surge in electricity and gas prices. A significant 92% of respondents indicated that ensuring affordable energy prices for both private citizens and businesses is a critical priority. Additionally, there was an overwhelming consensus on various economic objectives, including combating unemployment (90%), alleviating poverty (87%), promoting economic growth (86%), addressing inflation (86%), reducing labour taxes (86%), tackling tax evasion (84%), and executing the PNRR reforms to secure EU funding (80%). This data reflects a strong apprehension regarding the overall economic development of the nation, alongside a pronounced demand for financial security for households and individuals. Beyond economic issues, a prominent concern highlighted was the need to combat violence against women and femicides, with nearly 90% of respondents considering it a priority on the political agenda. Notably, Giorgia Meloni was recognized as the most credible leader to address this pressing issue<sup>256</sup>. Valence issues tend to unify the electorate around common policy objectives; however, the opposite is true for positional issues, which are inherently divisive. These issues are characterized by the presence of two conflicting policy objectives that create a divide among the public, with some individuals supporting one position while others advocate for the alternative. In the context of party competition, a party's position on a specific issue can significantly influence voters' final decisions<sup>257</sup>. The 2022 CISE/ICCP survey identified a total of 24 positional issues, encompassing economic and financial matters, immigration, civil rights and freedoms, climate change and environmental protection, institutional concerns, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Economic issues are particularly prominent, with key topics including minimum wage, basic income, retirement age, and progressive taxation. Interestingly, an ambiguous trend is observed regarding immigration and the rights of immigrants. A majority (57%) supports maintaining the current level of access to social services for immigrants and facilitating Italian citizenship for children of legal immigrants born and raised in Italy, rather than adhering to existing legislation. Conversely, a more substantial majority (68%) opposes the current immigration reception policies and favours reducing the number of immigrants entering the country. Notably, the priority assigned to immigration issues is greater than that given to the aforementioned social service access and citizenship matters,

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<sup>256</sup> Mannoni, E., and D. Angelucci. "I Flussi Elettorali tra Politiche 2018 e 2022: Lega e M5S Alimentano FdI.", 2022

<sup>257</sup> De Sio, L., and T. Weber. "Issue Yield, Campaign Communication, and Electoral Performance: A Six-Country Comparative Analysis.", 2020

which rank lower in importance<sup>258</sup>. In fact, when comparing the electoral program of the 2022 national election, concerning immigration the following trends are presented. The centre-right coalition, consisting of Lega, Fratelli d'Italia and Forza Italia, proposes measures aimed at combating irregular immigration and managing legal immigration flows orderly, without specified funding sources. The Democratic Party advocates for the establishment of a Coordination Agency for Migration Policies, aiming to become the primary entity for monitoring and managing migration flows, alongside the abolition of the "Bossi-Fini" law (Act 189/2002) and the implementation of a decentralized reception model. Additionally, they propose expanding humanitarian corridors in emergencies, with no specified funding. The Five Star Movement proposes a community mechanism to manage migration flows and operations, combat human trafficking, and enhance social and cultural integration, without specified funding sources<sup>259</sup>. More specifically, the topic of citizenship law and immigration of the second generation can be found in the electoral program of the Lega, where the introduction of the *ius soli* or any declination is opposed. It is stated that "Citizenship is not an instrument of integration but the end of an integrative process"<sup>260</sup>. Moreover, the program mentioned the need for the introduction of specific vocational training and placement programmes for the "second generation" and relaunching the fight against the exploitation of illegal immigration in the labour market. Conversely, the PD mentioned the need for a reform of the citizenship law in favour of an *ius scholae*. In the program of the leading party FdI, there was no mention of such a topic<sup>261</sup>. This analysis seems to confirm a trend observed in the previous elections. In 2018, the prevailing sentiment indicated a public opinion characterized by progressive views on economic matters while exhibiting conservative perspectives regarding immigration. This duality continues to resonate in contemporary public opinion, as the population seems more hesitant to fully endorse progressive policy objectives related to immigration compared to those concerning economic issues. However, the electorate appears to have shifted further to the left on most issues. This trend is particularly evident in the realm of immigration. In 2018, 79% of participants expressed a desire to limit the number of immigrants, 60% favoured restricting their access to social services, and 56% opposed easing the citizenship process for children of legal immigrants. By 2022, these figures had decreased to 68%, 43%, and 43%, respectively. This shift is particularly noteworthy when contrasted with the election outcomes, which saw a predominantly left-leaning electorate

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<sup>258</sup> Mannoni, E., and D. Angelucci. "I Flussi Elettorali tra Politiche 2018 e 2022: Lega e M5S Alimentano FdI.", 202

<sup>259</sup> Pagella Politica. "Il Confronto su 15 Temi tra i Programmi Elettorali dei Partiti.", 2022

<sup>260</sup> Lega, Programma di Governo – Elezioni 25 settembre 2022

<sup>261</sup> Pagella Politica. "Il Confronto su 15 Temi tra i Programmi Elettorali dei Partiti.", 2022

electing a firmly right-wing coalition<sup>262</sup>. This seemingly contradictory result warrants further examination. It is essential to recognize that the conservative coalition's success stemmed from the voting behaviour of those who participated in the election on September 25, representing two-thirds of the electorate. Out of the 50.869.304 Italian citizens with voting rights 63.9% voted<sup>263</sup>. Consequently, the high level of abstention in this national election may have contributed to the disparity between the electorate's progressive inclinations and the conservative nature of the parties that ultimately formed the government. A concurrent explanation may pertain to Meloni's capacity to leverage the dissatisfaction of a segment of the electorate. The data indicates that party competition is not solely determined by the policy positions of the parties but is significantly influenced by a combination of issue importance and the perceived credibility of leaders in effectively addressing these critical policy objectives<sup>264</sup>. In conclusion, both voter engagement and the activation of public discontent played a vital role in influencing the election, in addition to the matter of leader credibility.

### 3.3. A new phase of the debate on nationality law?

“Do you wish to repeal Article 9(1)(b), limited to the words ‘adopted by an Italian citizen’ and subsequent to adoption’; as well as subparagraph (f), containing the following provision: ‘(f) a foreigner who has been legally residing in the territory of the Republic for at least ten years, of Law No 91 of 5 February 1992, laying down new rules on nationality?’”<sup>265</sup>

Publish on the Official Journal, the Supreme Court of Cassation's registry, tasked with documenting and acknowledging the declaration of intent, announced the willingness of the presenting party to gather a minimum of 500,000 signatures from voters, which is necessary for the subsequent abrogative referendum request as stipulated in Article 75 of the Constitution (Supreme Court of Cassation, 2024). The current political climate in the country appears favourable to revising the criteria for acquiring Italian citizenship. This suggests that the ongoing discussions among political factions resonate with the sentiments of the Italian general public. The study conducted by the Noto Sondaggi Demoscopic Institute for Repubblica reveals that a significant proportion of voters across all opposition parties express support for a legal reform, which is further bolstered by 48% of Forza Italia supporters. Conversely, a majority of voters from Fratelli d'Italia and Lega oppose such changes. A prevailing view among the electorate is that citizenship requires an engagement with the national culture, values, and principles, which

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<sup>262</sup> Improta, M., E. Mannoni, C. Marcellino, and F. Trastulli. "Voters, Issues, and Party Loyalty: The 2022 Italian Election under the Magnifying Glass." 2022

<sup>263</sup> Ministero dell'Interno. Elezioni 25/09/2022: Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali, Direzione Centrale per i Servizi Elettorali, 2022

<sup>264</sup> De Sio, L., and T. Weber. "Issue Yield: A Model of Party Strategy in Multidimensional Space." *The American Political Science Review*, 2014

<sup>265</sup> Official Journal, n.208 of 5-09-2024

education in schools aims to instil, thereby fostering a sense of belonging among children and youth. While this perspective is commonly accepted for individuals born to Italian parents, 52% of Italians argue that it should equally apply to those born to foreign parents. Nearly all voters from the Democratic Party and Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra (Avs) support this notion, along with 71% of the 5Star Movement. In contrast, support from other opposition parties, such as the Tas Calenda's and Renzi's movements, is lower at 57% and 54%, respectively. In contrast, the perspectives of Forza Italia voters diverge significantly from those of other parties within the ruling coalition. 48% of supporters of Antonio Tajani's party backed the *ius scholae* proposal. A substantial majority of Fratelli d'Italia and Lega supporters oppose the initiative, with 69% and 74% against it, respectively. However, it is important to acknowledge that a minority, albeit significant, within both groups is receptive to this idea (29% for FdI and 24% for Lega)<sup>266</sup>. When the discussion shifts from *ius scholae* to *ius soli*, public opinion undergoes a notable transformation. In this scenario, a majority (41%) opposes the measure, while support declines to 35%, revealing varying sensitivities not only within the ruling coalition but also among opposition parties. For instance, within the Democratic Party, support diminishes to 60%, contrasting with the 90% approval for *ius scholae*, indicating a division among the electorate under the leadership of Elly Schlein. The endorsement for the *ius soli* initiative declines further within the 5 Star Movement, where only 36% express support, while 45% oppose it. This opposition is nearly mirrored among voters for Azione (42% in favour versus 40% against) and Italia Viva (47% in favour versus 38% against). The notion of citizenship by birth fails to resonate positively with the Forza Italia, who show 46% opposition compared to 35% support and faces strong resistance from Lega Nord (81% against) and FdI (71% against). A similar trend is observed regarding the proposal to confer citizenship status on individuals who contribute to the economy through work and taxes, albeit with a different distribution of opinions. The idea of linking citizenship to tax contributions is met with disapproval from Action and Italia Viva (47% and 48%, respectively), as well as 29% of M5S and 18% of PD. Conversely, FI shows a more favourable stance, with 39% in support and 27% opposed, while FDI (63% in favour versus 23% against) and Lega (62% in favour versus 28% against) exhibit comparatively less resistance<sup>267</sup>. Before the submission of the request for a referendum, eight in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews entailed representatives from the major political parties elected in September 2022. The majority of interviewees were elected to the Chamber of Deputies. Four women and four men were interviewed. The interviewees all come from different regions.

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<sup>266</sup> Noto, A. "Sondaggi Politici: Gli Italiani Scelgono lo Ius Scholae. Lo Ius Soli Invece non Piace al 41%." La Repubblica, 2024

<sup>267</sup> *ibidem*

Only two interviewees present a migratory background. The interviewees were selected as they are competent in migration and integration issues.

*Table 1: Overview interviewees*

	Gender	Age	Origin	Political Affiliation
Interviewee 1	Female	50-54	Centre	PD
Interviewee 2	Female	35-39	Migration Background	PD
Interviewee 3	Female	45-49	North	FDI
Interviewee 4	Female	40-44	North	Lega
Interviewee 5	Male	55-59	North	PD
Interviewee 6	Male	55-59	Centre	PD
Interviewee 7	Male	55-59	North	FDI
Interviewee 8	Male	45-49	South	FDI

An overview of the profiles is shown in Table 1. All the interviews were anonymous. The questionnaire used for the interviews can be found in Annex I. In-depth interviews as a research method were chosen as they facilitate detailed and thorough discussions regarding the reform of citizenship law. These interactions allow politicians to articulate their viewpoints, motivations, and the fundamental principles that inform their positions, thereby enriching the understanding of the political discourse. Engaging with politicians allows researchers to connect directly with those who shape or influence citizenship legislation and it can prove insightful to understand the political dynamics and considerations that underlie public statements or policies. However, it is important to acknowledge the limited sample of interviewees. Conducting a limited number of interviews produces a partial representativeness of the findings, as the views of a select few politicians may not adequately capture the wider political landscape or the diverse opinions surrounding citizenship law reform. The busy schedules of politicians and limited resources were the main obstacles. Another limit is the political bias. Inherently, politicians provide responses that conform to their public positions or political agendas, potentially obscuring their personal or nuanced perspectives, thus affecting the integrity of the data. Some may also modify their answers to evade controversy or to project a favourable image. Given that citizenship reform is often a contentious issue, some politicians might be reluctant to express their views candidly or may respond cautiously due to the implications for their political careers. Nevertheless, despite the limited number of interviews, this methodology can yield significant insights. Politicians possess unique knowledge of the policy-making process, and their

viewpoints can illuminate the political calculations, legislative hurdles, and intra-party dynamics that may not be captured through alternative research methods such as surveys or media analysis. Indeed, discourses on migration are often problematized. The conservative and right-leaning media tend to highlight the difficulties attributed to immigrants, such as those related to housing, education, unemployment, and crime. In contrast, more progressive media also address the adversities faced by immigrants, which stem from factors like poverty and discrimination. This dichotomy is further reflected in the differentiation between being a potential threat (to the labour market or public safety) and being vulnerable (to trafficking, exploitation in prostitution, forced marriages, domestic violence, or honour-based violence). Problematization refers to the process by which various stakeholders—such as academics, politicians, journalists, or non-governmental organizations—examine a situation, label it as problematic, amplify its significance by associating additional issues or inflating the number of affected individuals and associated costs, and ultimately propose solutions. In the context of discourse theory, discourses are formed through articulation processes, where specific nodal points provide stability and coherence to the discourse. A nodal point serves as a reference within the discourse that helps define other meanings. For instance, the concept of “nation” can function as a nodal point, thereby becoming a pivotal reference around which various political programmes are organized and through which political demands are expressed, such as “national interest” or “the welfare of the nation.” The existence of discourses is contingent upon the elements they exclude. For example, the homogenization of the nation is achieved through the discursive framing of “enemies of the nation,” who are perceived as both external and internal threats. The situational, institutional, and social contexts play a crucial role in shaping and influencing discourses, which in turn affect social and political realities<sup>268</sup>. Therefore when discussing immigration and integration policies an analysis of the discourse can prove useful. Discourse encompasses a collection of interconnected texts that shape social reality and involve various participants. It also entails the examination of the ideological foundations present within these texts. The objective of discourse analysis is to uncover the rules of concatenation that facilitate an understanding of the discourse's internal structure. Analysts identify specific units of analysis and differentiate between coherent and incoherent discourse. Textual coherence serves as a guiding principle for readers during the interpretation process. Critical discourse analysis, as proposed by Fairclough in the mid-1980s, investigates texts and their interrelations as pivotal components of social relations. A particularly compelling aspect of this analysis is the exploration of how individuals utilize texts to produce social practices, such as the placement of a political slogan within a

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<sup>268</sup> Schrover, M. and W. Schinkel. *The Language of Inclusion and Exclusion in Immigration and Integration*. London: Routledge, 2014

context that prompts subversion. Discourse analysis examines the internal coherence of texts and delineates the rules of concatenation through two primary stages: first, the identification of fundamental categories or units of discourse; second, the establishment of concatenation rules derived from these categories, which distinguish well-structured sequences from poorly structured ones, thereby categorizing discourse as coherent or incoherent. Critical discourse analysis has evolved the traditional two-dimensional model of discourse analysis into a three-dimensional framework, where the text is understood in relation to both discursive practices (the micro-social dimension) and the broader social context (the macro-social dimension). Currently, discourse analysis also investigates the discursive strategies that underpin the overt content of communication. This analytical approach is predominantly applied in sociology, media studies, and political science, offering a comprehensive examination of the interplay between linguistic elements and micro-macro social processes<sup>269</sup>. The viewpoints articulated by the various interviewees underscore the complex and divergent nature of the discourse surrounding citizenship reform in Italy, addressing issues such as inclusion, integration, national identity, and political division. While the perspectives differ, several shared themes emerge, particularly among proponents of a more inclusive and progressive citizenship framework. A notable consensus among the majority of interviewees from the Democratic Party (PD) is the urgent need to amend the existing citizenship legislation, specifically Law 91/1992. They collectively support the adoption of either *ius soli* or *ius culturae* to more accurately reflect the contemporary social landscape of Italy, where numerous children born or raised in the country to immigrant parents are denied automatic citizenship. The interviewees contend that the current law is anachronistic and insufficiently facilitates the integration of second- and third-generation migrants. Another recurring theme is the emphasis on the necessity of inclusion. Interviewee 2 and 5 stress the importance of transcending the notion of integration as mere assimilation into the prevailing culture, advocating instead for inclusion and interaction, which celebrates and values cultural diversity. Interviewee 6, by focusing on the realm of sports, illustrates how Italian society is already characterized by multiethnicity in practice, indicating that legal reforms must align with this social reality. Interview 1 further emphasizes the significance of granting citizenship to children born in Italy, positing that it is fundamentally a matter of justice and cohesion. Although there is considerable consensus regarding the necessity for reform, notable distinctions emerge concerning the conceptualization and allocation of citizenship.

*Citizenship is an extraordinary gift and as such must be desired* – Interviewee 7

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<sup>269</sup> De Blasio, E., M. Quaranta, M. Santaniello, and M. Sorice. *Media, politica e società: le tecniche di ricerca*, 2018



Interviewee 5 presents a divergent viewpoint, asserting that citizenship ought to be regarded as a "gift" rather than an inherent right conferred by birth or education. He contends that citizenship should be earned through a commitment to national values, including democracy, freedom, and respect for Italian traditions. In contrast, interviewees 4 and 7 advocate for a regulated and disciplined process for obtaining citizenship, expressing opposition to methods that would facilitate citizenship too readily or indiscriminately. Additionally, the interpretation of integration varies among the interviewees.

*The other linguistic theme which so many activists have worked on and which deals with cultures and intercultural education is, of course, the integration model. Replacing this word with other types of words, of language, that is, more perhaps referring to the theme of inclusion, more referring to the theme of interaction, because in the end it is never about one culture, otherwise we fall back into the model of a dominant culture and another that arrives and has to integrate – Interviewee 2*

Interviewee 2 proposes substituting the term "integration" with "inclusion" and "interaction," highlighting the importance of reciprocal cultural dialogue. Conversely, interviewee 8 maintains that integration should be understood as adherence to Italian values, emphasizing the preservation of national identity. Interviewee 6, however, frames integration as a means of progressive engagement, suggesting that reform could attract young and undecided voters by fostering a positive narrative surrounding new citizens and inclusivity. Another point of contention pertains to the political landscape, with several interviewees noting the polarization between the centre-left and right-wing factions, the latter opposing reforms on ideological grounds. Interviewee 5 specifically identifies resistance from Fratelli d'Italia and the Lega, which are characterized as ideologically opposed to reform and often obstructing pragmatic discussions on the matter. Interviewees from the ruling coalition share a more conservative stance, they critique approaches they perceive as driven by emotional or ideological motivations, advocating instead for a pragmatic and nationalist perspective on citizenship. The role of citizenship reform in electoral strategy exhibits a degree of complexity. Interviewees 5 and 6 perceive this reform as a possible electoral benefit for the Democratic Party, with the potential to engage young and undecided voters inclined towards progressive policies. Interviewee 1 echoes this perspective, indicating that a clear political stance on these matters could yield favourable electoral outcomes. Conversely, interviewees 7 and 8 do not view citizenship reform through an electoral lens; instead, they regard it as a national interest issue that necessitates a careful and pragmatic approach.

*If politics indulges in this utilitarian spirit, it would never do what, for example, we are doing today as a government action [...] the important thing is to do well for the Italians and for these citizens. But if we change our attitudes, and our beliefs on the basis of political*

*utilitarianism, we will not make the choices we have made so far. [...] So perhaps it is the task of politics to set the direction and not to be subjected to it* – Interviewee 7

## Conclusion

The initial section of this chapter delineated the evolution of the discourse surrounding nationality law. The 2021 Sentence No. 5679 issued by the Council of State elucidated that the authority to confer citizenship is a manifestation of the State's sovereign prerogative. Foreign nationals do not possess an automatic entitlement to Italian citizenship; rather, they may express a legitimate interest in obtaining it. The framework of Italy's citizenship law, as delineated by Law 91/1992, has been the subject of reform discussions over the past ten years, focusing on three primary avenues. The first proposal advocates for a moderated version of *ius soli*, which would grant citizenship at birth in Italy, contingent upon additional familial criteria, thereby reconciling the principles of *ius sanguinis* with concerns regarding irregular migration. The second proposal, known as *ius culturae*, seeks to extend citizenship to foreign minors born in Italy or those who arrive before the age of 12, provided they achieve educational integration. The Citizenship Bill of 2015, which was centred on *ius culturae*, successfully passed through the Chamber of Deputies but was subsequently stalled in the Senate in 2017 due to opposition from Fratelli d'Italia and the League. In a similar vein, the *ius scholae* reform proposed in 2018 linked citizenship to the successful completion of a school cycle for foreign minors born in Italy or arriving before the age of 12. However, this initiative faced delays in 2022 following a governmental shift. Survey findings indicate a significant public endorsement for granting citizenship to immigrant children born in Italy under specific conditions, with a notable portion of the Italian population favouring *ius soli* contingent upon factors such as parental employment and residence permits. The ActionAid survey conducted in 2022 revealed that approximately 60% of Italians were in favour of *ius scholae*. Therefore, public opinion surveys highlight a disparity between the positions of political parties and the views of their constituents, who appear more responsive to citizenship reform. Advocates contend that the *ius scholae* proposal is consistent with analogous reforms in other EU nations, which facilitate pathways to citizenship through residency and educational attainment. Implementing such reform would allow numerous immigrant children to associate citizenship with their educational experiences, thereby promoting civic awareness and integration, and addressing deficiencies within the existing framework. The second section focused on the 2022 elections, representing a critical juncture in Italian political history characterized by the triumph of Fratelli d'Italia (FdI). Utilizing the theoretical lens of issue yield theory, the research framed FdI's electoral achievement and its possible consequences for the ongoing discourse on citizenship reform. Specifically, a complex trend emerges concerning immigration and the rights of immigrants. A significant portion of the

population (57%) advocates for the preservation of current access to social services for immigrants and supports the facilitation of Italian citizenship for children of legal immigrants who are born and raised in Italy. In contrast, a more considerable majority (68%) expresses opposition to the current immigration reception policies and favours a reduction in the number of immigrants permitted to enter the country. It is noteworthy that immigration issues are more salient than concerns regarding access to social services and citizenship, which are considered less critical. Furthermore, both voter mobilization and public discontent have played crucial roles in influencing the election outcome, alongside the significance of leader credibility on issues of high saliency. Lastly, the analysis incorporated contemporary perspectives through a discourse analysis of eight interviews conducted in 2024 with representatives of the ruling party and the main opposition party, providing a nuanced understanding of current political sentiments regarding the reform of nationality laws. From the analysis of the 2022 CISE/ICCP survey, combined with the analysis of electoral programmes and discourse analysis of interviews it is possible to conclude that the discourse surrounding the reform of citizenship law in Italy is of lesser saliency when compared to the pressing issues of international migration. Evidence from the discourse analysis reveals that the political debate is primarily influenced by concerns regarding national identity, or concerns related to inclusion and integration rather than concerns related to the ongoing demographic shifts. Additionally, it is possible to conclude that the interaction between the effects on international migrations and demographic trends seems rather weak. In fact, the public discourse and the general sentiment appear to be focused on issues pertaining to the arrival of migrants, rather than on integration policies both in short-term and long-term perspective. Demographic concerns are often presented in a limited framework, emphasizing the need for increased birth rates as a strategy to protect the nation's identity. It suggests that demographic challenges are interpreted primarily through the lens of cultural preservation, rather than being considered within a broader socio-economic context. Based on the verified hypothesis, it is reasonable to anticipate that substantial changes to the nationality law are unlikely to take place during the current legislative session, especially considering the historical reluctance of the Italian political landscape to engage with this matter. However, it is relevant to highlight that numerous analyses reveal a significant agreement among the Italian population concerning the prospective reform of Law 91/1992. This consensus is underscored by the recent initiation of a request for an abrogative referendum, which indicates a transition in the discourse towards a more grassroots-oriented approach. Such a development illustrates an increasing public demand for reform, standing in contrast to the historically top-down framework of the legislative process in this domain.

## Conclusions: why demography should determine the political agenda of an ageing country

Experts offer differing views on the pace of forthcoming demographic transformations, yet there is broad consensus on several critical trends shaping the global population. The world is steadily ageing, with population growth stabilizing in most regions. Europe and East Asia face a projected decline in their working-age populations, while Africa's population is expected to continue growing through 2100. These shifts suggest that by 2050, the global demographic landscape will undergo profound changes<sup>270</sup>. As highlighted in Chapter 1, many European countries are witnessing declining fertility rates, leading to an increasing old-age dependency ratio. This demographic imbalance presents remarkable challenges to current welfare systems, labour markets, and social security frameworks, sparking renewed attention toward population policies. Demographic experts generally fall into two schools of thought regarding the role and efficacy of population policies, particularly in addressing fertility issues. Historically, policy discussions in the latter half of the 20th century were largely focused on mitigating rapid population growth. However, the contemporary focus has shifted, as an increasing number of nations now confront the challenges associated with shrinking and ageing populations<sup>271</sup>. A critical point of debate centres on whether it is possible to reverse persistently low fertility rates and return them to replacement levels once countries have entered the post-demographic transition phase. Furthermore, population policies are central when addressing broader issues such as development, urbanization, and environmental sustainability. Notably, persistently low fertility does not necessarily result in population decline, as demographic outcomes are also shaped by factors such as mortality rates and migration patterns<sup>272</sup>. Migration, particularly determined by employment-related reasons, has emerged as a significant driver of global population movement. This trend is fuelled by economic disparities, various political and environmental crises and opposite demographic shifts that result in ageing populations in Europe and youth bulges in Africa, further exacerbating imbalances in labour demand and supply. When effectively managed, labour migration can bring substantial benefits to both host countries and migrants' countries of origin. These benefits include skill enhancement and knowledge transfer in key sectors, fostering development in migrants' home communities. While migration alone is not a panacea for demographic shifts or skill shortages, the cross-border exchange of skills can strengthen global labour markets, positively influence demographic trends, and contribute to economic

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<sup>270</sup> Icardi, R., P. Ueffing, F. Natale, A. Goujon, and N. Gailey. "Why Global Demography is Important for EU Policies." European Commission, 2024

<sup>271</sup> Paice, E. Youthquake: Why African Demography Matters, 2023.

<sup>272</sup> Icardi, R., P. Ueffing, F. Natale, A. Goujon, and N. Gailey. "Why Global Demography is Important for EU Policies.", 2024

growth and development in both the sending and receiving countries<sup>273</sup>. Fertility and migration are often viewed as interchangeable elements in the broader context of demographic change, leading to differing opinions on which one is more effective and therefore should prevail, as each presents unique trade-offs. On one side, pro-natalist policies, aimed at boosting fertility rates, have seen limited success, often only marginally increasing birth rates. Conversely, multiple population studies agree that migration will play a crucial role in post-demographic transition countries. Italy serves as a compelling case study in this debate. As an ageing society, the country is facing a significant demographic shift, highlighting the need to move away from a narrative that has historically downplayed demographic factors and toward recognizing their critical role in shaping the future of the nation<sup>274</sup>. Chapter Two delves into this issue, illustrating a demographic landscape marked by an ageing and shrinking population and high rates of emigration and immigration. Italy's experience with migration is relatively recent, having become a key destination for migrants over the last three decades. Migrant communities now form an integral part of Italian society, contributing to its transformation into an increasingly multicultural nation, similar to the UK and France. However, this demographic reality is often denied within the political discourse, where persists a narrative that doesn't acknowledge these changes and undermines the contributions and potential benefits that migrant communities bring. A clear example of this is Italy's citizenship law. Law 91/1992, which governs the acquisition of Italian citizenship, remains largely unchanged, standing in stark contrast to evolving European legislative frameworks. It is one of the few remaining examples of a strict *ius sanguinis* regime, where citizenship is primarily based on bloodline rather than birthplace or residency. As a result, many young adults with a migratory background face long delays in obtaining citizenship, often reaching adulthood without legal recognition as Italian citizens. This bureaucratic hurdle can impede their full integration into society and can foster a sense of alienation, preventing Italy from fully benefiting from the potential of its increasingly diverse population. The interplay between fertility and migration in Italy thus raises important questions about how best to address demographic challenges. Chapter Three delves into the complexities of the Italian political debates surrounding migration with a focus on the possible reform of Law 91/1992. The 2022 elections saw a coalition of conservative parties, predominantly composed of far-right and centre-right groups, led by Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia – FdI) and composed by the League (Lega), and Forza Italia, rise to power. The management of migration, particularly adherence to international legal obligations on asylum and humanitarian aid, has taken centre stage in

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<sup>273</sup> Venturi, B., Y. Rocchini, and S. Okyay. Making Migration Work: An Analysis of Skills-Based Mobility Schemes for Mediterranean Youth. IOM, 2023

<sup>274</sup> CENSIS. *57° Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese*, 2023

electoral discourse. Despite migration figures not reaching crisis levels, migration emerges as a divisive issue. Notably, far-right leaders, Giorgia Meloni (Brothers of Italy) and Matteo Salvini (League) revived securitization narratives, framing migrants as threats to national security. Meloni, in particular took an even more extreme stance, pledging to implement a “naval blockade” to deter migrants from entering Italian territory<sup>275</sup>. However, this securitized narrative is not exclusive to the right. The centre-left Democratic Party (Partito Democratico – PD) has also largely accepted and perpetuated similar rhetoric, failing to counter the anti-migrant discourse effectively. This bipartisan embrace of a securitized approach to migration has become mainstream, reflecting trends seen across Europe and the United States. A major obstacle in addressing migration flows lies in the absence of alternative policy thinking and the lack of political will to create a comprehensive EU migration strategy grounded in solidarity and shared responsibility. The New Pact on Migration, the flagship initiative of the first Von der Leyen Commission and adopted April 2024 aims to overhaul the European Union's migration and asylum framework by creating a unified European approach to address migration issues. This initiative emphasizes the importance of enhanced security at European borders, expedited and streamlined processes for asylum applications and returns, and increased solidarity with Member States situated at external borders. However, international organizations and NGOs sustains that the situation is unlikely to alleviate the burdens faced by first-entry states and may lead to an escalation of human rights abuses at the borders of Europe. There are concerns related to a further diminishment of individuals' rights to pursue asylum, an increase in border detentions—including those involving families with children—fewer chances for individuals to have their asylum claims thoroughly and justly evaluated, a rise in pushback practices, and a greater tendency to "outsource" the processing of asylum claims.<sup>276</sup> In Italy, the broader political discourse has largely overlooked alternative narratives that emphasize the benefits of welcoming and integrating migrants, particularly given Italy's own demographic challenges of low birth rates and persistent emigration. Even though the debate on the acquisition of Italian citizenship doesn't strictly relate to migration policies, it represents a current and notable case study to better study the political debate. The debate on the reform of nationality law failed on two occasions, in 2017 and 2022. Sottillotta<sup>277</sup> highlights that the fear of alienation of more conservative voters has led many parties in the centre and centre-left landscape to hesitate to fully support progressive proposals, such as *ius soli* or *ius scholae*. This hesitation has hindered meaningful progress, contributing to the broader stagnation in Italy's migration policies and

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<sup>275</sup> Sottillotta, C.. "Italy's Far-Right and the Migration Debate: Implications for Europe." Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2022

<sup>276</sup> International Rescue Committee. What is the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum?, 2024

<sup>277</sup> *ibidem*

perpetuating a political environment where restrictive measures are seen as the default solution<sup>278</sup>. Chapter Three concludes with a qualitative analysis of the political discourse on the reform of Italy's nationality law. The debate reveals a deeply divided political landscape, with one side advocating for an inclusive approach to citizenship, while the other emphasizes the preservation of traditional values and national identity. What stands out, however, is that the Italian public appears largely supportive of significant reform, as demonstrated by multiple studies, including the CENSIS 2023 report. Despite the public readiness, the political sphere remains unresponsive, or at best, indifferent. Ultimately this research concludes that despite an overarching consensus on a reforming Law 91/1992, the issue of nationality reform holds lower political salience compared to the more contentious topic of migration. By applying the issue yield theoretical framework, it becomes clear that nationality reform is less likely to influence voter behaviour and therefore lacks the political strength to become a flagship initiative for any major party. The recent endorsement of a citizenship reform initiative by Forza Italia was therefore quite surprising, given the party's longstanding conservative position on immigration issues. Although there was some initial enthusiasm for revisiting nationality law, once again proposing an *ius scholae*-based system, the political determination necessary to advance these reforms proved to be inadequate. The overarching discourse remained overshadowed by more pressing issues, notably the management of migration flows and Italy's involvement in the Mediterranean region. Consequently, the reform agenda struggled to achieve significant visibility in both media and political discussions, underscoring the deeply rooted obstacles that complicate the pursuit of citizenship reform in Italy. Therefore, while it was surprising that the parliamentary discussion on reform even began under the current legislative context, it is less surprising that this debate was short-lived. It was quietly embedded within a broader security decree and eventually sidelined, even by Forza Italia, the party that had initially supported it.<sup>279</sup> Despite this political inertia, public interest in reform remains strong, as evidenced by a grassroots request for an abrogative referendum.<sup>280</sup> This suggests a growing bottom-up movement, led primarily by migrant-led organizations and associations, aiming to push for change. This political activism reflects a disconnect between the will of the population and the priorities of the political elite, signalling that while the issue may not be salient in the corridors of power, it is gaining momentum in Italy's civil society. Demographic realities are exerting increasing pressure on Italy, shaping its political and economic landscape in profound ways. After becoming prime minister, Giorgia Meloni's leadership marked a significant shift for the conservative

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<sup>278</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>279</sup> Preziosi. No allo *Ius scholae*, alla Camera Forza Italia boccia anche la sua proposta. Domani, 2024

<sup>280</sup> ANSA. Cittadinanza, corsa contro il tempo per il referendum, 2024

movement across Europe. Her once incendiary rhetoric has given way to the pragmatic demands of governance. Over the past decade, Italy's population has shrunk by approximately 1.5 million—greater than the population of Milan. In 39 of Italy's 107 provinces, the number of retirees now surpasses the working population. Such trends prompted Economy Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti to warn that without urgent reform, the pension system will become unsustainable in the medium to long term, given the country's declining birth rate. This policy aims to facilitate the entry of 452,000 workers within that period to fill both seasonal positions in agriculture and tourism, as well as long-term roles in sectors like plumbing, caregiving, electrical work, and mechanics. This pragmatic stance reflects a growing recognition of labour shortages and the need for migration to sustain Italy's economy<sup>281</sup>. Similarly, former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi, in his report on EU competitiveness, calls for simplifying immigration procedures for highly skilled workers, including expedited visa processes and residence permits for qualified professionals. He emphasizes the need to create attractive employment opportunities for skilled professionals across Europe. However, this focus on high-tech and specialized sectors mirrors the EU's broader labour migration strategy, which tends to prioritize certain industries while overlooking the essential contributions of so-called "low-skilled" workers. Sectors like construction, agriculture, domestic care, and cleaning, which rely heavily on migrant labour, often offer inadequate wages and limited protections. Yet these workers are just as critical to the economy's functioning as those in high-skilled roles. Neither Draghi's recommendations nor many of Europe's labour migration policies address the needs of these workers, perpetuating a gap in the discourse around labour migration. Despite this pragmatic shift in immigration policy, it remains focused primarily on economic utility, lacking a robust commitment to inclusion and integration as a two-way process. The policies in place address labour shortages but fall short of fostering deeper social cohesion or long-term integration strategies, which are necessary for a truly sustainable approach to migration in Italy and Europe<sup>282</sup>. In conclusion, migration will continue to shape the political landscape in Italy and across Europe for the foreseeable future. As the older cohorts of society grow, it is crucial to move beyond the politicization and securitization of migration and focus on genuine, pragmatic reforms. A sustainable long-term migration strategy requires an EU-level framework that manages migratory movements based on shared resources and collective responsibilities. A clear and consistent policy on pathways to permanent residency across the EU would be a vital first step. For a resilient economy that benefits all, it is essential to advocate for fair work permits that cover all skill

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<sup>281</sup> Barigazzi, J. How Italy's Far-Right Leader Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Migration. Politico, 2023.

<sup>282</sup> PICUM. Exclusion by Design: Unveiling Unequal Treatment and Racial Inequalities in Migration Policies. 2024



levels and sectors. Whether in highly skilled or low-wage industries, every worker should be guaranteed equitable working conditions and compensation. At the same time, policies surrounding family planning and reproductive health must be rooted in respect for human rights, ensuring that individuals and couples can freely decide on the number, spacing, and timing of their children. This rights-based approach can play a critical role in addressing fertility rates<sup>283</sup>. It is also essential to approach demographic targets with caution, considering the ethical and practical implications. Issues such as discrimination, stigmatization, and potential violations of individual rights must be carefully weighed. Policies that narrowly focus on demographic targets risk oversimplifying the complex diversity within populations, leading to ineffective or counterproductive outcomes. Thus, any decision to pursue demographic goals must be grounded in a comprehensive assessment of the specific context, societal values, and policy objectives. Striking a balance between addressing societal challenges and upholding individual rights, while promoting inclusivity, is key to successful policy-making in this area. Finally, political parties must stay aligned with macro and micro-level population changes, recognizing that international migration flows are part of the solution, rather than the problem.

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<sup>283</sup> Icardi, R., P. Ueffing, F. Natale, A. Goujon, and N. Gailey. "Why Global Demography is Important for EU Policies.", 2024

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## ANNEX I

### QUESTIONNAIRE :

#### Impact of the ageing population:

- In your opinion, how does the ageing population influence your party's priorities on the political agenda?
- Is there a specific policy proposal that your party supports to address the challenges posed by an ageing population?
- In your experience, have you observed any notable trends or shifts in the voting behaviour of the different cohorts (older and younger voters)? Do you perceive a strong correlation between age and political ideology within your party?

#### Impact of the growth of the immigrant population:

- How does your party approach the integration of second and third-generation immigrants in the context of citizenship laws?
- According to conflict theory, diversity can promote group unity and out-group hostility. How does your party address these dynamics in its policies?
- What strategies does your party propose to mitigate potential conflicts arising from increased diversity?
- In your experience, have you observed any noteworthy trends or shifts in the voting behaviour of the different cohorts (Italian voters and voters with an immigrant background)? Do you perceive a strong correlation between ethnicity and political ideology within your party?

#### Expression of political ideologies:

- Can you give an overview of your party's position on current citizenship laws?
- Can you provide insights into the 2021 debate on the citizenship law in Italy and your party's role in it? What were the main arguments and positions taken by your party during this debate?
- In your opinion, what is the perception of your party and your voters on this issue? (reformation of the citizenship law)
- In a potential political campaign, would you/your party choose this issue as one of the main topics? Yes or no? Why? How?
- Would taking a clear position on this issue benefit your party or do you think it would benefit the other parties, putting your party in a minority position?

Sentiment of the population:

- Based on quantitative studies (e.g. CENSIS 2023), the general sentiment of the population regarding citizenship laws is in favour of *ius scholae*. Were you and your party aware of these results?
- How does your party interpret and respond to these sentiments in its policy proposals?

Future directions:

- What future policy directions does your party envisage with regard to citizenship laws in light of demographic changes?
- How does your party plan to balance the needs and interests of the ageing population and the growing immigrant population?

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