

POPULATION REPORT 2021

# THE ITALIAN DEMOGRAPHIC EXCEPTIONALISM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# SUMMARY

The AISP Population Report 2021 aims to analyze demographic trends of the Italian population over the last twenty years, situating the Italian dynamics within the larger European context. The main demographic dimensions that are investigated in the present volumes are: family, fertility, transition to adulthood, migration, health and mortality (including recent trends linked to the current COVID-19 pandemic). Moreover, the Report investigates dynamics of inequality in education and across geographical areas. The other relevant goal of the volume is to identify potential demographic scenarios for the future of the Italian population, highlighting their main challenges. Next to this, a rigorous analysis of possible policy options has been conducted, referring to international “best practices”, and developing causal evidence for the evaluations of these policies.

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# PREFACE

*Dubravka Šuica*

In spite of a challenging year 2020 that lies behind us, there are good news to share: while the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted nearly every aspect of our health, economy and society, we live longer and healthier lives in Europe today. The European Commission's Report on the Impact of Demographic Change identified longer life expectancy as a major development within the Union – older persons are the fastest growing age group. The good news is that growing life expectancy is paired with an increase in years of good health.

Active and healthy ageing and harnessing economic and social potential will be key opportunities to allow longer-working lives and develop the silver economy, work towards changing environments with safer and inclusive city environments, ensure accessibility of social services also in remote rural areas, and foster more participation, e.g. in volunteering, life-long learning, as well as physical activities and sport.

Ageing also creates challenges. With an increasing share of older people, demand for health care and long-term care will increase. We have to adapt our systems to meet the needs of older people, while maintaining the systems' sustainability. This includes pension sustainability; we need to find ways to integrate more people in the labour market and foster productivity growth. Ultimately, these considerations are cornerstones of intergenerational fairness and solidarity. With an increasingly older

population and fewer children being born, a balance needs to be struck between ensuring a life in dignity at older age and the chance to build a future as a young person.

The European Pillar of Social Rights is our compass for ensuring a fair and sustainable transition to green and digital societies and labour markets, against the background of ageing demographic trends. The present Report offers an unparalleled overview of demographic changes in Italy and how this compares to the rest of the EU. This timely analysis fits well into the wide debate on the impact of ageing launched through the Green Paper on Ageing by the European Commission.

The key questions it raises are for everyone to ponder on; what will Italian families look like in the future? How does the life of young Italians differ from the time their parents became adults? How does migration reflect on the population? What are the main health determinants in a country with one of the highest life expectancies in the EU? The report also delves deep into a matter at the heart of our society: why are people in unequal situations and what it means for all of us.

It is not easy being a young adult today. Uncertainties abound and the experience of our parents is of little help in a world driven by digitalisation, new forms of work, and the green economy. Yet young adults in Italy and Europe need to be reassured that they can continue counting on a society around them for opportunities, support and for sharing lives. That society is made of the people this report describes, for population studies are not just about what we observe today; rather, they are a lot about what will come tomorrow.

This Report also touches upon another important issue, local disparities. We cannot forget differences between regions; and we cannot address issues in cities if we do not help people in rural areas at the same time. We need a strategy for rural areas that puts them on a sustainable future.

The concerns raised in this Report are high on the EU agenda, as we strive to sustain recovery and resilience and uphold high social standards for all members of our society, at all stages in life.

# INTRODUCTION

**Francesco C. Billari & Cecilia Tomassini**

Italy has been characterised by extreme levels of its demographic indicators: it is, demographically speaking, an exceptional country. Italy has an extremely aged population structure, a tremendously low fertility, a very long transition to adulthood, surprisingly frequent intergenerational exchanges, among the highest life expectancy and fast migrant population growth. Despite such exceptionalism, demography had very little space in the Italian cultural debate and even less in the political agenda. While the European Union Commission in 2019 has nominated a vice president and commissioner for Demography and Democracy, the Italian governments have largely ignored the demographic issue and its long- and short-term consequences. Having over 60 millions residents lasted just for few years (from 2014 to 2018), and, with the additional contribution of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 Italian population lost 384,000 people (about the population of Florence) reaching 59,2 millions.

The first four chapters of this report analyse the fertility, family, migration and mortality dynamics of the last twenty years from the first period of population growth (2000-2008) thanks to fertility increase and migration, to the subsequent stagnation due to the Great Recession and finally the strike of the COVID-19 pandemic. In just twenty years, the Italian population has changed so quickly that the traditional idea that demography moves slowly is only partially correct: on one side population ageing may be a “slow” phenomenon (even if it can occur at different speed rates), on the other side migration (especially for short-term periods) may be considered the “fast” component of population change.

But fast demography is also characterising population subgroups both in terms of socio-economic and territorial characteristics. Education is the most striking variable for demographic behaviour in Italy: patterns in fertility, migration, health and mortality are strongly influenced by the education levels of individuals and deeply characterises their life course. Additionally, education is particularly important in shaping lives of the new generations: in this respect another component of the demographic exceptionalism that characterises Italian welfare is the absence of policies concerning new cohorts. Not only they are smaller, poorer, discouraged compared to the past cohorts, but they are also more vulnerable when related to their European counterparts.

The European Commission is suggesting a new paradigm for the welfare state with the Next Generation EU: investing for the incoming generations is the only way to overcome the pandemic and the crisis that followed.

Therefore, Italian reforms should enact a new political framework where consideration to the new generations and stability in government measures are the key factors to help Italian demography to be less exceptional and more normal.

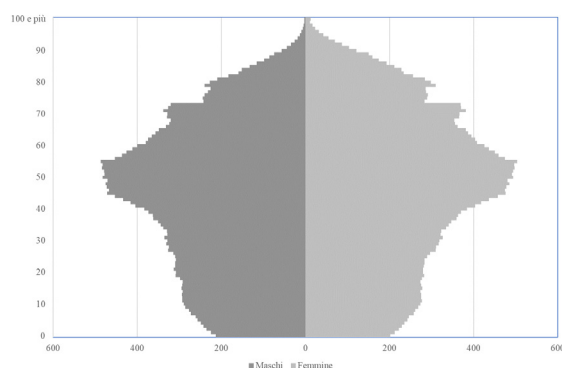
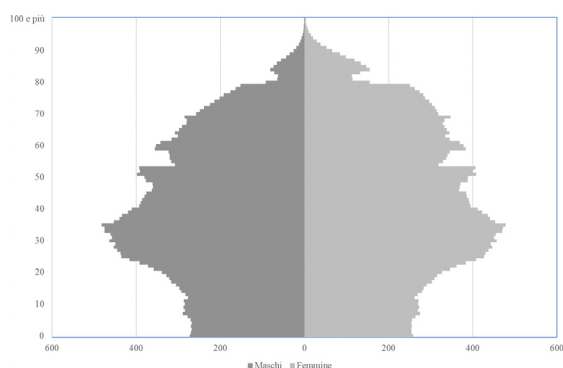


Fig. 1: Italian population age pyramids 2000 and 2020

# 01

## FERTILITY

**Letizia Mencarini, Daniele Vignoli & Maria Francesca Morabito**

Italy, today has very low fertility rates, with 1.29 children on average per woman (2019). This is the result of fertility changes that stretch back to the 1970s, and that have included: the 'baby bust' of the mid 1990s; a modest rise with the new century; and then a new decline with the Great Recession (see figure).

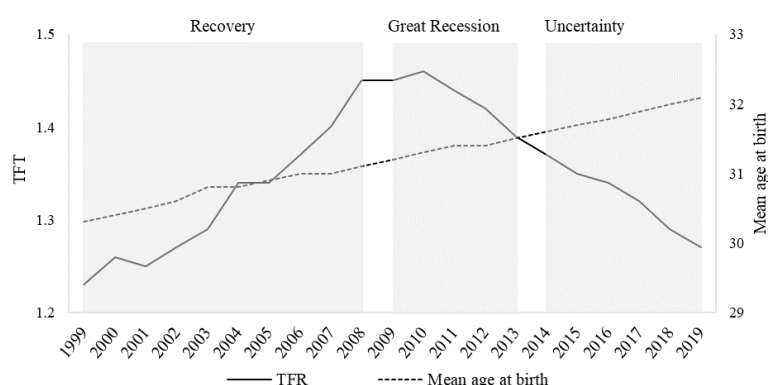
In the last twenty years low, and fluctuating, Italian fertility has seen a constant rise in the mother's average age at childbearing: the average now stands at over 32. This puts first births at greater risk, and means that there is less time for subsequent births.

Since the 'timid reprise' of the early 2000s, we have now passed to a 'time of uncertainty', uncertainty which involves not just work and the economy, but also the family. In this setting we must now factor the Covid-19 pandemic. Prospective parents naturally postpone reproductive choices in the face of this kind of uncertainty. If Central-Northern Italian and foreign mothers drove the modest fertility recovery of the first decade of the century, they are now contributing to downwards fertility trends. Fertility levels were already low in the South. Recently, even the fertility of foreign women has been falling, with an average of below two children per woman.

In recent years also the annual number of births has fallen sharply (from almost 580,000 in 2008 to 404,104 in 2020). The smaller generations of the last years are not only the result of low fertility today.

They are born of past low fertility: prospective parents are no longer the baby-boomers who came into the world in the 'fertile' 1960s, but those born in the 1980s and 1990s when fertility was already reduced, with only a small increment thanks to young immigrants. Italy is in the downward spiral of 'fertility trap', which will also affect the future. Newborns will be the potential parents tomorrow. In the next two decades, the number of women of child-bearing age is expected to fall by more than two million. So radical will be the fall that even if fertility increases, the number of births will continue to fall.

Compared to other developed countries, Italy has long been characterised by low female participation in the labour market, marked gender inequality in domestic and care work, and low public spending in favour of families: all of these factors discourage fertility. During the COVID-19 pandemic these characteristics inevitably had effects. Indeed, inequalities and fragility in the Italian 'familialistic' welfare model have reached a critical juncture and there has been a call towards public intervention for the support of families with children, childcare services and measures to reconcile family and work. A generous provision of resources for young adults could also mitigate the negative consequences of economic uncertainty.



*Fig. 2: The low fertility phases in the last twenty years. (TFRs - total fertility rates - and mean age of women at childbirth in the period 1999-2019 in Italy).*

*Source: Istat data*





# 02

# ITALIAN FAMILIES

*Elena Pirani, Raffaele Guetto & Francesca Rinesi*

Over the past half century, Italy has experienced revolutionary changes in the ways of doing family and in the timing of family formation, together with a general increase in life expectancy and fertility reduction. Marriages have decreased, often in favor of less “traditional” forms of union, and marital dissolutions have increased. These changes have intensified at the beginning of the third millennium, leading to a progressive simplification in the size and composition of Italian families: the number of people living alone has increased, whereas couples with children and families with 4 or more members have reduced.

These changes in family structures have important implications for trends in economic inequalities among Italian households, especially in the context of increased difficulties set by the Great Recession. In recent years, the economic situation of Italian families has worsened, with a sharp increase in households in absolute poverty. Large families with children, albeit less and less frequent in the country, are among those families, with the highest risk, together with single-parent families, in slow but steady growth.

In this chapter we show that family structure and composition keep having a direct effect on the risks of economic deprivation of Italian households, although an important share of their total effect is explained by the educational and employment levels of family members. Dual-income families are less economically vulnerable, indicating that the labor market attachment of both partners – and, consequently, the role of work-family reconciliation policies – is fundamental in protecting families from poverty risks, especially those with children. In Italy,

cultural and institutional support for female employment and reconciliation of work and care duties is still insufficient, however.

The network of strong kinship and intergenerational ties of the Italian family has acted as a key factor of social protection during the recent economic crisis, allowing to reduce its effects. Yet, given the demographic changes that Italy is experiencing, together with the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unreasonable to continue to only rely on traditional familialistic welfare. A weakness of family policies in Italy is the inadequacy of monetary transfers towards families with children. Welfare measures tend to be fragmented, specific, and at times chaotic. The 2020 Family Act, which envisages a single universal allowance for children, could represent a turning point for Italian family policies, even if such policies should be included into the broader frame of the country’s welfare and development policies.

In recent years, Italy has made many and significant steps forward, from a legislative point of view, in the field of families’ rights (think, for instance, of the laws on same-sex couples, on de facto unions and their children, on “fast divorce”). Nevertheless, the equality of rights does not always imply equality of opportunities. It is, thus, necessary to continue to remove all legal and socio-economic obstacles to a full realization of the well-being of families and of the individuals who belong to them.

*“Family structure and composition keep having a direct effect on the risks of economic deprivation of Italian households, although an important share of their total effect is explained by the educational and employment levels of family members”.*

# 03

## INTERNATIONAL MIGRATIONS & MIGRANTS

*Roberto Impicciatore, Livia Elisa Ortensi & Cinzia Conti*

In Italy, international migration has had a leading position in the public debate, with a strong media impact and important electoral implications. The number of foreigners, increased by almost four times between 2002 and 2014, has then stabilized at around five million in the following years. However, in the last five years the share of undocumented immigrants has increased, primarily fuelled by the growth in the number of landings and denials to asylum requests. Despite the fact that landings, after a peak in the 2015-17, have been abruptly reduced since July 2017, the narrative of the migratory phenomenon has continued to overemphasize emergency aspects, forced migration and the increase in the number irregular migrants. This polarization of interest, by diverting attention from the actual majority of immigrants, encourages the demand for short-term policies linked to transitory or cyclical factors affecting only a minority part of the immigrant population.

The result is a system of rules and policies with at least three gaps. Firstly, it combines high levels of declared severity with an inefficient management of inbound flows. Secondly, it leaves some grey areas in the protection of the fundamental rights of large sections of the immigrant population. Thirdly, it overshadows the need for policies and reforms aimed at promoting the full inclusion of people with foreign origin, who were born or have been living permanently in Italy for years, in particular the reform of the legislation regulating the acquisition of citizenship. The current law, which was passed in 1992 after a long period of emigration, only partially responds to the needs of a country in which immigration is now a structural and stable element of the population.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a description of

the main characteristics of migration flows and entry channels, focusing on recent trends related to landings, asylum seekers, illegal migration and the acquisition of the citizenship. According to these figures, we identify some insights related to migration policies in Italy. Overall, immigration in Italy is the result of a decades-long process and, in order to be well understood, and consequently well governed, must be considered in a medium-long term perspective going beyond the predominantly emergency approach, which has prevailed so far.

*“Immigration in Italy is the result of a decades-long process and, in order to be well understood, and consequently well governed, must be considered in a medium-long term perspective going beyond the predominantly emergency approach, which has prevailed so far”.*



# 04

## MORTALITY & COVID-19

*Luisa Frova, Gianfranco Alicandro, Gabriella Sebastiani, Sabrina Prati & Giuseppe Costa*

In 2000, life expectancy in Italy was 79.3 years with a gender difference of 7.9 years, in favour of women. In 2018, LE was 85.2 for women and 80.9 for men, with a reduction of the female advantage (from 7.9 to 4.3 years). In 2020, the increase in LE has come to a halt due to the Covid-19 pandemic that caused an excess mortality in Italy of about 50% in March 2020 and 37% in April. Preliminary estimates indicate a decrease in LE at birth in the whole country between 0.4 and 1.4 years and up to 2 years in the areas most affected by the pandemic.

Until the 1990s, a decline in mortality was observed in all European countries and in all socio-economic groups, with the exception of the less educated in Central and Eastern Europe, for which a favourable trend was observed only since the 2000s. Among EU and EFTA countries, Italy ranks third with a LE of 83.4 years.

Socioeconomic and geographic inequalities in LE are still present in Italy, with a substantial disadvantage among the less educated individuals and in some areas of the country. Compared to individuals with a high level of education, those less educated have a lower LE at 25 years (-3.6 years in men and -2.2 years in women).

During the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, less educated individuals experienced a higher increase in mortality than their highly educated counterparts, thus widening the pre-existing socioeconomic gap. Socioeconomic inequalities were observed for several causes of deaths, including cardiovascular and chronic low respiratory diseases. The socioeconomically disadvantaged population has a higher prevalence of lifestyle risk factors, such as physical inactivity, alcohol consumption, poor diet and smoking.

The first Italian case of Covid-19 was reported on February 20, 2020 in Codogno (Lombardia) and rapidly spread thereafter. At the beginning of March, the Government implemented a series of measures to contain the infection, including the isolation of suspected/confirmed cases, limiting movements of people, promoting physical distancing and closing of economic activities. Although, these measures were effective in containing the pandemic, a remark-

able excess in total mortality was observed in March in many northern regions, beginning to decline by April 2020. At the national level, total deaths fell from over 85.000 in March to 72.000 in April, corresponding to an average excess of 27.500 deaths (47.2% compared to the previous quinquennium) in March and 20.000 in April (39.2%). In June and July, the number of deaths dropped and, at the national level, they were lower compared to the expected values (by 1.5% and 3%). In July, for the very first time since the beginning of the pandemic, Lombardy showed a lower number of deaths compared to the average of the same months in 2015 to 2019.

Italy is among the countries with the highest LE and with the lowest level of socioeconomic inequality in mortality compared to other EU and EFTA countries. This is likely related to the protective effects of the Mediterranean diet, mainly on cardiovascular diseases, as well as a stronger family support network and the universalistic and free-of-charge national health service.

There are still important inequalities in mortality by level of education, gender and geographic areas in Italy. A significant share of those differences are explained by the uneven distribution of lifestyle risk factors that disadvantage the less educated and the worse-off individuals. The living environment also plays an important role by offering different opportunities since childhood and affecting the choices that every individual makes over the life course.

The pandemic has awakened the attention on the impact that health and non-health policies have on different groups of the population. In this difficult time, they may even exacerbate the pre-existing inequalities with deleterious effects on the health of the most vulnerable groups, including those with low education, poor health literacy and migrants. To contain a possible widening of socioeconomic inequities during the pandemic and in the recovery period, it is of utmost importance to improve the monitoring of socioeconomic inequities, in terms of effectiveness and timeliness, to provide policy makers with reliable data to plan more equal policies for the benefit of the whole population.

# 05

## INEQUALITIES ACROSS GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS

*Federico Benassi, Annalisa Busetta, Gerardo Gallo & Manuela Stranges*

The trend of demographic stagnation that has been characterising the resident population in Italy is the result of a persistent and continuous decrease in births that has led, since 1993, to an almost constantly negative natural balance, up to about -200 thousand units per year in the last three years (2017-2019).

Together with Spain, Italy has held the negative record of the so-called lowest-low fertility, i.e. the tendency of fertility to settle at extremely low levels, which over time has also characterised not only other European countries but also some Asian countries.

The weak growth of the resident population in Italy in recent years can only be attributed to the foreign migration balance, which has compensated the negative natural balance. Since the beginning of the new millennium, however, the number of resident foreign citizens has been decreasing in almost all the years: in the last four years the foreign migration balance has only managed to reduce the losses against natural balances that have still been decreasing.

In the post-economic crisis period (2009-2018), there has been a reduction in the variability of population growth rates among Italian regions. This has signalled a consolidated, widespread and progressive “demographic disease”. Specifically, only the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano maintain positive growth rates in both natural, and migration components. Overall, a progressive process of a persistent natural demographic decline has been found in almost all Italian regions. In some areas, this decline has not even adequately been compensated by migration flows.

The cluster analysis in the chapter shows how the Italian contexts is strongly heterogeneous when observed at a municipal level, and how demographic decrease and territorial marginality are not an essential combination. While there are municipalities in internal areas - not only in the South of the country - whose weakness is associated with a comparatively “low accessibility”, the two regions that have the lowest accessibility index also have the lowest depopulation. Trentino Alto Adige which registers a comparatively low level of accessibility (72.7 minutes is the average travel time) but the second lowest percentage of municipalities in systematic demographic decrease (just 5.5%). This is a territory that has often been called “the mountain of well-being”. Similar is the case of the Aosta Valley, which has been able to exploit its territorial capital in an accurate and profitable way (without depleting resources). For this reasons, some elements, such as the low level of accessibility, which may seem to be clear disadvantages, can, if properly managed, have not insignificant comparative advantages, such as tourism linked to nature and the environment, DOP and IGT production and the importance of the wine industry (also within wine tourism and local tourism). It is therefore a matter of understanding what kind of territorial capital characterises the different sub-national contexts and how it can be fully exploited in order to create the conditions to attract individuals.

*“A progressive process of a persistent natural demographic decline has been found in almost all Italian regions. In some areas, this decline has not even adequately been compensated by migration flows”.*

# 06

## EDUCATION

**Mariano Porcu & Massimo Attanasio**

This chapter deals with the big changes occurred in upper secondary (high school) and tertiary education in Italy in the last 60 years, with a special focus on the last two decades and on gender differences. The narrative can be divided into three frames: 1. High school, 2. High school-university transition; 3. University enrollment and careers.

High school. With reference to upper secondary education, educational attendance and attainment have reached very good results in the last 60 years, as 90% of the young students get nowadays a high school diploma with some differences in favour of the northern-central regions of the country.

Moreover, there have been extensive changes in the choices relating to the type of high school: a decrease of the students attending the "Liceo classico" (with more girls); an increase in the "Liceo Scientifico" (boys and girls are equal just in the last years) and in the "Istituti Tecnici", attended mostly by boys. The latest are more frequent in the North of Italy because they are more directly linked to the labour market.

High school-university transition. In the last 60 years, the transition rates from school to university as shown ups and downs, with a peak in the 90s.

During the last years rates have reached levels of around 50-60%. On the other hand, the number of university students has steadily increased in the 70s and 80s, as the baby boomers were more numerous and more educated than their previous generations. In the last years, these rates have not increased probably due to the economic crisis.

University enrollment and careers. Gender differences are well "summarized" by the next figure, as in the 1989/90 female freshmen overcome male freshmen and the distance between females-males have increased in the last 10 years (the total number of freshmen is around 280,000 in the last 10 years).

Performance is better for female students in the bachelor's degree courses, enlarging differences with respect to males: 27.6 females out of 100 drop out in the 5 years of observation (cohort of freshmen enrolled in 2014/15 academic year), compared to 37.3 out of 100 males. On the other hand, observing the transition to the master's degree courses, we have noticed - unexpectedly - an inversion, in fact, female students enrolled in the master within 4 years are 57%, while males enrolled are 66.5%. This change (keeping in mind that in master courses females are still 20,000 more numerous than males) is particularly interesting and certainly deserves further studies.



Fig.3. University freshmen in Italy by gender (%)  
Source: Istat data.





# 07

## YOUTH CONDITION & THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

*Romina Fraboni, Alessandro Rosina & Elisa Marzilli*

The timings and ways (but also meanings) of the transition to adulthood depend on many factors: personal characteristics, individual preferences, the social and historical context, the social conditions of the family of origin, and the type of relationship between parents and children.

The impetus of the first three decades after World War II (the “Thirty Glorious”) allowed the middle class in Italy to achieve levels of well-being similar to those of other advanced countries. However, welfare provision towards the new generations (facing increased uncertainty in the transition to adulthood) has remained weak, and the Italian family has had to strengthen its role as the main provider of social support for the new generations. The changes in the labour market since the late nineties and during the Great Recession occurred between the first and the second decade of the new century have further accentuated the relevance of the family. Therefore, the current well-being conditions, and the future chances of self-actualization of young Italians are more dependent on their parents’ aid, with respect to their peers in other European countries.

During the first two decades of the new century, together with a reduction in the size of the new generations (due to the persistent low fertility in the country), young people’s chances of intergenerational social mobility and their potential boost - in terms of energies and human capital - to the country’s growth have both decreased. The data testify this unequivocally. The employment rate for people aged 15-34 was 53% in 2000 and dropped below 42% in 2019, with a loss of more than 10%, mainly concentrated in 2008-2013. The Great Recession has also significantly increased the share of young NEETs (Not in education, employment, or training). Despite the end of the recession, and the effects of the Youth Guarantee program, Italy ended the years Ten at the top of the NEET EU ranking. The incidence of NEETs in 2019 was 22% in Italy, more than three times that of the Netherlands, and Sweden (around 6%). Sub-national differences also remained significant: in Sicily, the NEET population exceeds 35%, more than double compared to Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

In the first part of this century, therefore, Italy unable not only to bridge the gap with other European countries, but also to reduce internal inequalities. During the first twenty years of the new century, in line with this picture, objective difficulties in the permanence of young people in the family of origin have increased. This is testified by, among those who live with their parents, the growth of the quota of those who declare they do not have the means for their autonomy, of those who live in the South, of those looking for work, but also of those who manifest a positive intention to leave the parental home.

Entering the fourth decade of life while still living with parents has become an increasingly common condition, taken for granted and accepted, even if not desired by most. This is confirmed by the data from various surveys, which highlight a progressive downward adjustment of the expected goals of the new generations as they are confronted with the real conditions of the labour market. In 2018, young Italians, more than the European peers, fear reaching the middle of adult life without a solid job position (Istituto Toniolo/Ipsos survey on individuals aged 18-34 living in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, UK). This fear increases with age, rising to over one in three in the 30-34 age group. It also depends on education, reaching around 40% among those with low education. This suggests that the high levels of early school leavers and the low number of graduates, compared to the European average, not only worsens the working conditions of the present, but also future prospects.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, therefore, hit a country that already had employment and social indicators on youth that were among the worst in Europe. Whereas young people had already great difficulty in imagining a positive future, the new scenario has added, as the data collected from the lockdown onwards show, a further layer of uncertainty, which can go deep and become insecurity if not properly managed.

# 08

## HEALTH

*Giovanna Boccuzzo, Lidia Gargiulo, Laura Iannucci, Margherita Silan, Giuseppe Costa*

The COVID-19 emergency has highlighted the importance of identifying and monitoring frail individuals, as they are more subject to the risk of serious consequences of the infection.

Although frailty largely affects elderly people, not all the elderly are systematically frail, there are also robust ones, that do not need assistance, but can provide it. Indeed, especially in the last twenty years, frailty and active ageing can be seen as two sides of the very same coin. With the increase of the number of elderly due to the growth of life expectancy, the number of old individuals in Italy has exceeded 10 million in 2000. The main concern that comes together with the lengthening of the life expectancy regards the worsening of elderly's health conditions, that would put the health system at risk.

However, evidence seems to go otherwise, indeed the health profile of the elderly in Italy is encouraging: healthy life expectancy is growing, with a reduction of morbidity, perceived ill health and functional limitations. While years are added to life, the age at which diseases arise, subjective health worsens and functional limitations begin, moves forward with the exception of neurodegenerative diseases typical of the elderly.

Even if inequalities between genders, social groups and geographic areas are shrinking, social and geographical inequalities continue to significantly cross all the health dimensions. In Italy, social inequalities coincide with geographical inequalities, since individual conditions of social disadvantage tend to be concentrated in the regions of the South.

In order to be able to provide the necessary social and health assistance and prolong the healthy life of the elderly, it is necessary to identify their care needs, thus implementing targeted, efficient and preventive interventions. In the perspective of implementing targeted interventions, the total population can be imagined as a sort of pyramid. In

the pyramid's base there are the majority of the subjects, healthier than the others, for which it will be useful to implement health promotion interventions. In the central portion of the pyramid there are patients characterized by a single chronic disease with clear and defined treatment paths and a simple management. At the top of the pyramid we find instead the so-called frail and complex subjects, who have more chronic conditions and risk factors and who must be taken care of with personalized care programs and a more extensive use of resources, but who also represent a very small portion of the total assisted population. In order to identify this group of frail persons, a promising proposal for a composite indicator for frailty has emerged, thanks to various experiences made both in Veneto (Silan et al., 2019) and in Piedmont (Silan et al., 2020). The frailty indicator is composed by seven variables: age, the number of different drug prescriptions, the Charlson index (that measures co-morbidities), disability, the number of accesses to the emergency room with yellow code, the number of accesses to the emergency room with a green code and the presence of Parkinson's disease.

In 2015 the combination of the flu epidemic and the heat wave had caused several tens of thousands more deaths, reducing life expectancy by a few percentage points. The phenomenon was repeated even more severely in the COVID-19 pandemic. These phenomena draw attention to the frail segment of the population, which must be the focus of systematic and ad-hoc policies in a less occasional and residual way than has happened so far.



***Executive Summary Designed by Mahalia Thomas, Population Europe (MPIDR)***

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