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Editors: Francesco Maria Chelli, Mariateresa Ciommi, Salvatore Ingrassia, Francesca Mariani, Maria Cristina Recchioni

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Contents

Statistical Machine Learning for environmental applications

Statistical Process Monitoring for Complex Data in Industry 4.0

Advances in Data Science and Statistical Learning [IMS Invited Session]

ENBIS Session: System Maintenance, Boosting algorithms for regression, and Research Excellence

Educational Data mining: methods for complex data in students' assessment

Spatial and Spatio-Temporal Modeling: Theory and Applications

Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism

Statistical learning for well-being analysis

Statistics in Society 1

Assessment and Education

Bayesian methods and applications 1

Health and mortality

Mixture Models

Sampling methods and analysis of survey data

Space-time statistics

Clustering and classification 1

Dynamic models and time series

Environmental learning and indicators

Health statistics 2

Migrants in Italy and return migration

Sustainability assessment

Bayesian methods and applications 2

Clustering and classification 2

Economics and labour markets

Environmental modeling

Multivariate data analysis 2

Statistics in Society 2

Bayesian methods and applications 3

Functional Data Analysis

Machine Learning and text mining

Multivariate data analysis 3

Nonparametric statistical methods

Regression modeling

Εἰλείθυια comes from afar: The foreigners' contribution to fertility by Italian provinces

Eleonora Miaci[a], Cristina Giudici[a], Eleonora Trappolini[b], Marina Attili[c], Cinzia Castagnaro[c], Antonella Guarneri[c]

[a] University of Rome, Sapienza; eleonora.miaci@uniroma1.it
[b] University of Milano-Bicocca; eleonora.trappolini@unimib.it
[c] Italian National Institute of Statistics- ISTAT; maattili@istat.it

Abstract

The fertility differential of foreign women in Italy has decreased considerably over the years and it is expected to decrease even more over time but, despite this, the role of foreign children in slowing the decline in births remains crucial.

This study aims to further the debate on the fertility of migrants, providing an estimate of the fertility rates among foreign nationals at the provincial level over the past two decades. We intend to analyse the evolution over time and space of the contribution to fertility by foreign female citizens, investigating the determinants of their fertility behaviour and identifying differences and similarities with Italian female citizens.

Keywords: Migrants' Fertility, Italy, Foreign woman, Fertility, Employment level.

1. Introduction

Although fertility gaps within the same territory are frequent in many countries (Frejka, Sobotka 2008), there are few analyses exploring the subnational level in Europe and especially in Italy (Vitali, Billari 2017; Campisi et al. 2020).

Italy is constituted by very heterogeneous territories in terms of geographic, socioeconomic and demographic characteristics (Reynaud et al., 2020) and fertility levels differ considerably both at the level of rural or urban territories and by geographical distribution (Zambon et al. 2020).

Despite the extensive research in the field of migrant fertility examining the relationship between migration and family and reproductive dynamics (Landale 1997; Toulemon, Mazuy 2004; Cooke 2008; Milewski 2010), to our knowledge, there is no analysis to date that explores the subnational level with regard to the fertility of foreign female citizens.

The contribution of this paper is precisely to fill this gap in the literature.

We aim to estimate the age-specific and total fertility rates of foreign women in Italy, disaggregated by citizenship (for the five main citizenships), at a provincial level.

2. Fertility of foreign women in Italy

On 1st January 2022, more than 50% of the foreign female population resident in Italy came from Romania, Albania, Morocco, China and Ukraine. These five groups are characterised by different levels of maturity in the migration cycle. Foreign female residents are on average a younger population than the Italian female one and have contributed to slowing the decline in births, due to a significant presence at fertile age, a younger average age at childbirth and a fertility rate almost close to replacement level.

The share of foreign children in the Italian birth rate remains crucial. Due to the composition of the presence, it is not surprising that the highest number of foreign children recorded in the national registry is Romanian (14,248 born in 2020), followed by Moroccan (9,991) and Albanian (8,082). These citizenships represent about 40% of births to foreign mothers residing in Italy. As regards other citizenships, a non-negligible contribution comes from other African communities (in particular Egyptian and Tunisian nationals) and several Asian communities (in particular from India, Bangladesh, China and Pakistan).

As for Italian nationals, the fertility of foreigners shows territorial differences: the fertility rate is 2 children per woman in the North, 1.65 in the Centre and 1.86 in the South. (ISTAT, 2020)

Although the gap with the fertility rate of Italian women (1.17 in 2020) remains considerable, the reduction experienced by foreign female citizens in the last ten years has been sharper (-18% for the TFR of foreign women and -12% for the TFR of Italian women since 2010).

Numerous studies underline how the convergence of Italian and foreign women's reproductive behaviour is determined by social, political, cultural and employment conditions in the host society (Alba, Nee 1997; Carter 2000). In this context, several works stress the importance of the growing propensity of foreign women to work, mostly in the family service sectors with great variability linked to nationality and migratory background (Gabrielli et al. 2007; Lübke 2015; Sobotka 2008).

3. Data and methods

This research is conducted as part of a curricular internship at ISTAT, carried out in the context of the EMOS (European Master in Official Statistics Workshop) programme, on "Estimating the fertility of the cohorts of women resident in Italy by citizenship in the years 2002-2020", within the framework of the doctorate in the School of Statistical Sciences, Demography curriculum, at La Sapienza University of Rome. Starting from the ISTAT births database, which contains data on all women who have had at least onechild registered in the registry office since 1999, total and age-specific fertility rates were constructed for Italians and foreigners and for the five main citizenships in Italy (Romanians, Albanians, Moroccans, Chinese, Ukrainians). These indicators were then validated to provincial detail.

4. Preliminary results

Figure 1 displays age-specific fertility rates for the total, Italian and foreign female population at national level and by macro-areas. Foreign nationals realize their fertility behaviour earlier than Italians and with higher rates but, compared to 2010, in 2020 they experienced a greater reduction in number of births and a stronger postponement. The underlying area between the age specific rate of the total population and that of the Italian population reveals that the contribution of foreign female citizens, both in 2010 and 2020, is lower in the South than in the rest of Italy. This depends on several factors: the lower fertility rate experienced by foreign nationals in the South compared to North and Centre, their older age structure (explained by looking at the prevailing nationalities in the different macro-areas) and also on the fact that in the south, as we have already pointed, there are precisely fewer foreigners present and therefore their contribution is lower when calculating the rate of the total population.

The provincial detail of the total fertility rate (figure 2) reveals how despite a certain heterogeneity between the geographic areas, there is a clear homogeneity between the various levels of fertility of Italian provinces in the different macro-areas.

The provinces reporting a high total fertility rate for foreigners are mainly in the North, with the exception of some Sicilian provinces. The lowest rates are instead concentrated in the Centre, in some provinces of the South and in Sardinia.

Although the fertility of foreigners follows the trend of that of Italians, the data indicate a fertility differential present in almost all the provinces of the North and the Centre but limited in the South.

The five communities examined, although they have all experienced widespread fertility declines, differ in their levels of fertility in their countries of origin. In 2020 TFR ranges from 1.2 in Ukraine to 2.4 in Morocco. Except for the latter case, while remaining higher than that of Italian nationals, the TFRin the countries of origin lies below the replacement level.

One of the factors explaining the low fertility rate of foreign women in Italy is their origin mainly fromlow fertility countries.

Concerning Romanian migrants, we found that they have a lower fertility rate than non-migrant women,confirming previous research (Mussino, Cantalini, 2022).

One of the most original results that emerged from our study is the higher fertility of Albanian and Moroccan citizens in Italy compared to both those who remained in the country of origin (table 1) and to native Italians (figure 3). The analysis of the socio-economic characteristics, labour market integration and attitudes of these communities allowed us to hypothesise explanations for this result.

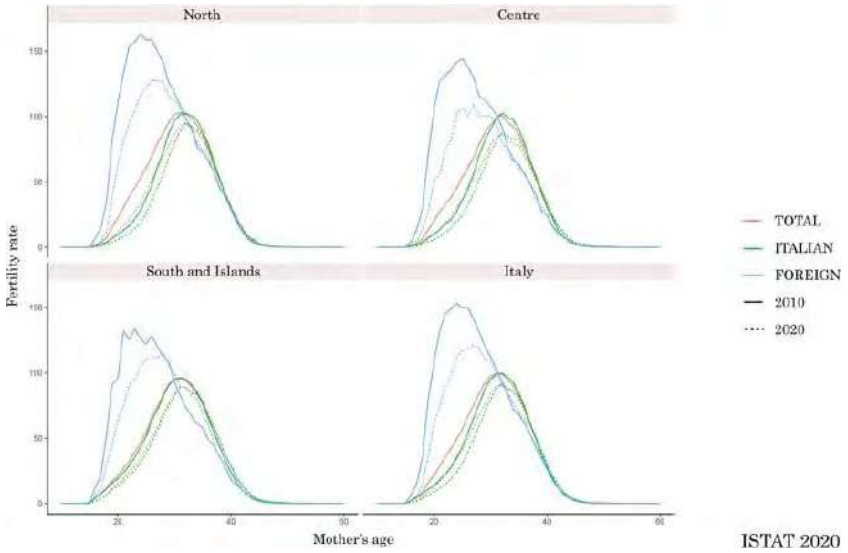

Figure 1: Age-specific fertility rates of total italian and foreign female population for microregion

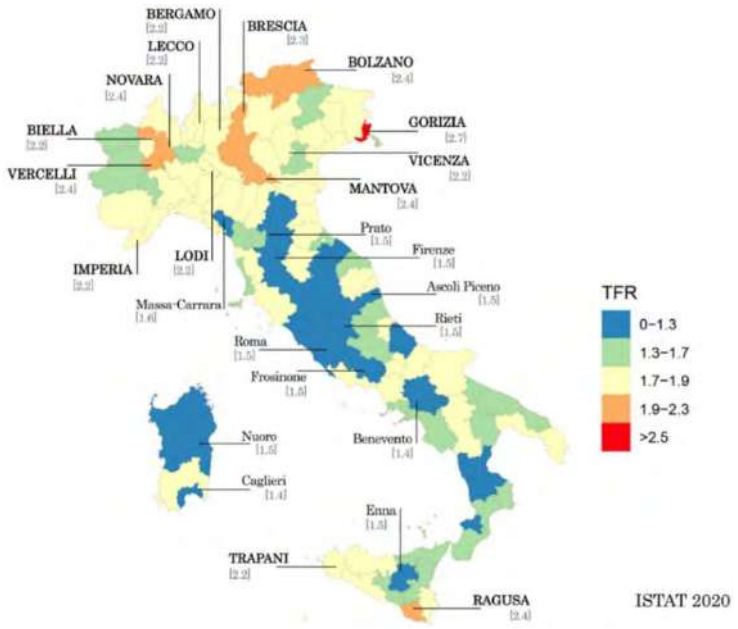

Figure 2: Total fertility rate of foreign population in Italy, 2020

Table 1: TFR of the first five citizenship in Italy and in the country of origin, 2019-2021

ITALY	Romania	Albania	Ukraine	China	Morocco
2019	1.4	2.1	1.3	1.5	3.4
2020	1.4	2	1.3	1.1	3
2021	1.5	2.1	1.2	0.9	2.9

ISTAT

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Romania	Albania	Ukraine	China	Morocco
2019[b]	1.8	1.4	1.2	1.5	2.4
2020[c]	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.3	2.4
2021[d]	1.7	1.4	1.2	1.2	2.3

[b] [c] World Bank, [d] World Population Prospects

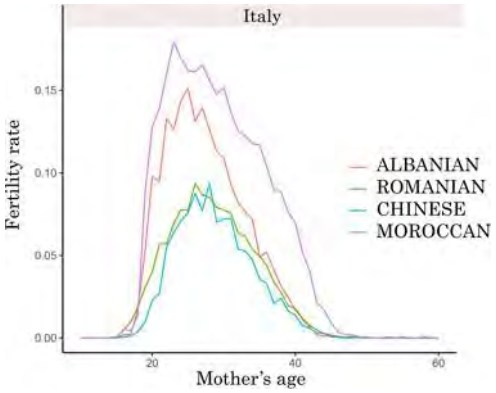

Figure 3: Age-specific fertility rate of foreign female population by citizenship in Italy, 2020

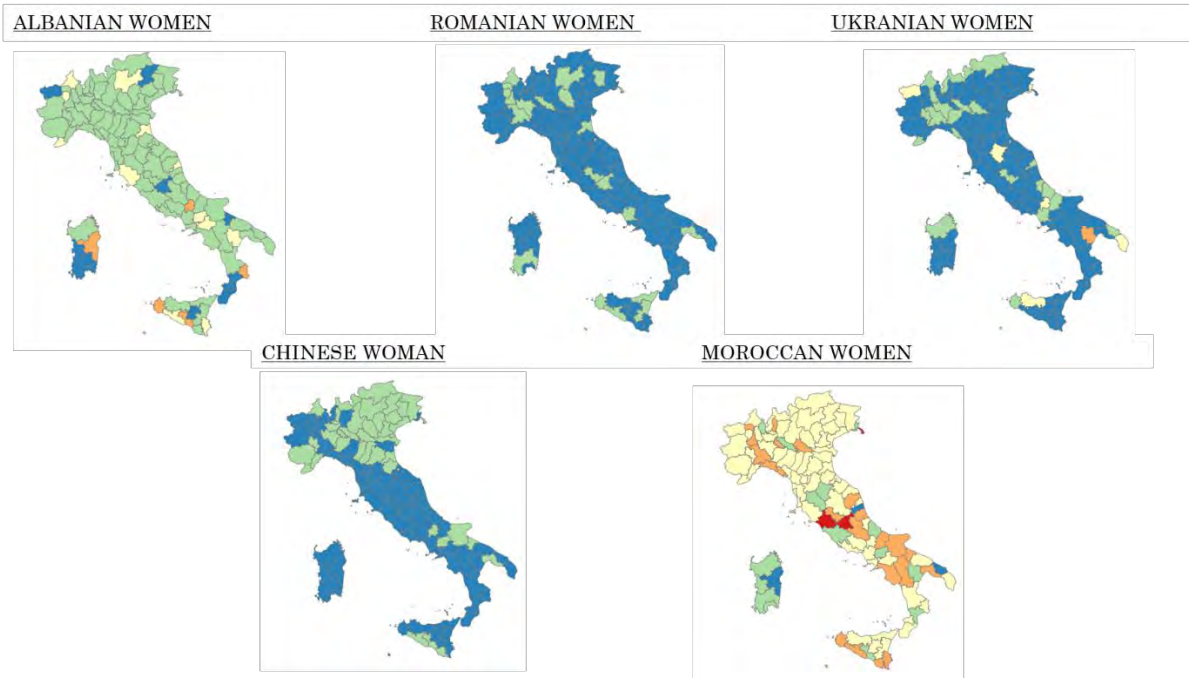

Figure 4: Total fertility rate at provincial level for the five main citizenship in Italy, 2020

5. Conclusion and further developments

This preliminary work introduced the relevant literature on migrants' fertility, presented a syntheticpicture of the foreign presence on Italian territory and of the characteristics of the different nationalities, and illustrated a selection of the descriptive results obtained.

The paper will be implemented with linear regression models to analyse the relationship between fertility behaviour and socio-economic and contextual factors, as well as to identify differencesbetween Italian provinces.

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