FROM MUNICIPAL CENTRES TO ULTRA-REMOTE ZONES: FOREIGN SETTLEMENT PATTERNS ACROSS ITALY'S INNER AREAS

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Abstract. This paper explores the settlement patterns of foreign populations within Italy's Inner Areas, as defined by the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI). These areas characterised by increasing remoteness from essential services such as healthcare, education, and transport face structural challenges of demographic ageing, depopulation, and economic marginality. Using municipal data from the years 2003, 2013 and 2023, the analysis measures the foreign incidence (foreigners per 1,000 inhabitants) in the six SNAI municipal categories. Results show a generalised increase in foreign presence, particularly in municipalities classified as service centres, while remote and ultra-remote areas exhibit lower but growing trends. A Local Moran's I spatial cluster analysis reveals that high-incidence clusters are concentrated in the North and Centre, whereas low-incidence clusters dominate in the South and Islands, highlighting persistent territorial disparities. The study confirms that foreign settlement patterns are closely linked to SNAI spatial hierarchies and service accessibility.

1. Introduction

Since World War II, Italy has faced profound demographic changes, notably depopulation and population ageing (Reynaud and Miccoli, 2023). These dynamics have disproportionately affected rural and mountainous territories, now formally classified as Inner Areas (Barca *et al*., 2014; ISTAT, 2022). Italy faces significant demographic challenges, especially in peripheral and less densely populated regions identified by the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI), characterised by their distance from essential services such as education, healthcare, and transportation. This remoteness often correlates with depopulation, an ageing population, and pronounced territorial disparities compared to more central and urbanized parts of the country (Kërçuku, 2022; Fiasconaro *et al*., 2024). Rather than framing these areas solely as spaces of loss, recent attention has shifted to their potential transformation through the presence of foreign populations. However, the phenomenon of foreign settlement in Italy's Inner Areas (IA) presents a complex interplay with these existing demographic and socio-economic trends. In theoretical terms, foreign settlement in IA can be interpreted as the result of a combination of mechanisms. These include labour demand in agriculture, construction, and personal care services; the relative

affordability of housing in depopulated municipalities; demographic niches created by ageing and out-migration of natives; and targeted local or national policies aimed at revitalising marginal territories. Prior studies (Carlucci and Lucatelli, 2013; Oppio, 2021) confirm that these structural and institutional factors jointly influence the attractiveness of IA for foreign residents. The phenomenon of foreign settlement in such disadvantaged territories is gaining strategic relevance, particularly within the framework of the SNAI, aimed at countering demographic and socio-economic marginalization. Depopulation in Italy, intensified from the 1970s, is tied to declining fertility rates and persistent emigration from rural areas (Reynaud and Miccoli, 2018). Spatial analyses confirm that higher altitudes, geographical isolation, and reduced service accessibility are strong predictors of municipal population decline (Benassi *et al*., 2020). Northern municipalities have experienced milder depopulation trends compared to the South and island regions. The South alone contains 67.4% of Italy's Inner Area municipalities (ISTAT, 2022). In this fragile context, foreign populations have begun to play an increasingly relevant role in some municipalities. In many cases, foreign residents have helped to maintain minimum demographic thresholds in schools, supported the agricultural labour force, and contributed to the survival of small services and local markets (Reynaud and Miccoli, 2023). Their presence may also facilitate a redefinition of local identity, particularly in rural areas where authenticity and inclusion can coexist (Carlucci and Lucatelli, 2023; Oppio, 2021). However, this presence remains uneven across the national territory. By examining the extent of foreign presence and focusing mainly on territorial disparities within SNAI areas, this article aims to explore precisely this settlement phenomenon. Unlike much of the existing literature on Italy's IA, which focuses primarily on processes of depopulation, ageing, and marginalisation, this paper adopts a different analytical perspective. Specifically focusing on the geography of foreign presence within the SNAI framework, the main objective is to explore how the presence of foreign citizens has changed over the last 20 years in different types of municipalities – from central service centres to the most marginal and peripheral areas of our country. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are used to map the distribution of the incidence of foreigners at the scale of IA. Spatial statistical techniques are also used to identify spatial concentrations of foreign population settlement.

The paper is structured as follows: In the next section we will address more formally the definition of SNAI; in the third section we will specifically address the settlement of foreigners in SNAI. Some concluding remarks will conclude the article.

2. The Inner Areas: definition and territorial statistics

Before presenting the data on foreign presence in Italy over the past 20 years, it is important to provide some definitions and territorial statistics on IA, which will serve as a foundation for the subsequent analysis. The concept of IA was formally introduced in Italy through the National Strategy for IA (Barca *et al*., 2014; ISTAT, 2022), which aims to identify and support those territories characterized by persistent conditions of marginality and remoteness from essential services. These services include education, healthcare, and mobility (ISTAT, 2022 and 2024). According to the SNAI framework for the 2021–2027 programming cycle, Italian municipalities are classified into six distinct types based on average road travel time (a.r.t.t.) to the nearest service provision centre (a municipality or group of municipalities providing all three key services): A: Municipality (single service centre); B: Municipality (multi service centre); C: Belt (a.r.t.t.< 27.7 minutes); D: Intermediate (27.7 ≤ a.r.t.t.< 40.9 minutes); E: Remote (40.9 ≤ a.r.t.t.< 66.9 minutes);F: Ultra-remote (a.r.t.t.≥ 66.9 minutes). Municipalities classified as Intermediate (D), Remote (E), and Ultra-remote (F) are designated as "IA" within the SNAI typology. In 2023, these categories collectively included 3,818 municipalities, representing approximately 48.4% of all Italian municipalities[1]. From a demographic perspective, the 2023 population distribution shows that IA are home to 13.29 million individuals (22.5% of the national total). In terms of surface area, however, they account for 58.7% of the national territory, underscoring the demographic imbalance between spatial extension and population distribution. This reflects a marked contrast in population density: while non-IA host an average of 366.5 inhabitants per km², IA report a much lower density of 75.0 inhabitants per km². Elevation also contributes to the territorial distinction of these areas: average altitudes increase significantly across the classification gradient, from 135 meters in central service municipalities (Type A) to 736 meters in ultra-remote municipalities (Type F).

From a functional perspective, the three categories that define IA (Types D–F) face particularly strong barriers to immigrant settlement. Intermediate municipalities often combine medium accessibility with limited economic opportunities. Remote municipalities tend to suffer from poor infrastructure and reduced public transport connections. Ultra-remote municipalities, located at the farthest distance from service centres, face structural disadvantages: ageing populations, declining labour markets, and scarce educational and health services. These conditions reduce their capacity to attract and retain foreign residents, despite the availability of low-cost housing.

[1] Our analysis is based on ISTAT data considering 7,887 municipalities in the year 2023 compared to the total of 7,900 municipalities. The 13 municipalities were excluded to ensure consistency in geography during the analysis period (2003-2023) and the next spatial statistical analysis.

3. The Settlement of Foreigners in the SNAI Areas

Over the past two decades, the distribution of foreign residents across Italian municipalities has undergone substantial transformation. While the overall foreign incidence (FI) presence has increased nationally, the degree of this change vary considerably depending on the SNAI classification of the municipalities (Table 1). Using the indicator of foreign incidence (number of foreigners per 1,000 inhabitants), we observe that the highest values are consistently found in municipalities classified as service provision centres. In particular, Type A municipalities (single service centres) showed a sharp increase from 32.4 in 2003 to 113.3 in 2023, an absolute rise of over 80.8, reflecting their strong attraction for foreign settlement (see colomn "Diff. 2003 -2023" in Table 1). Similarly, Type B municipalities (multi-municipality centres) experienced an increase from 19.2 to 74.4, with an increase of of 55.2 foreigners.

Table 1 - *Foreigner incidence (FI) by SNAI classification – Years 2003, 2013 and 2023*.

Classification of Municipalities	FI_2003	FI_2013	FI_2023	Diff. 2023-2003
A - Municipality (single)	32.44	94.71	113.27	80.83
B - Municipality (multi)	19.22	64.39	74.41	55.19
C - Belt	24.74	72.57	78.16	53.42
D - Intermediate	21.95	65.15	71.62	49.67
E - Remote	15.91	49.08	56.61	40.70
F - Ultra remote	10.39	33.52	40.51	30.12
Total	25.95	76.50	87.17	61.23

Source: Our elaboration on municipal Istat data.

Moving outward from the core, Belt municipalities (Type C) saw foreign incidence increase from 24.7 in 2003 to 78.2 in 2023 (+53.4), while Intermediate areas (Type D) rose from 22.0 to 71.6 (+49.6). Remote municipalities (Type E) grew from 15.9 to 56.6 (+40.7), and Ultra-remote ones (Type F)—representing the most marginal areas—saw a more modest increase from 10.4 to 40.5 (+30.1). These data reveal a clear territorial gradient in the growth of foreign presence: the closer a municipality is to essential services, the higher its capacity to attract and retain foreign populations. Such a pattern suggests that accessibility continues to play a pivotal role in shaping migration geographies[2]. Despite significant improvements in peripheral areas, territorial gaps persist with the 2023 incidence in ultra-remote municipalities less than half that of central ones. When we aggregate municipalities

[2] However, caution is required in interpreting these increases, as without flow data it is not possible to distinguish between new arrivals, demographic turnover, or local policy effects.

into IA vs. Non-IA, the difference remains stark. In 2003, the incidence in Non-IA was 28.1, compared to only 19.1 in IA. By 2023, these figures had grown to 93.7 and 64.9, respectively, preserving a substantial gap of nearly 29 foreigners per 1,000 inhabitants. This differentiated expansion could reflect multiple factors that underlie settlement decisions: job opportunities, housing availability, mobility, local infrastructure, and municipal inclusion policies. The analysis of foreign population incidence at the geographical macro-area level over a 20-year period reveals a marked territorial divide that has persisted despite generalised growth (Table 2). As of 2023, foreign presence per 1,000 inhabitants reaches its highest values in the North-West (110.63), North-East (109.57), and Center (108.05). These values contrast sharply with those in the South (45.33) and Isles (37.68), which remain significantly below the national average of 87.15.

Looking at growth over time, the North-West records the most significant increase (+75.42), followed closely by the Center (+74.99) and the North-East (+71.04). These results confirm the long-standing attractiveness of central and northern regions for foreign settlement, likely driven by stronger labour demand, better institutional support, and denser service networks. A more detailed analysis reveals that this growth is particularly concentrated in municipalities classified as Municipality (single) and Type B Municipality (multi), where accessibility and infrastructure are most developed. Municipalities classified as Belt, Intermediate, Remote, and Ultra-remote also show improvements, but to a lesser extent—especially in the Centre and North-East, where foreigner incidence appears to be gradually diffusing along the SNAI territorial gradient. In contrast, the South and the Isles continue to lag behind. Despite experiencing growth in foreign incidence over the 20-year period, their absolute levels remain low. From 2003 to 2023, the South increased from 8.62 to 45.33 per 1,000 (+36.71), and the Isles from 9.01 to 37.68 (+28.67). While these results confirm an upward trend, they remain significantly below the national average and far lower than the levels observed in the North and Centre. This growth, although positive, is insufficient to compensate for the deep-rooted demographic decline that characterises these territories. Foreign presence, in these cases, does not appear to generate a demographic counterbalance capable of offsetting population ageing and structural outmigration. The data suggest that these areas are not only less attractive to foregner popolutions, but also face considerable difficulties in retaining foreign residents over time. Indeed, when disaggregated by the six SNAI municipal classifications, it becomes clear that Ultra-remote, Remote, and Intermediate municipalities in the South and Islands show consistently low levels of foreign incidence.

Table 2 - *Foreigner incidence (FI) by SNAI classification and Geographical area – Years 2003, 2013 and 2023.*

Geographical Area	Classification of Municipalities	FI_2003	FI_2013	FI_2023	Diff. 2023-2003
North-West	A - Municipality (single)	46.11	130.17	149.45	103.34
	B - Municipality (multi)	26.02	89.78	98.16	72.15
	C - Belt	28.75	86.74	91.89	63.14
	D - Intermediate	36.91	97.73	94.92	58.02
	E - Remote	30.73	77.45	74.57	43.84
	F - Ultra remote	14.48	42.82	41.16	26.68
	Total	35.22	101.57	110.67	75.45
North-East	A - Municipality (single)	41.29	123.41	139.23	97.94
	B - Municipality (multi)	34.97	92.63	94.83	59.86
	C - Belt	37.71	95.95	94.22	56.51
	D - Intermediate	38.03	92.76	99.11	61.08
	E - Remote	32.79	74.43	80.83	48.04
	F - Ultra remote	21.83	51.22	65.27	43.44
	Total	38.53	103.5	109.59	71.06
Centre	A - Municipality (single)	36.32	101.12	121.80	85.48
	B - Municipality (multi)	23.77	67.76	80.34	56.57
	C - Belt	29.73	87.09	94.76	65.03
	D - Intermediate	31.53	96.19	100.11	68.59
	E - Remote	30.25	89.53	93.97	63.72
	F - Ultra remote	31.14	82.45	81.41	50.27
	Total	33.07	94.77	108.05	74.99
South	A - Municipality (single)	9.30	35.33	52.68	43.38
	B - Municipality (multi)	7.84	34.41	46.59	38.75
	C - Belt	8.33	31.17	41.41	33.08
	D - Intermediate	8.68	34.34	44.50	35.83
	E - Remote	8.57	34.60	44.72	36.15
	F - Ultra remote	6.47	30.80	38.68	32.20
	Total	8.62	33.33	45.36	36.74
Islands	A - Municipality (single)	13.57	35.50	47.64	34.07
	B - Municipality (multi)	4.92	19.43	30.15	25.22
	C - Belt	7.68	23.15	29.82	22.14
	D - Intermediate	7.56	28.43	38.29	30.73
	E - Remote	5.60	23.86	32.54	26.94
	F - Ultra remote	4.14	14.50	18.89	14.75
	Total	9.01	28.05	37.68	28.67

Source: Our elaboration on municipal Istat data.

Even where growth has occurred, the absolute values remain modest, and the capacity to integrate and retain foreign populations appears constrained. Given these spatially uneven dynamics, it becomes essential to move beyond descriptive statistics and examine whether the growth in foreign population incidence follows spatially structured patterns. To this end, the study applies a Local Indicators of Spatial Association (LISA) approach—specifically the Local Moran's I statistic—to test for the presence of significant territorial clusters (Anselin, 1995). This method

enables the identification of growth trajectories of foreign incidence by differentiating between isolated municipalities and those that belong to statistically coherent spatial clusters of high or low incidence intensity. Before turning to the spatial clustering analysis, it is useful to provide a descriptive overview of the territorial distribution of change in foreign population incidence across Italian municipalities. Figure 1 (left) presents the absolute variation in the number of foreign residents per 1,000 inhabitants between 2003 and 2023, offering a first-level reading of the geography of foreign settlement. The spatial distribution clearly indicates that the most significant increases are concentrated in Northern and Central Italy, particularly along the Po Valley, in Tuscany, and in parts of Umbria, Marche, and Emilia-Romagna. These areas exhibit dark red and orange shades, indicating an increase of more than 100 foreigners per 1,000 residents in several cases. Conversely, Southern regions and the Islands, including vast portions of Calabria, Basilicata, Sardinia, and Sicily, are largely characterised by lighter shades, signifying modest increases or even stagnation in foreign presence. A limited number of municipalities, just 3.6% of the total, primarily in rural areas of the Centre-North—display negative values (shades of blue), indicating a decline in foreign incidence over the 20-year period. However, these are rare and geographically scattered. To test whether these patterns exhibit statistically significant spatial clustering, a Local Moran's I analysis was conducted using an inverse distance spatial weight matrix, where neighbouring municipalities are defined by geographical proximity, with closer municipalities receiving stronger influence and the effect decreasing as distance increases. The analysis was structured at the municipal level, dividing municipalities into five groups:

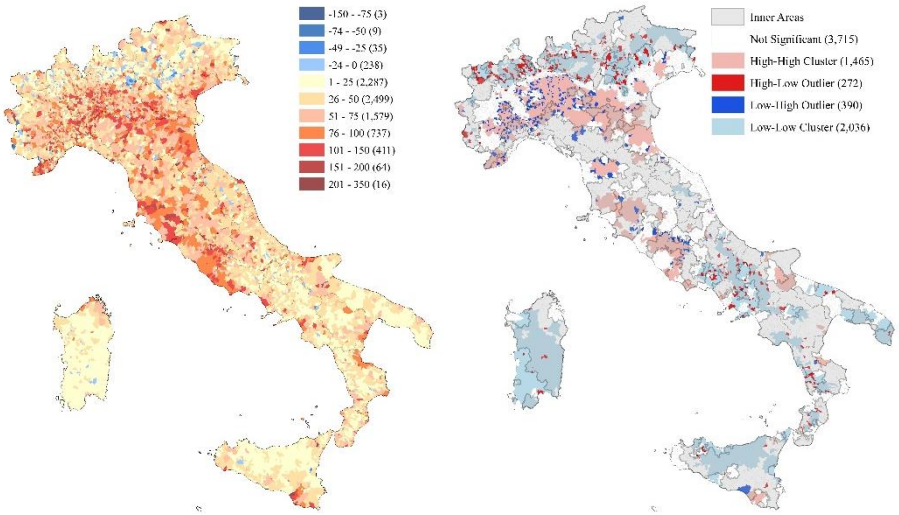
- HH (High–High): Municipalities with high foreign incidence surrounded by municipalities with similarly high values;
- LL (Low–Low): Municipalities with low incidence surrounded by similarly low values;
- HL (High–Low): Municipalities with high foreign incidence surrounded by low-incidence neighbours;
- LH (Low–High): Municipalities with low incidence surrounded by high-incidence neighbours;
- NS (Not Significant): Municipalities with no statistically significant local spatial autocorrelation.

According to the results obtained[3] (Table 3 and Figure 1/right), out of 7,878 Italian municipalities: 1,465 (18.6%) belong to HH clusters, highlighting consolidated areas of high foreign presence. 2,036 (25.8%) fall within LL clusters, reflecting wide zones with uniformly low incidence. 272 (3.5%) and 390 (4.9%) are outlier municipalities

[3] Data processed with ARCGIS 10.8 (See for more details ESRI, 2020).

(HL and LH, respectively), suggesting spatial discontinuities. Almost 47% (3,715 municipalities) show no significant local clustering, indicating a more random distribution or transitional contexts (see at the Italy row profile at the bottom of the Table 3).

Figure 1 – *(Left)* Territorial distribution of the variation in foreign population incidence (2003–2023); (Right) Spatial clusters of change in foreign incidence detected through Local Moran's I.*



**Foreign residents per 1,000 inhabitants (value classes).*

The spatial visualization of the clusters confirms these findings (Figure 1/right). Municipalities marked in pink (HH) show concentrated high foreign incidence, primarily located in Northern and Central Italy—especially in productive districts and urban fringes. Conversely, municipalities marked in light blue (LL) dominate the South and the Islands, underlining the persistent exclusion of these territories from foreign settlement dynamics. Red (HL) and blue (LH) identify spatial outliers, often located at the interface between areas of differing dynamics, such as peri-urban belts or administrative borders. These patterns confirm that foreign migration in Italy is not territorially neutral. While foreign presence has expanded overall, it has done so unevenly, reinforcing certain territorial divides. The spatial concentration of high-incidence areas in the North and low-incidence areas in the South likely reflects broader socio-economic and infrastructural disparities. A more detailed analysis of Table 3 highlights pronounced territorial disparities in the distribution and concentration of foreign presence between geographical areas. In the North-West,

HH clusters dominate among Type A (50.0%), Type B (39.3%), and Belt (34.0%) municipalities. Even Intermediate (26.9%) and Remote (13.0%) municipalities register relevant shares of HH. Clustering indicates that foreign demographic growth extends beyond core urban centres, diffusing along functional corridors.

Table 3 - *Percentage distribution of municipalities by spatial clustering type and SNAI classification, disaggregated by geographical area*.

Geo. area	SNAI classification	HH (%)	HL (%)	LH (%)	LL (%)	NS (%)	Total (%)
North-West	A - Municipality	50.0	10.4	0.0	0.0	39.6	100
	B - Municipality	39.3	7.1	0.0	7.1	46.4	100
	C - Belt	34.0	2.6	11.8	12.8	38.8	100
	D - Intermediate	26.9	7.1	8.4	19.3	38.2	100
	E - Remote	13.0	5.6	6.5	35.7	39.2	100
	F - Ultra remote	0.0	7.7	0.0	49.2	43.1	100
	Total	29.8	4.1	9.9	17.3	38.9	100
North-East	A - Municipality	37.0	15.2	0.0	2.2	45.7	100
	B - Municipality	22.2	11.1	0.0	22.2	44.4	100
	C - Belt	28.9	1.8	3.6	17.5	48.2	100
	D - Intermediate	19.9	3.3	2.2	31.0	43.5	100
	E - Remote	3.4	6.3	1.7	30.8	57.8	100
	F - Ultra remote	0.0	0.0	1.5	22.7	75.8	100
	Total	21.6	3.3	2.7	22.2	50.1	100
Centre	A - Municipality	18.4	2.6	0.0	0.0	78.9	100
	B - Municipality	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100
	C - Belt	23.4	1.3	4.6	7.1	63.7	100
	D - Intermediate	26.0	0.3	5.0	8.8	59.9	100
	E - Remote	26.3	0.0	5.3	1.1	67.4	100
	F - Ultra remote	5.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	94.1	100
	Total	24.2	0.7	4.6	6.0	64.5	100
South	A - Municipality	3.1	9.4	0.0	28.1	59.4	100
	B - Municipality	8.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	91.7	100
	C - Belt	1.7	5.4	0.3	43.6	49.0	100
	D - Intermediate	3.9	5.1	0.8	34.1	56.1	100
	E - Remote	0.6	3.3	0.4	30.1	65.6	100
	F - Ultra remote	0.0	4.2	0.0	32.9	62.9	100
	Total	2.0	4.7	0.4	35.8	57.2	100
Islands	A - Municipality	5.6	5.6	0.0	44.4	44.4	100
	B - Municipality	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	100
	C - Belt	1.2	1.2	0.0	71.8	25.9	100
	D - Intermediate	1.4	1.4	0.0	68.0	29.3	100
	E - Remote	0.4	1.5	0.8	64.4	33.0	100
	F - Ultra remote	0.0	2.4	0.0	78.0	19.5	100
	Total	0.9	1.6	0.3	68.0	29.2	100
Italy	*Total*	*18.6*	*3.5*	*4.9*	*25.8*	*47.2*	*100*

Source: Our elaboration on municipal Istat data.

However, Ultra-remote municipalities are excluded (0.0% HH; 49.2% LL), highlighting spatial thresholds beyond which migration does not penetrate. The North-East presents a more fragmented structure. HH clusters are frequent in Type A (37.0%) and Belt (28.9%) municipalities, but their incidence drops sharply in more

marginal areas—only 3.4% in Remote and 0.0% in Ultra-remote municipalities. LL clustering increases correspondingly with remoteness, with over 30% of Type D, E, and F municipalities in this region falling into the LL category. These findings suggest a strong association between accessibility and foreign incidence, with IA largely bypassed by foreign settlement. In the Centre, HH clustering is moderate across all typologies, peaking at around 26% in Intermediate and Remote municipalities. Notably, these figures represent some of the highest HH shares among IA nationally, indicating that foreign presence in Central Italy has begun to diffuse more evenly, even into less accessible territories. However, this trend is tempered by the high prevalence of NS classifications—reaching 100% in Type B and 94.1% in Ultra-remote municipalities—suggesting that settlement patterns remain statistically fragmented or transitional. The South and Islands exhibit a marked prevalence of Low–Low (LL) clustering, which reflects a spatially widespread low incidence of foreign population growth. HH clusters remain marginal—accounting for only 2.0% of municipalities in the South and 0.9% in the Islands—and are virtually absent in more peripheral areas. Conversely, LL clusters dominate across SNAI typologies in these regions: more than 30% of all municipalities in the South fall into this category, reaching 43.6% in Belt areas and over 68% in Type C and D municipalities of the Islands. This pattern suggests not necessarily a process of demographic erosion, but rather a stable and diffuse condition of low foreign incidence, where the presence of immigrants has not expanded substantially nor has it clustered territorially in significant ways. The NS category, which signals the absence of statistically significant spatial clustering, remains highly prevalent in the South (57.2%) and the Islands (29.2%). In Southern and Insular regions this non-clustered incidence often coexists with widespread LL clusters, indicating a diffuse and persistent condition of low foreign incidence. This spatial configuration reinforces the interpretation of demographic stagnation, particularly in the most marginal IA.

4. Final remarks

This paper has examined the territorial dynamics of foreign population settlement in Italy over the last two decades, with a specific focus on the classification of municipalities defined by the SNAI framework. While the overall incidence of foreign residents has increased significantly across the country, the analysis confirms that such growth has not occurred evenly. The North and Centre particularly in service-rich municipalities (Types A and B) have consolidated as key destinations for the foreign population, forming statistically significant High–High clusters that reflect spatial cohesion and demographic reinforcement. In contrast, the South and

the Islands remain characterised by Low–Low clusters and widespread absence of spatial clustering, particularly in Intermediate, Remote, and Ultra-remote areas. These results point to a persistent mismatch between territorial need and foregner contribution: areas most vulnerable to depopulation and demographic ageing continue to attract fewer foreign populations. The present analysis underscores the importance of adopting a territorial scale of interpretation, in which migration is not treated as a uniform process, but rather as a phenomenon shaped by accessibility, service availability. In this respect, the SNAI classification proves particularly useful in revealing these structural disparities, showing how foreign presence tends to concentrate in already functional areas.

From a policy perspective, this also suggests that interventions should focus on improving infrastructure and transport accessibility, strengthening labour market integration in agriculture and local services, and promoting inclusive strategies in education and welfare. Such measures could help align foreign settlement with the demographic needs of the most fragile IA. While this analysis provides insights into the spatial dynamics of foreign settlement, future research should move beyond aggregate measures and examine specific communities, shaped by differentiated labour markets and networks (Conti et al., 2022). On the other hand future research should go beyond the descriptive level to incorporate explanatory models. It should also incorporate explanatory models, analysing foreign incidence as a function of distance from service centres and other socio-economic predictors. This would allow a more robust understanding of territorial drivers and provide a stronger basis for social policy design.

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