# YOUNG ADULTS RESIDENT IN ITALY:
## A LOCAL-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF
## CHARACTERISTICS AND DEMO-SOCIAL WEAKNESS

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**Abstract.** Some territories in Italy have experienced a persistent population loss in recent decades. The decline, due to reduced births and emigration, has contributed to population ageing and depopulation in many areas. Italy is experiencing *dejuvenation* (*degiovanimento*) due to the decrease of young people, too. The study focuses on young adults (25-49 years). The aim is to highlight the differences across Italy when the focus is placed on the local level, by a synthetic index to measure the level of 'demo-social weakness of municipalities (for young adults)'. Five demographic and socio-economic indicators on young adults resident in Italian municipalities are calculated. For each municipality, indicators are compared to the respective national values through the location quotients (LQ). From the combination of the LQ values, criticality profiles are identified and finally summarised in a single measure. The LQs and the synthetic index are represented on maps to allow for visual assessment and highlight territorial disparities. Other geographical peculiarities are included in the analysis to investigate which types of municipalities present more critical elements in the index of demo-social weakness of young adults in Italy. The results show that criticality is not solely linked to belonging to a geographical area or spatial peripherality: despite the presence of services, some municipalities are not immune to criticality, while others, even without essential services, show a positive demographic and social situation, suggesting the influence of factors other than distance from services alone.
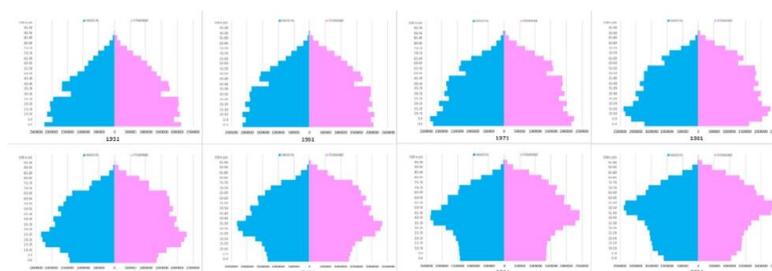
## 1. Introduction

Demographically, Italy presents differentiated situations with territories that have experienced a persistent population loss in recent decades. The population structure in Italy has changed significantly over the last 70 years as shown by the age-sex pyramids starting from the first post-war census (Figure 1).

In 1951, the resident population stood at 47,515,537, rising to 59,030,133 by 2021. The all-time peak was reached in 2014, with approximately 60,346,000 residents, followed by a gradual and steady decline. An analysis of the population divided into four broad age groups shows that, at the 1951 census, the under-25s were just less than half the population, while at the 2021 census they represent just over one in five; conversely, people aged 65 and over represented less than one in ten in 1951, whereas in 2021 they are approximately one in four inhabitants. There

is also an increasing weight of adults (50-64 years) and a not insignificant decrease of young adults (25-49 years) (Istat, 2023).

**Figure 1 -** *Age-sex pyramids, Censuses from 1951 to 2021.*

The work focuses on individuals aged 25 to 49, referred to as '*young adults*' and presents a proposal to measure the level of 'demo-social weakness of municipalities (for young adults)'. After an overview of the demographic context of the analysis (Section 2), the data used, the method of analysis and synthesis are illustrated (Section 3), the main results are presented (Section 4) and the conclusions and future prospects are outlined (Section 5).

## 2.  Factors and consequences of demographic change and decline in Italy

Ageing and depopulation are rapidly accelerating phenomena that are set to define global demographics for the rest of the 21st century. The general trend is characterised by an increase in the elderly population and a simultaneous reduction in the working-age labour force (Ljunggren, 2024). Japan is the country with the highest proportion of elderly people globally. However, Europe is projected to become the first continent to experience demographic decline, with significant challenges due to low and decreasing birth rates, limited or negative net migration, rapid ageing and a shrinking workforce. Depopulation occurred mainly in Eastern and Southern Europe in the 2010s, and these areas are expected to experience the sharpest demographic declines between 2023 and 2050 (Majdzińska, 2024; Newsham, Rowe, 2022; Pinkus, Ruer, 2025). Also in Italy, a combination of demographic and migratory dynamics is shaping population trends. One major factor is the shrinking size of new generations, a process called 'ageing from below' - a structural shift resulting from fewer births. This led to a broader phenomenon of *dejuvenation*, the gradual reduction in the younger population (Rosina, 2008). Migration flows play a key role, too. Internal migration continues predominantly in a South-to-North direction, especially towards medium to large urban centres that offer better opportunities for education, employment, and overall quality of life. Since the mid-1990s, foreign immigration has helped slow population decline and

ageing in some territories, partially counteracting the negative natural dynamics of the native population. However, these inflows have diminished over the past years and remain concentrated in regions more economically active. Meanwhile, emigration has resumed in recent years; in 2024 the number of individuals leaving the country reached 191,000 people -up 20.5% from the previous year- including over 156,000 Italian citizens (Istat, 2025).

Depopulation and ageing show substantial spatial heterogeneity at the local level. The emigration of young people is a particularly critical factor accelerating depopulation and ageing in rural areas. Depopulation is not limited to rural areas but occurs along the entire rural-urban continuum. Rural and intermediate areas far from large urban centres are proving to be the most vulnerable, with small and medium-sized rural areas being the main driver of accelerating demographic decline in Europe (Newsham, Rowe, 2025). In Italy many areas have given up population to other territories or abroad. Internal and international migration by young adults towards more attractive places has led to the abandonment of municipalities of smaller demographic size, rural, and mountainous areas, intensifying in these territories the processes of *dejuvenation* and population ageing and increasing spatial inequality for those who remain in declining areas. The future perspectives are even worse: if current trends persist, ageing and depopulation will increase especially in marginal zones that will become more and more disadvantaged.

The analysis focuses on young adults, the demographic and economic backbone of society. At that stage of life, they are generally expected to have completed their education, to be active in the labour market, and to have settled in a place chosen as residence. An index is proposed to measure the level of demo-social weakness of municipalities for young adults, i.e. the demo-social weakness with regard to young adults on a municipal basis, obtained as a synthesis of some characteristics of young adults resident in Italian municipalities. The aim is to highlight territorial disparities in Italy by analysing the local level. When considering municipalities separately, peculiarities emerge that might be overlooked when observing broader portions of territory (Quondamstefano, Verrascina, 2024). Five indicators are calculated to describe demographic and socio-economic characteristics of young adults. For each municipality, indicators are compared to the respective national values through the location quotients (LQ). Then, criticality profiles are identified from the combination of the LQ values, and finally summarised in a synthetic index. These steps are explained in detail in the next section.

## 3. Data, method of analysis and synthesis

### 3.1. *Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of young adults*

The data used for the analysis come from the 2021 Permanent Census of Population and Housing, open data available online, which provides annual results

at municipal level, allowing for a detailed understanding of local dynamics. To assess the situation of young adults, five non-redundant indicators are calculated.

A. *Population aged 25-49 (%)* - ratio of the population aged 25-49 to the total resident population per 100 inhabitants. A low share of this group may signal the onset of demographic fragility.

B. *Ratio of the population aged 65 and over to the population aged 25-49 (%)* - ratio of the population aged 65 and over to the population aged 25-49 per 100 inhabitants. It reflects the generational balance by indicating how many older individuals exist for every 100 young adults. A high value points to a demographic imbalance and potential dependency issues.

C. *Population aged 25-49 with high educational level (%)* - ratio of population aged 25-49 with high educational level[1] to population aged 25-49 per 100 inhabitants. It refers to the share of young adults who have attained a tertiary education qualification, reflecting the human capital available in a given area.

D. *Employment rate of population aged 25-49 (%)* - ratio of employed persons aged 25-49 to the population of the same age group per 100 inhabitants. It measures labour market integration, showing where there are greater employment difficulties for young adults.

E. *Population aged 25-49 with no income or who are homemakers (%)* - ratio of the population aged 25-49 with no income or who are homemakers to the total population of the same age group per 100 inhabitants. It identifies, among people classified as 'Non-labour force', young adults who do not receive one or more pensions as a result of previous employment or capital income, are homemakers, are not students.

### 3.2. Method of analysis

A multidimensional phenomenon cannot be investigated through a single descriptive indicator. The synthetic index methodology in statistics is a technique used to summarise information of several variables into a sole indicator. This approach is particularly useful when it is necessary to condense a large amount of data into a more manageable and interpretable form. Synthetic indices are widely used in many disciplines to measure complex because multidimensional phenomena. They can be used as tools to identify more exposed territories, and as an aid to suggest to decision-makers an order of priority for intervention. The construction of a synthetic index requires several steps (Mazziotta, Pareto, 2024). The phenomenon to be measured with the index must be clearly defined and variables that best represent the phenomenon under investigation must be chosen. After identifying the

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[1] High educational level: tertiary education (ITS higher technical diploma, tertiary first and second degree and PhD).

variables, data must be normalised to ensure comparability and the polarity (positive or negative), i.e. the sign of the relationship between the indicator and the phenomenon, must be identified. Then the normalised indicators can be aggregated into a single synthetic index. In this study, indicators are normalised through the calculation of location quotients. The location quotient (LQ), a ratio of ratios, is a widely known geographic index. It is used to measure and map relative distributions or relative concentrations of a character in a subarea (in this case municipality) compared to the area as a whole (Italy). The location quotient is an index of local concentration that varies around 1, obtained as the ratio of the indicator value of each municipality to the national value. The LQs allow to identify the spatial units in which a phenomenon is under-represented (LQ<1) or conversely, over-represented (LQ>1) compared to the phenomenon on a national basis (Verrascina et al., 2024; Benassi et al., 2022). When LQ<1 the extent of the phenomenon on a municipal scale is smaller than on a national scale (phenomenon less present in the area); if LQ=1 the extent of the phenomenon on a municipal scale is in line with the national one and when LQ>1 the extent of the phenomenon on a municipal scale is greater than on a national scale (phenomenon more concentrated in the area). The LQ normalises the data with respect to the overall structure and eliminates differences in scale or population, making different territorial areas comparable (a small municipality with a high LQ for an indicator may reveal a significant local concentration of a phenomenon even if the absolute number of cases is low). The method has been applied in several studies when using data for small areas. For instance, LQs are applied to analyse the concentration of different foreign groups in the enumeration areas of an Italian city (Borruso, 2008); to measure the local concentration of foreigners compared to Italians, providing a concise and easily interpretable measure of territorial concentration (Istat, 2024). LQs are also used to measure territorial production specialisation in economic sectors to compare the concentration of employees in a sector in an area vs the national value, helping to identify poles of excellence or areas of production weakness (Istat, 2007).

In order to make the location quotients (LQ) comparable with each other and establish uniform interpretation classes (not distorted by the individual statistical distributions of each indicator), a fixed threshold classification is chosen. This methodological choice is based on a standardised analytical approach that derives consistently from the conceptual nature of the LQ. Thus, the classes are defined with intervals of 0.5 around the reference value (LQ=1, i.e. the national value):

- LQ < 0.5: Strong under-representation: municipalities with a situation of severe shortage.
- $0.5 \leq LQ < 1.0$: Moderate under-representation: municipalities that do not reach the national value but with less severity than the previous class.

- 1.0 ≤ LQ < 1.5: Standard representation/slight over-representation: municipalities in line with the national value or with slight over-representation.
- 1.5 ≤ LQ < 2.0: Substantial over-representation: municipalities with a significant concentration.
- LQ ≥2.0: Extreme over-representation: municipalities with an exceptional concentration.

For indicators *Population aged 25-49* and *Employment rate of population aged 25-49*, the LQ values do not exceed the threshold of 1.5, meaning there are no cases of substantial or extreme concentration. For *Population aged 25-49 with high educational level*, more than 3 out of 4 municipalities are in the Moderate under-representation class, corresponding to 57.4% of the resident population. However, there are also a few cases of municipalities showing a concentration of young adults with a high educational level (0.7% of municipalities and 6.0% of the population). *Ratio of the population aged 65 and over to the population aged 25-49* and *Population aged 25-49 with no income or who are homemakers*, conversely, have opposite trends since they are indicators with negative polarity: extreme over-representation (LQ≥2.0) indicates very critical situations. Although a large number (more than 1,100) of municipalities fall into these high-criticality categories, they correspond to a low proportion of population residing there. In general, the distribution of municipalities is often different from that of the resident population, as many municipalities have a relatively small population.

Location quotients are usually represented visually on maps to allow for a deeper understanding of territorial distributions and disparities and to facilitate their interpretation. By highlighting areas where a phenomenon is either over- or under-represented, the LQ is particularly effective in identifying situations of potential or specific local criticality. By using colour gradients - typically red for areas where the indicator is significantly worse than the national value (signalling a critical condition), and green for areas performing better than the national figure - one can quickly assess where issues are more or less intense (Figure 2).

**Figure 2** - *Maps of location quotients for the considered indicators.*
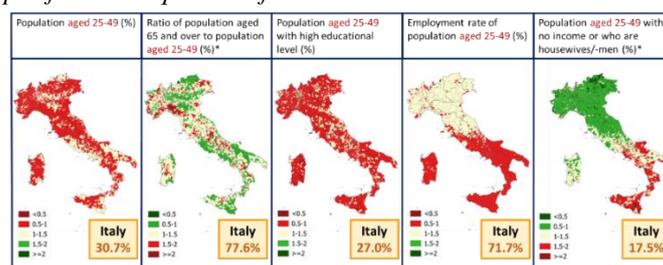


*Source: Istat, Permanent Population Census 2021.*
*\* Indicators with negative polarity.*

Compared to the other indicators where criticality occurs when LQ<1, for *Ratio of population aged 65 and over to population aged 25-49* and *Population aged 25-49 with no income or who are homemakers* criticality occurs if LQ>1. Thus, municipalities with a ratio of elderly to young adults and municipalities with an incidence of young adults without income or homemakers higher than the national figure are shown in red.

### 3.3. Method of synthesis

For each location quotient, based on the value of the LQs themselves, criticality levels are defined, which identify the potential criticality levels for each socio-demographic characteristic of young adults considered. Specifically: Criticality level 0 - no critical elements; Criticality level 1 - LQ value in line with the national value or slightly deviating; Criticality level 2 - significantly divergent LQ value. By counting the frequency with which each Criticality level (0, 1, 2) occurs, combinations of levels are constructed. The combinations identify Criticality profiles then summarised in a synthetic index. The Criticality profiles (i.e. the combinations of Criticality levels) are reclassified for the single index of demographic and social weakness of municipalities (for young adults) and are assigned values between 0 ('no criticality') and 5 ('very high criticality') (Table 1).

**Table 1** - *Index of demo-social weakness of municipalities (for young adults).*

| Nr of Criticality level 0 | Nr of Criticality level 1 | Nr of Criticality level 2 | Criticality profiles (Combination of number of Criticality level) | Index | | Nr of municipalities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | value | description | |
| 3 | 2 | 0 | all criticality level 0 or 1 (no criticality level 2) | 0 | no criticality | 154 |
| 2 | 3 | 0 | | | | |
| 1 | 4 | 0 | 1 criticality level 2 or 4-5 criticality level 1 | 1 | low criticality | 1861 |
| 0 | 5 | 0 | | | | |
| 3 | 1 | 1 | | | | |
| 2 | 2 | 1 | | | | |
| 1 | 3 | 1 | | | | |
| 0 | 4 | 1 | 2 criticality level 2 or 4 criticality level 1 & 1 criticality level 2 | 2 | medium-low criticality | 2738 |
| 3 | 0 | 2 | | | | |
| 2 | 1 | 2 | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 2 | | | | |
| 0 | 3 | 2 | 3 criticality level 2 or 3 criticality level 1 & 2 criticality level 2 | 3 | medium-high criticality | 1478 |
| 2 | 0 | 3 | | | | |
| 1 | 1 | 3 | | | | |
| 0 | 2 | 3 | 4 criticality level 2 or 2 criticality level 1 & 3 criticality level 2 | 4 | high criticality | 899 |
| 1 | 0 | 4 | | | | |
| 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 criticality level 2 or 1 criticality level 1 & 4 criticality level 2 | 5 | very high criticality | 774 |
| 0 | 0 | 5 | | | | |

The synthetic index provides a clear and concise summary of the overall demo-social vulnerability of young adults at municipal level, and also shows how municipalities are distributed across each class.

### 3.4. Territorial/geographical characteristics of municipalities

When the focus is on the local level, it is useful to include in the analysis some geographical peculiarities that help to better highlight the similarities and differences among Italian municipalities and, in this case, to investigate whether there are types of municipalities that present more critical elements in the index on the level of

demo-social weakness for young adults in Italy. Analysing demographic and socio-economic aspects relating to the population, the disadvantage experienced by some territories due to the lack of citizenship services cannot be ignored. The abandonment of municipalities on the margin (especially by young people) occurs in favour of those with more services or easier access to some services (Carrosio, Faccini, 2020).

The classification of the Italian territory, based on the geography of Inner Areas, assigns municipalities to categories according to the availability and accessibility of specific essential services (namely mobility, education, and health), or the proximity to such services. The remaining municipalities are designated as Inner Areas (Dipartimento per lo sviluppo e la coesione economica, 2014). Thus, Inner Areas are territories in the country that are further away from the centres offering the three types of services. The distance to the supply of essential services is calculated in terms of road travel time; as travel time increases, so does the potential difficulty of accessing services. Municipalities are divided into six groups (types): Pole, Intermunicipal Pole, Belt, Intermediate, Peripheral, Ultraperipheral[2] (Istat, 2022). For this work, municipalities were grouped into three classes: 'Centre Areas' (Pole, Intermunicipal Pole and Belt municipalities), 'Intermediate Municipalities' and 'Peripheral and Ultraperipheral Municipalities' (the last two groups).

Supplementary geographical characteristics are integrated into the analysis: Altitude zone[3], Degree of urbanisation[4] and Demographic size of municipalities. This allows to identify which types of municipalities demonstrate greater criticality according to Index of demo-social weakness (for young adults).

## 4. Main results

The situation of Italian municipalities according to the index is shown on maps (Figure 3). Municipalities with no critical issues or with a low level of critical issues are highlighted in dark green. As the intensity of the green colour becomes lighter, the phenomenon increases in intensity, until it turns into to shades of red. The darker the red colour, the higher the criticality level of those municipalities.

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[2] Centre Areas: 'Pole' and 'Intermunicipal Pole' - all three services present; 'Belt' - distance to the nearest pole less than 27 minutes. Inner Areas (municipalities with higher travel times): 'Intermediate' - between 27 and 41 minutes; 'Peripheral' - between 41 and 67 minutes; 'Ultraperipheral' - over 67 minutes.

[3] Altitude zone derives from the division of the national territory into homogeneous zones resulting from the aggregation of contiguous municipalities on the basis of altimetric threshold values. The classification includes: Plain, Coastal Hill, Inland Hill, Coastal Mountain and Inland Mountain (Eurostat, 2019).

[4] Degree of urbanisation is an international classification that indicates the character of an area. Based on the share of the local population living in urban clusters and urban centres, it classifies Local Administrative Units (LAU or municipalities) into three types of area: Cities (densely populated areas), Towns and suburbs (intermediate density areas), Rural areas (thinly populated areas) (Eurostat, 2019).

An initial analysis of the 'Italy' map reveals a predominance of the colour red in the South and the Islands, indicating municipalities with high levels of criticality, highlighting a demo-social weakness for young adults. However, there are areas in the Northern and Central Italy (around Liguria, Tuscany) with red spots, as well as areas in the South (between Apulia and Basilicata) that are greener than the surrounding areas.

**Figure 3 -** *Index of demo-social weakness (for young adults), Italy and Inner Areas.*
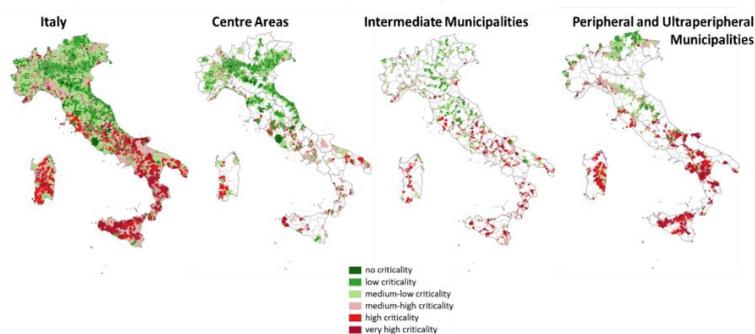


*Source: Istat, Permanent Population Census 2021.*

The synthetic index has also been broken down into three maps according to the type of area to which the municipalities belong. Comparing the first and the last, even in the Centre Areas, which have services and should be less penalised, there are red spots, i.e. not all municipalities are completely free of criticality profiles. In contrast, in the more peripheral areas, there are territories in the North where the situation is not bad, even though these municipalities do not have essential services close by. This means that belonging to an Inner Area is not necessarily further penalising; there are other elements that come into play.

The index makes it possible to distinguish, among the Inner Areas, those most at risk, and among the Centre Areas those municipalities that nevertheless present critical profiles. At the same time, the index allows to immediately trace among the municipalities most exposed those that, falling in a peripheral or ultra-peripheral area, present more serious criticalities and require more urgent interventions.

After displaying the index for Inner Areas on maps, the distribution of municipalities and resident population classified according to the values of the synthetic indicator for the geographical/territorial characteristics introduced in the previous section is shown in Table 2. As expected, the most penalised municipalities are those in inland hills and inland mountains, those belonging to rural areas with low population density, and the very small municipalities, which are the majority in Italy (5,533 out of 7,904).

**Table 2** - *Index for Altitude zone, Degree of urbanisation and Demographic size - number of municipalities and resident population, percentage value.*

| Altitude zone | Nr of municipalities | | | | | | | | Resident population | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Index value | Total (AV) | Total (%) | no criticality | low criticality | medium-low criticality | medium-high criticality | high criticality | very high criticality | Total (AV) | Total (%) | no criticality | low criticality | medium-low criticality | medium-high criticality | high criticality | very high criticality |
| Plain | 2,099 | 26.6 | 45.5 | 44.0 | 28.4 | 18.5 | 12.2 | 6.5 | 29,026,699 | 49.2 | 81.5 | 52.4 | 41.6 | 41.5 | 26.3 | 34.4 |
| Coastal hill | 785 | 9.9 | 10.4 | 7.1 | 6.4 | 13.4 | 16.6 | 14.7 | 9,147,809 | 15.5 | 3.6 | 11.1 | 12.9 | 31.6 | 23.0 | 17.2 |
| Inland hill | 2,533 | 32.0 | 27.3 | 28.3 | 32.9 | 28.9 | 37.0 | 39.0 | 13,699,210 | 23.2 | 11.1 | 25.9 | 29.5 | 16.3 | 25.7 | 28.2 |
| Coastal mountain | 117 | 1.5 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.7 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 4.9 | 1,330,452 | 2.3 | 0.0 | 2.7 | 1.1 | 2.0 | 9.0 | 3.8 |
| Inland mountain | 2,370 | 30.0 | 16.9 | 20.5 | 31.6 | 36.7 | 31.7 | 34.2 | 5,825,963 | 9.9 | 3.8 | 7.9 | 14.9 | 8.6 | 13.7 | 16.4 |
| *Italy* | *7,904* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *59,030,133* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* |

| Degree of urbanisation | Nr of municipalities | | | | | | | | Resident population | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Index value | Total (AV) | Total (%) | no criticality | low criticality | medium-low criticality | medium-high criticality | high criticality | very high criticality | Total (AV) | Total (%) | no criticality | low criticality | medium-low criticality | medium-high criticality | high criticality | very high criticality |
| Cities (densely populated areas) | 256 | 3.2 | 18.2 | 5.1 | 1.6 | 5.5 | 0.8 | 0.3 | 20,757,460 | 35.2 | 82.1 | 36.3 | 11.9 | 43.1 | 15.6 | 13.0 |
| Towns and suburbs (intermediate density areas) | 2,608 | 33.0 | 60.4 | 52.6 | 34.1 | 25.2 | 16.6 | 10.2 | 28,230,065 | 47.8 | 16.3 | 53.5 | 61.0 | 42.8 | 44.6 | 37.5 |
| Rural areas (thinly populated areas) | 5,040 | 63.8 | 21.4 | 42.3 | 64.2 | 69.3 | 82.6 | 89.6 | 10,042,608 | 17.0 | 1.6 | 10.2 | 27.2 | 14.1 | 39.8 | 49.5 |
| *Italy* | *7,904* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *59,030,133* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* |

| Demographic size | Nr of municipalities | | | | | | | | Resident population | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Index value | Total (AV) | Total (%) | no criticality | low criticality | medium-low criticality | medium-high criticality | high criticality | very high criticality | Total (AV) | Total (%) | no criticality | low criticality | medium-low criticality | medium-high criticality | high criticality | very high criticality |
| Up to 5.000 | 5,533 | 70.0 | 34.4 | 53.7 | 71.7 | 71.6 | 84.3 | 90.8 | 9,764,093 | 16.5 | 2.0 | 25.9 | 13.0 | 36.7 | 45.1 | 48.6 |
| 5.001-50.000 | 2,231 | 28.2 | 58.4 | 43.0 | 27.4 | 26.0 | 15.1 | 8.9 | 29,116,580 | 49.3 | 21.0 | 52.5 | 61.6 | 48.0 | 40.7 | 34.1 |
| 50.001-100.000 | 96 | 1.2 | 2.6 | 2.0 | 0.8 | 1.9 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 6,490,006 | 11.0 | 4.0 | 12.5 | 9.8 | 15.6 | 7.5 | 7.2 |
| 100.000 and more | 44 | 0.6 | 4.5 | 1.3 | 0.1 | 0.5 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 13,659,454 | 23.1 | 73.0 | 24.3 | 2.7 | 23.3 | 6.8 | 10.0 |
| *Italy* | *7,904* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *59,030,133* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* | *100.0* |

## 5. Conclusions and future perspectives

The analysis carried out reveals a context in Italy for young adults that goes beyond the geographical position of the municipalities in which they reside. Situations of criticality and disadvantage are scattered over the territory: in the North and in the South, in the mountains and in the plains, in rural and in urban areas, in Centre Areas and in Inner Areas. While much discussion revolves around declining birth rates and ageing population, attention should also be paid to the critical age group of young adults, otherwise Italy really risks losing its 'demographic future'.

The depopulation of the territory, when associated with the ageing of the population living there, represents a major challenge for the society, economy and politics of the future. But public policies and measures should be wide-ranging. It would be necessary to secure those groups of the population able to procreate (before encouraging the birth rate), counter the demographic decline of young people and slow down the *dejuvenation* of the population resident in Italy, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in order to restart development and growth (Rosina, 2023). Furthermore, it would be necessary to invest in training of young people and facilitate their integration into the labour market, find ways to attract and retain young people, both Italians and foreigners (Dalla Zuanna, 2023). Promoting immigration could help achieve some objectives thanks to the arrival of active population with higher fertility levels than those recorded in Italy. If the imbalances between generations increase, already vulnerable territories will become increasingly fragile.

Other actions should be put in place to counter the depopulation and abandonment of some territories. Villages and small towns should be revitalised and revived by providing them with adequate services (schools, social and health services, transport, internet network). Choices to leave or to stay could be linked to these aspects. There are several elements to be considered in order to achieve this objective: attracting people (even from other countries) (Licursi, 2024), reducing the need to leave (those

who leave their place of origin usually go to centres that provide essential services, job opportunities and the possibility of better living conditions and quality of life), encouraging the return of young people who have left to their places of origin, and facilitating the 'restance' (restanza) according to the concept defined by the anthropologist Vito Teti. Sabina Licursi said 'A young person who stays is the prerequisite for another to decide not to leave and perhaps for yet another to arrive' (Elia, 2022). Indeed, there are cases of trend reverse, emerged or accelerated during the period of the pandemic: young people went to or returned to the inland zones, families moved from cities to villages, perceived as places with a higher environmental quality, in search of slower lifestyles.

This work is a preliminary analysis to shed light on young adults. More generally, it is a possible method of contextual analysis of the demographic and socio-economic changes of the resident population in Italy. It will be possible to improve the analysis thanks to the use of the Population and Housing Permanent Census results. With such a fine territorial detail and annual dissemination, they allow to analyse the evolution of phenomena, to identify sub-populations or territories that are particularly vulnerable or in difficulty, and to help policy-makers planning specific local policies and monitoring their progress. It will be possible to calculate the synthetic index both for the pre-pandemic years and in the years to come in order to identify trends and territories that need to be monitored so that policy-makers can implement policies to counter the *dejuvenation* phenomenon.

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