

Italy

- National policies that address demographic change in Italy fall in three main areas: Welfare system aspects, lifelong learning, and labour market participation.
- Many surveys touch upon the issue of population ageing but, at present, there appears no large-scale research or data collection specifically targeting the older population.
- Insufficient data exists on gender, migration and regional demographic change.



1. Demographic context

With 12 per cent of the over 500 million residents in the European Union, Italy is the fourth-largest country based on population. In 2012, the total resident population of Italy was 59.4 million, of which about 51.6 per cent were females and 48.4 per cent were males.

Italy is among the countries with a very low fertility rate. In 2011, it stood at 1.39 children per woman, i.e. below the replacement level, and it continues to decrease. The mean age at childbearing has been on the rise, reaching 31.3 years. Average life expectancy is just above 84 years for Italian women and 79 years for men, putting Italy at the top of the EU. Life expectancy at the age of 50 is about 35 years for women and 31 years for men. In terms of the Healthy Life Years Index (HLY), a baby girl born in 2010 was projected to have 56.4 healthy years and a baby boy born 59.2 healthy years respectively. Hence, women will have a longer life, but they are more likely to suffer from disease at older age.

In May 2013, an estimated number of 22.6 million people was employed. The respective employment rate was 56 per cent, the unemployment rate was 12 per cent and the inactivity rate was 36 per cent. In terms of retirement, as of 1 January 2012, the retirement benefits are calculated on a contribution-based system. In par-

allel, the statutory retirement age increased from 65 to 66 years for men and from 60 to 62 years for women. Regarding health and living conditions, since 2010, Italy has promoted an initiative for the measurement of “equitable and sustainable well-being”. The project aims at developing a multi-dimensional approach to wellbeing, which covers health, social, economic, and environmental factors.

2. Demographic change and policy concerns

These demographic changes will have significant social and economic repercussions for Sweden, and will influence taxpayers’ willingness to contribute to growing needs in the ageing care sector, including for improved communication, transport, and social services. The challenge of increasing productivity is being addressed in a number of ways. First, there is a permanent and growing demand for more efficient production systems and the development of value chains in both the public and the private sectors. Second, it is essential to mobilise the Swedish workforce and to increase the number of hours or years worked. Third, the government has started a policy debate on the options for working longer and for promoting job retention up to the year of formal retirement.

The Swedish pension system is currently being reviewed and debated by policymakers. In March 2011, the government appointed a commission called the “Retirement Age Inquiry” to analyse the pension-related age limits and to investigate any possible obstacles to an extension of working life.

The initiative’s interim report showed that working conditions needed to be better accommodate older workers’ needs, rules of the national public pension and occupational pensions systems needed to be revised to facilitate longer working lives. Government agencies, employers and the social partners need to change their attitudes towards employing older workers.

3. Data sources

General issues

The main producer of official statistics is the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat). There are many more national, regional and local agencies that collect data, such as the Consiglio Nazionale dell’Economia e del Lavoro (National Council for Economy and Work); the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (National Research Council), and the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (National Health Institute). Almost all of the ministries produce and publish statistical data related to their own area of interest, including the Istituto Nazionale per la Previdenza Sociale (National Social Security and Welfare Institute).

Many surveys touch upon the population ageing topic but, at present, there is no particular form of research conducted by Istat dedicated entirely to the older population. Results from a national survey (Second National Survey on the Social Condition of Senior People) have been published in February 2012 by the AUSER Association, which aims to promote intergenerational solidarity and support older people in continuing to play an active role in society based on their specific experiences, skills and abilities. On a European level, the AUSER Association is a member of SOLIDAR, a European network of 50 NGOs active in over 90 countries working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide.

Health and Performance

There are several sources of health data. Most statistics are available from the national agencies, including the National Health Institute, the Ministry of Health, and the National Agency for Regional Health Services, which collects and organises health data from Italian regions. Still, there appears a lack of national surveys devoted exclusively to elderly people. Senior citizens are obviously

interviewed during censuses and other multipurpose surveys, but they are not the main statistical unit. The situation is better at regional and municipal levels, where some surveys concerning ageing and health are carried out. In any case, a large survey on ageing and elderly at the national level is desirable.

Social systems and welfare

As regards the topic of social systems and welfare, there appears a lack of surveys devoted exclusively to elderly people at the national level. Senior citizens are obviously interviewed during censuses and other multipurpose surveys, but they do not constitute the main statistical subject. The situation seems better at the regional or municipal level, where some surveys concerning ageing, health and welfare are carried out. Worth mentioning is also the “Second national survey on the social condition of senior citizens” by AUSER, which provides a deep investigation concerning senior citizens’ quality of life, habits, health and social conditions.

Work and productivity

The effects on mature workers of the recent legislative developments regarding Italian labour market employment have been mixed. The employment rate of workers aged 54+ was the sixth-lowest in the EU27 in 2008. The main obstacles apparently preventing older people from working are the inflexibility in the work hour regime, the exclusion from further training in the workplace, and the fact that older employees are not viewed positively by employers.

There seems again a lack of information devoted exclusively to senior citizens at the national level, but the regions and municipalities are conducting several interesting surveys on this topic. A good overview of the national situation is presented in the report “The social capital of senior citizens” by the Social and economic research institute (IRES). Against this background, a large survey on ageing and elderly at the national level is desirable.

Education and learning

In Italy, 56 per cent of men and 72 per cent of women aged 65+ only had a primary school education, while only seven per cent of men and three per cent of women earned a master’s degree. Subsequent generations of elderly people will have higher levels of education, and the demand for learning is expected to increase, for example about how to participate in social networks, how to access news and other information through the web to avoid “technological exclusion”.

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regions and municipalities are conducting several interesting surveys on this topic. A large survey on ageing and elderly at the national level appears desirable.

Housing, urban development and mobility

The percentage of the general population living alone is 40 per cent, while that of the elderly ranges at 49 per cent. Even though community dwellings are increasing, the great majority of elderly people lives alone and, especially in small towns, in old and non-functional houses. In many cities, old people freely use public transportation, but mobility, even in the largest cities such as Rome, Milan or Naples, is still limited by built barriers. Empirical information about housing, urban development and mobility comes from the Census which, as already emphasised, is not devoted exclusively to the situation of senior citizens, but covers all of the population. Hence, also for this topic, there appears a significant need for a national-level survey specifically focused only on the elderly population.

Public attitudes towards old age

Concerning public attitudes towards old age, there is at present no available or updated statistical information. An interesting survey was published in January 2012, reporting the results of a survey with 31,280 respondents interviewed by the TNS Opinion & Social network in all 27 member states and five non-EU member states. Across the 27 member states, the average age at which someone reaches “old age” is believed to be 63.9 years, while Italian respondents placed this threshold at 67.6 years. The majority of Italian respondents believe that people aged 55 and older are perceived positively in society (67 per cent), with a minority (18 per cent) feeling they are perceived negatively. Interestingly, 74 per cent of Italian respondents think that people aged 55 and older should play a major role in Italian politics and economics. This proportion rises to 81 per cent when the role in the family is considered.

Social, civic and cultural engagement

Concerning the issue of engagement, there appears no statistical information available. The project “Passi d’argento” (“Silver steps”) of the National Institute of Health indicated that one out of two people over 64 may be considered “a resource”. This share still ranges at one out of four for people over 75 years. These indicators also shed light on the Italian culture and social system. The elderly are essential not only for the care of grandchildren, but also for the care of other elderly, even outside of the family. Both women and men volunteer in the community. Meanwhile, participation in cultural or other training remains very low regardless of gender and age group.

Uses of technology

In Italy, continuous education among people aged 54-64 is low compared to other countries. Relative to the average penetration of PCs, this could imply insufficient knowledge of the elderly in the current supply of IST services. There has been some national activity in relation to ICT-based support directed towards older people. These initiatives mainly concern social alarm services, which are now fully mainstreamed, and more advanced forms of telecare, as well as telehealth and smart home developments. No national statistics are available, although some estimates on the use of social alarms among those aged 65+ show that between one and two per cent may use this service. Several regional initiatives have been launched. In addition, the Senior Watch programme provides national statistics on the access to technologies.

Wellbeing

The evaluation of wellbeing generally considers the individual level (e. g. happiness, life satisfaction, opinion about domains of life experience), and the societal level (e. g. the perception of the quality of society or societal wellbeing). In order to create a summary score of wellbeing in older populations, synthetic indexes have been developed. According to the SCL/PRB index, Italy ranks among the lowest when compared to Western Europe and the USA, with a value of 73 (Denmark and the USA had the highest value of 88, and Spain had the lowest value of 71). This position mostly reflects the limited active engagement in life or social connectedness as measured by participation in social organisations and participation in the labour force. These results are confirmed by other reports, such as the European Study on Adult Well-being (ESAW), which consistently placed Italy in the last position of satisfaction in almost all of the categories evaluated.

Intergenerational relationships

Concerning Intergenerational relationships, there appears no statistical information available at this moment. While a large share of about 30 per cent of all pensions are below 1,000 euros, the interplay of the economic crisis and the applicability of the previous pension system (last salary-dependent) to older retirees results in many retired grandparents’ having an income that is often higher than that of their children. For the first time since World War II, the younger generation, who came of age after 2010, appears to have a lower socio-economic level than the previous generation. However, the expected intergenerational conflict is not yet evident due to the “family-based” structure of the Italian society, in which grandparents help their children and grandchildren. Specific data to empirically illustrate the situation is hardly available.

4. The data and the policy agenda: gaps and challenges

In view of the demographic data situation in Italy, there are a number of gaps and needs, including:

- National-level research focused specifically on senior citizens;
- More frequent updates of statistics other than national censuses and ISS (Italian NIH);
- Easier availability of data based on gender and the evolution of specific gender policies;
- Less fragmented and more representative data at the regional and provincial levels (given that the leading regions are over-represented and there is a north-south gradient);
- More statistical information about immigrants and population movements, especially due to irregular migration.

This policy brief summarises the major data sources for the ten policy fields identified by the working group of the Data Mapping Project of the Joint Programming Initiative “More Years, Better Lives”. An extended version of the original text and more information on the described sources are available at <http://www.jpi-dataproject.eu/>.

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