

Internal migration in Italy: the pattern of new Italian citizens

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Framework and aim

Internal migration has a strong impact on population redistribution in Italy and is the main driver of demographic dynamics due to a negative natural increase. The pattern of internal migration is very different between Italians and foreigners. These have a greater propensity to migrate than Italians and are driven by different factors. In Italy, from the 1950s to the early 1970s, internal migration was an important factor in the remarkable redistribution of the Italian population (Golini 1974; Mencarini 1999). Subsequently, from the 1980s to the early 1990s the role of Italy was changed from an emigration to an immigration country (Natale and Strozza 1997; Bonifazi 1998, 2007, 2013; Pugliese 2006; Strozza and De Santis 2017). Since the second half of the 1990s, internal migration within the country has been on the increase, in line with interest in this topic (Piras and Melis 2007; Golini and Reynaud 2010; Bonifazi, Heins, and Tucci 2012; Lamonica and Zagaglia 2013). Italy has seen a gradual increase in its resident foreign population (Strozza, 2019; Bonifazi and Strozza, 2020). According to Italian National Statistical Institute (ISTAT) data, at 1.1.2019 there were about 5 million foreigners in the country, accounting for over 8% of Italy's resident population (Strozza and De Santis, 2017).

Thanks to the increase in the foreign presence in our country and its settlement on our territory, the phenomenon of acquisitions of citizenship also becomes relevant (Strozza et al., 2021). From 2012 until 2016, there was an increasing number of acquisitions of Italian citizenship year by year: 100 thousand in 2013, 200 thousand in 2016. From 2017 the number of acquisitions of citizenship decreased (-38% less than the previous year) but then in the three years that followed it remained above 120 thousand. At 1.1.2019 the number of foreigners who have acquired Italian citizenship is more than one and a half million and represents 2.8% of the Italian population. New Italian citizens are highly concentrated territorially in the northern regions - Lombardia (23%), Veneto (12%), Piemonte and Emilia Romagna (11%) - while their numbers are very small in the South. Residents who have acquired citizenship are 14% Moroccan and 13% Albanian: among the citizenships most present in both numbers and years on our territory.

The recent internal migration trend has been considerably affected by an increasing presence of foreign citizens, given their greater propensity to move within the country, and structural factors such as a greater incidence of foreigners within younger age groups (Impicciatore and Strozza 2016; Casacchia et al. 2019). In Italy, several research projects have focussed on the contribution of foreigners to internal migration within the country (Bonifazi et al., 2012; Impicciatore and Strozza, 2016; Casacchia et al., 2019; Rimoldi et al., 2020, Casacchia et al., 2022), revealing higher levels of migration in comparison to Italians, even where demographic characteristics are equal. Much has been written on the comparison between nationals and foreigners (or natives and those who are foreign born), but no attention has been paid to foreigners who have acquired Italian citizenship. On the one hand, Italian citizenship bears witness to the integration process and suggests migratory behaviour similar to that of Italians; on the other hand, their concentration on the territory and their citizenship of origin suggest migratory behaviour more similar to that of foreigners

The aim of this work is to investigate whether the migration behaviour of new citizens is more similar to that of Italians or to that of foreigners.

Using the application of the gravity model, the push and pull factors of internal migration flows are studied by distinguishing between Italian citizens, new Italian citizens and foreigners. The combined effect of masses and distance helps us understand – through the gravity model theory – the internal migratory model of three considered groups. The study of the factors that push and pull of the internal migration of new citizens provides another step in understanding their integration process. Some studies in other countries suggested that the internal redistribution of the population has an effect on social cohesion and has therefore become a political issue (Simpson, 2007; Maza et al., 2019). So, we consider the internal migration flows from 2012 to 2021 year to highlight the evolution of this process.

Data source and method

Data source are based on the Municipality Population Register (Anagrafe). Official statistics on migration flows are based on the changes of residence administrative source, which Istat carries out every year. included information on the main demographic characteristics of migrants, such as citizenship. We considered three groups: Italian citizens, new Italian citizens and foreigners. New Italian citizens are foreigners who have acquired Italian citizenship.

Our analysis focussed on differences between Italian, new Italian and foreign citizens in their changes of residence between the 107 provinces of Italy (NUTS 3 under European classification). We ignored within-province movement because it is prompted primarily by housing satisfaction and family changes (Biagi et al., 2011) rather than the economic reasons that are our prime interest. We had one matrix for each group. We used interprovincial changes of residence from 1.1.2012 to 31.12.2022.

A descriptive analysis taking into consideration the changes of residence between Italian provinces from 2012 to 2021 for three considered group is proposed.

Subsequently, a gravity model is used, derived from Isaac Newton's law of gravity. The gravity model is an appropriate method for studying different patterns in the internal migration of minority groups (Sapiro, 2017), and has been widely used in internal migration studies (Beine et al., 2015; Poot et al., 2016; Cameron, 2018). The "masses" are measured in terms of the resident population number. Numerous extended versions of the gravity model have been published that also take into account other socio-economic variables of both the areas of origin and those of destination (e. g. Mocetti and Porello, 2010). These variables can be expressed by rates of unemployment of a given province (Fratesi and Percoco, 2014) or by the percentage of the population with high educational qualifications (Piras, 2012). This enables the study to examine the role of different explanatory variables by checking for other socio-economic conditions in the different areas.

The model has been modified considering not only the effect of specific masses and distance, but also factors by single considered group. The explicative variables are also taken into account in a unique model, allowing a simultaneous estimation of the effects of the masses and distances on the Italian, new Italians and foreign internal migration.

We used a Poisson-type specification of the gravity model (Flores et al., 2013) and Poisson Pseudo-Maximum Likelihood (PPML) estimators (Metulini et al., 2018). The PPML function was tested for cross-sectional data.

Main and expected findings

The role of foreigners in internal migration is relevant: as of 2012, foreigners were around 8% of the resident population in Italy, but accounted for 20% of changes of residence. New Italian citizens for example in 2019, constituted 2.8% of the Italian population but gave rise to 3% of inter-provincial changes of residence. In Italy, the phenomenon of internal migration has contributed the most to the change in the structure and redistribution of the resident population. Indeed, every year about 1,300,000 people change their municipality of residence and among those that do, more or

less 300,000 have foreign citizenship. It was therefore interesting to understand which factors mostly characterise the flows of groups within the territory.

The application of several gravity models seems to confirm the opportunity to analyze internal migration by citizenship. Generally speaking, the gravity models fit well the origin/destination matrix between provinces and among three different groups.

In explaining the different migration behaviour among the three groups, the effects of the distances can be particularly interesting such as the different role of the geographical and socio-economic indicators.

The study of the factors that push and pull of the internal migration of new citizens provides another step in understanding their integration process. The results of these applications could provide planners and policy makers with the tools to understand the current situation and offer an insight on the tendency for the future distribution of the examined subgroups of the population.

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