

必要とされていることを感じる。以上の理由などから、たいていのイタリア人は少なくとも1人の、平均して2人以上の子供を望んでいる。

女性の労働参加および一般的な性別役割についての問いに対し、現在の理想は働く女性が夫と家事を分担することであり、回答者の半数が男性も女性も協力して家事を行うべきだと考えている (Istat の調査によれば、実際には働いているイタリア人男性はほとんど何も家事をしていない)。また、家計や休日など余暇についての重要な決定は、男女2人でなすべきである。しかし、子供がいる場合、育児のためには女性が勤務時間を減らすべきであるとほとんどの回答者が考えている。

¹ 義務教育は6歳から始まり13年間続く。その後、能力に応じて上級の学校に5年、大学には4~6年進学できる。2年後に実施される教育改革で、義務教育は5歳から始まり14年間続くことになる。

² イタリアは20の行政区に分けられる。それぞれ異なった人口的・経済的特徴を持ち、地理的に次のようにまとめられる。北西部 (Val d'Aosta, Piemonte, Liguria, Lombardia)、北東部 (Trentino Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli, Venezia Giulia, Emilia Romagna)、中部 (Toscana, Marche, Umbria, Lazio)、南部 (Abruzzi, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria) 島嶼部 (Sicilia, Sardegna)。南部と島嶼部は地理統計学分析上 Mezzogiorno と称し一緒に扱われる。経済の中心地であるミラノは Lombardia に、首都であるローマは Lazio にある。

³ 特に1968~69年の労働者と学生による激しい反体制運動の結果、1970年代初めに戦前からの既存法に対して変化が起きた。

⁴ 最近では父親でも良い。但し、父親か母親のどちらか一方がこの休暇を取ることができ、たいていの場合母親である。

⁵ 収入の構成についても調査がある。収入の少なくとも7割は雇用による勤労収入、年金、または雇用による勤労の結果得られる給付金でなければならない。

⁶ 20の州、103の県、8100の市町村を指す。

FERTILITY TRENDS AND FAMILY POLICIES IN ITALY

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Introduction

During the last few years, the Italian total period fertility rate (TPFR) has been one of the lowest in the world, down to around, and recently even below, 1.2 children per woman. Within the European Union, fertility is generally low, but, apart from exceptional situations (like warfare, or a sudden disruption of the existing socio-economic order), similar values can only be found in the Mediterranean area (Portugal, Spain and Greece), where total period fertility rates ranged between 1.15 and 1.30 in 1998 (Council of Europe, 1999). Ironically, this is precisely the part of Europe which, together with Ireland, was formerly reputed for its comparatively high fertility.

Not only period fertility, but also cohort fertility is low and rapidly decreasing, and women of the most recent cohorts (1966) are expected to bear merely 1.4 children each at the end of their reproductive life.

How, and how long, can a society survive in these conditions? How did Italy get to this point? And can anything be done to bring fertility back to reproduction level, or at least close to it? Although with considerable delay, questions like these are finally starting to be asked not only in academic circles, but also in public debates, and on the media.

Non Italian readers will perhaps find it useful to read, in the following pages, a quick synthesis of the Italian demographic situation, with special focus on the post-war evolution of fertility (Section 1), and on the concurrent phenomenon of family formation and dissolution (Section 2), both considered not only at the national level, but also with an eye at territorial differences, which, although narrowing, are still non negligible.

Section 3 quickly describes the related issue of family policy, which happens to be generally very weak, or totally non-existent in certain areas. Opinion polls indicate that public favour towards family policies, once rather mild, is now on the increase in Italy (Section 4), so that there finally seems to be at least some scope for a more active attitude on part of the government.

Two major difficulties exist, however. One lies in the broad disagreement on the "true" causes of the fertility fall, which has given rise to several, sometimes contrasting interpretations (Section 5). Since none of these theories can claim undisputed supremacy, and since several observers share Miguel de Cervantes's prudent attitude on causes and remedies ("al mal de quien la causa no se sabe, milagro es acertar la medicina"¹), scope for action would appear to be rather narrow.

Contrary to this, however, we tend to believe that a sizeable and direct financial support for the bearing and rearing of children would be the proper answer to the birth dearth, (almost) regardless

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¹ "When the illness is unknown, only by a miracle can the proper medicine be found" (*Don Quijote de la Mancha*, Vol. I, 1604)

of its (partly unknown) causes. But, and here comes the second hindrance we mentioned before, such a financial effort cannot be produced without reorganising (and cutting, to be sure) other kinds of social expenditure, pensions in the first place. Unfortunately, while future generations are not here to lobby, current and perspective pensioners are, and this is likely to block any major reform in this field.

1. Fertility

In Italy, the demographic transition started relatively late: although in some of the northern regions², which were at the same time also experiencing the industrial revolution, it began in the second half of the 19th century, which is broadly in line with what happened in the rest of western Europe, its onset dates definitely later in the rest of the country, and especially in the South, sometimes as late as the eve of World War II. Analogously, its end may be located around 1930 in Liguria, but only around 1970 in Calabria (Livi Bacci, 1980).

Overall, the total period fertility rate (TPFR) has been declining throughout the 20th century, although with a few exceptions, among which the two post war rebounds (around 1920 and 1945) and the “baby boom” of the early 1960s. Until the early 1970s, however, the decline was relatively slow and smooth: in the 1950s, for instance, in several southern regions, total period fertility rates (TPFR) were still about 3 children per woman, a value far from 2.1 which signals the end of the transition (Figure 1).

*** FIGURE 1. PERIOD FERTILITY BY AREA IN ITALY, 1952-1996 (1,000 WOMEN) ***

After 1974, however, the process accelerated abruptly, and, as mentioned, fertility dropped to a low of less than 1.2 children per woman – still an unparalleled level for a country of 57 million inhabitants -, and this has persisted until today, despite the fact that contraceptive methods are still relatively traditional in Italy³.

1.1 Territorial differences: a cohort perspective (with cross sectional implications)

Let us look at fertility more closely, considering its longitudinal dimension (birth order, age at birth, etc.), and the main differences between the various regions and areas of Italy.

It is perhaps worth reminding that Italy was united only in 1861, and that its regions belonged formerly to separate states, with different languages, laws, levels of economic development, and so forth: as a consequence, territorial differences have always been strong, in almost all fields. Fertility does not constitute an exception, as a vast body of literature amply proves (e.g. Livi Bacci, 1980, Sorvillo, Terra Abrami, 1993; Santini, 1995). This literature has been recently enriched by two

² Italy is subdivided into 20 administrative regions that have different demographic and economic features. They are grouped according to the geographical location: **North-West** (Val d'Aosta, Piemonte, Liguria, Lombardia); **North-East** (Trentino Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Emilia Romagna); **Centre** (Toscana, Marche, Umbria, Lazio); **South** (Abruzzi, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria), **Islands** (Sicilia, Sardegna). South and Islands are often grouped together for geo-statistical analysis, in the so called *Mezzogiorno*. Milano (the main economic centre) is in Lombardia; Roma (the capital) in Lazio.

³ In 1996, 30% of couples practising contraception declared they used *coitus interruptus* during their sexual intercourse; 23% condoms; 23% contraceptive pills and 10% the IUD (De Sandre *et alii*, 1997).

further publications⁴ edited by Istat (1997 and 2000), Italy's National Statistical Office, from which we will draw extensively in this paper.

The first thing to notice is that, unlike total period fertility rates, longitudinal fertility has been continuously declining at the national level: the number of children per woman decreased from 2.5 for the cohort of 1920 to about 1.4 for the cohort of 1966 (Figure 2).

*** FIGURE 2. COHORT FERTILITY BY AREA (1,000 WOMEN) ***

Looking at the history of the three areas separately, one may notice that in the North and the Centre fertility was roughly constant at 2 for the cohorts born in the first half of the century, but declined subsequently and is projected to reach maybe 1.3 for women born around 1966. In the South, on the contrary, the decline has been constant: the generations born in the 1920s had around 2.5 children each, but those of the mid 1960s are likely to have merely 1.4.

So the first indication is that roughly two thirds of Italy (North and Centre) have always had very low levels of fertility, and that only one third, the South, experienced sufficient fertility to prevent the Italian population from shrinking⁵. Incidentally, studies on reproduction, which keep mortality levels and trends into account, indicate that even the contribution of the South would not have sufficed for the whole of the 20th century, had mortality not declined quickly enough: net reproduction at birth⁶, never exceedingly high, started to be insufficient already for the generations born around 1910. However, since daughters lived longer than their mothers, reproduction rates at older ages (and reproduction rates in terms of years of life) have been above 1 up to the generations born after World War II (Figure 3). After then, low fertility, and slower improvements in survival (at least, before the age of 50), brought *all* measures of net reproduction below, actually much below, 1.

*** FIGURE 3. REPRODUCTION RATES FOR SELECTED ITALIAN COHORTS
(SOURCE: VENTISETTE, 1996) ***

So, when measured in terms of reproduction, fertility in Italy has always been relatively low, lower, for instance, than that of many other European countries and, for the post-war generations, lower than that of *any* other European country (Santini, 1995).

Back to territorial fertility differences, Figure 2 indicates that they are narrowing. This is true, but a closer look at the data suggests that some peculiarities still persist in terms of distribution of women around their average number of descendants. In the northern and central areas, 35-40% of women end their reproductive career with one child only, while childlessness is relatively uncommon: once below 10% (cohorts of the 1940s), it is now gradually climbing up to some 20%

⁴ Data on fertility are reported cross sectionally (years 1952-1996) and longitudinally (cohorts 1920-1966); by birth order (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th or higher) and by region. Information is given both on intensity and timing.

⁵ Periods of strong internal migratory movements from the South to the rest of the country occurred in the meantime, and this kept the relative demographic weight of the South roughly constant at 36%.

⁶ A net reproduction rate (NRR) is the ratio between the number of daughters and the number of mothers, both groups being considered at the same age. When reproduction exceeds 1 (more daughters than mothers), the population tends to increase. Reproduction is frequently evaluated at birth (NRR₀), but when mortality changes over time, computation at other ages may be instructive as well.

(cohorts of the 1960s), that is close to percentages that have long been prevailing in the countries of northern Europe. So, while control on family size is strong, parenthood still appears to be a valued option in these areas.

In the South, on the contrary, women have predominantly two children⁷, but only a low proportion of them bears just one child (less than 10%), and childlessness has traditionally had a relatively high incidence of around 15%.

Data on birth order can be connected to variations in period fertility. In the early '60s Italy, like most other western European countries, experienced a "baby boom". It is generally known, by now, that this cross sectional phenomenon was mostly brought about by a change in the timing of fertility (see below), with little effect on the intensity of cohort fertility. What is less well known is that in Italy the baby boom characterised mainly the North and the Centre, and affected the South only marginally (cf. again Figure 1). Moreover, even in the North-Centre, it was due to an upsurge of first and second-order births (measured by TFR_1 and TFR_2 respectively), while third and higher-order births have always been diminishing, ever since the onset of the demographic transition. In the South, on the contrary, this upward trend in the first two birth orders was barely perceptible, and soon overbalanced by the continuous decrease of third and higher-order births (TFR_3 , TFR_4 , ...).

1.2 Age at birth

Age at birth has long been on the increase for every birth order. Overall, however, it has first been decreasing, due to the decreasing relevance of higher-order births, and later increasing again: from 29 for women born in 1933 down to 27 for those born in 1947 and then up again to 28.5 for those of 1963 (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. AGE AT CHILDBIRTH IN ITALY (COHORTS 1933-1963)

As mentioned before, the progressively younger age at birth of earlier cohorts contributed to the cross-sectional phenomenon of the "baby boom" of the early 60s. On the other hand, the recent delay of childbirth is in part responsible for the extremely low values of current cross-sectional fertility. In particular, age at first birth, relatively stationary or even decreasing during the 20th century (especially in the Centre-North), reached a low of 24.8 for the cohorts born around 1950 (not too far from the level recorded at the beginning of the 20th century), but went up steeply since then, and is now 26.5 on a longitudinal basis, and 28.5 on a cross-sectional basis.

Once again, territorial differences emerge: in the North-Centre, the period of declining age at childbirth is shorter (it ends in 1947) and the following increase is stronger, so that age at childbirth, on a cohort basis, is now 29 in this area. In the South, the decline persisted until the mid-1950s, and the subsequent upturn proved smoother: age at childbirth, on a cohort basis, is now 27.7 in this area.

⁷ About 40% of them do. However, this characteristic emerges even more clearly if one looks at parity progression ratios, and in particular the probability to proceed to a second child (for women who already have one). This probability is about 0.9 in the South, as against 0.6-0.8 in the North-Centre.

Indeed, the curves of the North-Centre on the one hand, and of the South on the other, cross over around 1954 (Figure 4)⁸.

2. Nuptiality and cohabitation

The Italian baby boost goes along with, and in some interpretations (discussed in Section 5) is caused by, a delay in the process of family formation.

The first thing to notice is that the proportion of out-of-wedlock births has traditionally been low (around 5%), and, although it is now on the increase (around 10%), it still cannot be compared to that of other developed countries, where proportions were originally higher, increased more rapidly, and range now between 33 and 55%. Notice, further, that since birth rates are so low in Italy, the low level of illegitimacy is better appreciated as a ratio to the number of unmarried women in the reproductive age span: in 1996, while 1,000 married women aged 15-49 gave birth to a comparable number of children in France, Sweden and Italy (82, 74 and 76, respectively), 1,000 unmarried women of the same age group gave birth to widely different numbers of children in the three countries: 45, 52 and 8, respectively (Dalla Zuanna, 2000).

Where illegitimacy is so scarce, changes in the intensity and timing of nuptiality play a key role on fertility. Celibacy was formerly a comparatively rare phenomenon, below 10% for the generations born at the beginning of the century, but it is now on the increase and forecasts point to an end value of 0.7 for the cohorts of the 60s (De Sandre *et al.*, 1997).

This tendency is aggravated by a delay in the process: age at marriage, once 24 to 25 for women, ranges now between 26 and 27, and is still on the increase⁹. Incidentally, this delay is also depressing cross-sectional measures of first marriage: for instance, the total period first marriage rate is currently down to 0.6.

Finally, marriages are becoming increasingly fragile: some 10% of them end up in a divorce¹⁰, a proportion which may appear low by western European standards, but which is nonetheless high when compared to the Italian tradition, and keeps rising.

These processes are common in western Europe. What is peculiar of Italy is that while elsewhere cohabitation of unmarried young couples is frequent, both as a "trial" period, or as an alternative to marriage, in Italy this solution is hardly ever practised. Merely 2.3% of all couples are unmarried (to each other)¹¹, and cohabitation remains until today a scarcely relevant phenomenon, although it may be slightly underestimated in the available sources (demographic censuses and surveys), and is probably slowly on the rise.

Young people, who do not marry and do not start a cohabitation, remain longer and longer years in their parents' home: in the age range 25-34 years, for instance, 26% of them were still living with

⁸ This, in spite of the circumstance that fertility is higher in the South, which generally also implies a higher age at birth.

⁹ Husbands were, and still are about 3 years older than their wives.

¹⁰ In Italy a divorce must be preceded by at least three years of legal separation. Currently, separations are roughly twice as numerous as divorces.

¹¹ With a few geographical variability: for instance, cohabitation is higher in urban areas and in the North.

their parents in 1989-90, but this proportion climbed up to 38% in 1997-98, merely 8 years later. Once this delay was characteristic of boys (who were allegedly over-cheered by their “typical Italian mothers”) but nowadays girls are rapidly catching up.

Obviously, this delay is connected to the postponement and reduction of marriages, since forming a new union constitutes the main reason why young people leave their parental home (Table 1).

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGES OF PEOPLE LEAVING THEIR PARENTS' HOUSE BY AGE AND REASON

AGE	REASON				No. cases
	Formation of a new union	Work	Education	Other	
<20	49.5	22.1	25.1	6.9	551
20-24	80.7	8.0	6.2	5.1	1091
25-29	80.0	5.5	0.7	5.9	564
30 or more	81.9	2.9	0.5	14.7	152

Source: Billari and Ongaro (1999)

But, in all cases, the phenomenon is puzzling, and the interpretations that are being put forth coincide largely with those which try to explain low fertility: longer years of education¹², especially for girls (who nowadays study more than in the past, and more profitably than their male colleagues), difficulties in finding an occupation¹³, difficulties in finding a house to live in, etc.¹⁴

We will discuss these interpretations in Section 5.

3. Population policy

No explicit policy aimed at sustaining fertility exists in Italy. A variety of reasons is likely to be at the root of this choice, among which many mention the experience of the pro-natalist policy of the fascist era (1922-1943), which was carried out for ideological reasons and produced a sort of reaction after the fall of Mussolini. Another important reason is surely the fact that, until not so long ago, the common perception was that, if anything, the Italian problem was that of overpopulation¹⁵.

¹² Starting at 6, there are 13 years of compulsory school, after which students can attend 5 more years of higher school and 4-6 years of University, depending on the faculty. A recent reform, effective in the next two years, will make compulsory school start at 5, and last 14 years.

¹³ Unemployment is around 12% in Italy, but it rises to 15% for those aged 25-24, and skyrockets to 33% for people aged 15-24. At all ages, women suffer from higher unemployment rates than men.

¹⁴ Not all explanations focus on negative aspects, though: for instance, some authors emphasise the improved relationships between parents and children, which, traditionally based on the respect of hierarchy, evolved into confrontation (if not overt conflict) by the end of the 60s, and are now more and more guided by mutual understanding, and respect for each member's autonomy (Picone Stella, 1997). This trend is common to all the Italian regions, although, in the South, young people experience the so-called “transition to adulthood” (i.e. leave their parents' home) somewhat earlier, presumably because of the relatively more traditional structure of family relationships (Sabbadini, 1999).

¹⁵ This view was reinforced by the fact that, since its unity and until 1973, Italy has been a country of strong out-migration. Besides, population density has always been relatively high (currently, almost 200 inhabitants per square km).

Last, but maybe not least, several observers have noticed a lack of a strong national, common feeling (in part linked to the alleged Italian “familism”— see below), over which a variety of internal contrasts seems to prevail: both at the regional level and at the ideological/political/religious level. As for the former, since Italy, as mentioned, was united only in relatively recent times, regional differences of almost every kind are still relatively strong, and political movements emerge now and then which oppose the central government and favour local autonomy to the highest possible degree. In this context, launching a demographic policy at the national level proves difficult. Moreover, some fear that, under the umbrella of a demographic policy, some form of nepotism may emerge, and in particular that supporting fertility would in practice favour the more fertile South. Moreover, after some time, lacking adequate economic development, sustaining fertility in the relatively less developed southern part of the country might promote new waves of emigration towards the Centre and the North.

As for the ideological/political/religious level, it should be borne in mind that Italy has always had a very strong communist party, countered by a very strong catholic movement, supported by the Vatican. And, not surprisingly, political parties, labour movements, and lobbies of various kinds have always held widely differing views on what ought to be done, and how: what weight should the State have in such private matters as “setting up a family”? What scope for the traditional vs. the *de-facto* family? What role should women play in the society? In this context, and in the aftermath of World War II (with the concomitant passage from monarchy to republic), political and economic reconstruction was given priority, and thorny issues such as these were avoided as much as possible. (Saraceno, 1998)

Things are now changing, albeit slowly. The fascist era is long gone, the problem of exceedingly low birth rates is at long last starting to be perceived, as we mentioned before, and many societal, legislative and economic changes have occurred in the meantime. For instance, as indicated above, young women nowadays study and work as much as young men do; since 1975 - New Family Code - no supremacy is accorded any longer to the man in the family; contraception is freely advertised since 1971; abortion is available publicly and freely since 1977; divorce is possible since 1971; discrimination against women is no longer admitted in any domain, and most particularly at work; etc.¹⁶

Public support for families with children does exist, to be sure, but under a variety of different perspectives, and *never* as a stimulus for fertility in itself. Four typologies of intervention may be identified:

- 1) parental leave and child care services;
- 2) income transfers (sometimes in the form of family allowances and tax relief);
- 3) housing and labour policies;
- 4) local policies.

¹⁶ Most of these changes occurred in the early 70s as a consequence of a vast workers' and students' protest movement, in particular in the years 1968-69, against many existing laws (and habits) that Italy had inherited from pre-war times.

3.1 Parental leave and child care services

In Italy a 5-month compulsory maternity leave forces prospective mothers to abstain from work: 2 months before childbirth and 3 months after. Dependent workers get paid during this period, at 80% of their pre-leave salary. Afterwards, mothers¹⁷ are entitled to a 6-month leave during their child's first year of age, and this period is paid at 30% of salary. If children under 3¹⁸ get sick, one of the parents can take a sick leave, but this period is unpaid.

Child care services for children under 3 years are scarce (available places are only some 5% of the children of that age), irregularly distributed on the territory (much more in the North-Centre-, or in large cities, for instance) and irregularly exploited by families (indeed, these services happen to be insufficient precisely where they are more concentrated). Parents pay income-related fees which cover most, but not all, of the costs - the rest being provided by local authorities (municipalities). Since private child care centres are rare and expensive, families with working mothers and young children rely heavily on the help network of relatives: child care, and, especially for non working mothers, income transfers. This kind of help is favoured by the circumstance that in Italy most newly formed couples live within 1 km of the house of (at least) one of the spouses' parents.

Child care facilities for children 3-5 years old serve about 90% of the target group: although not compulsory, this service is heavily publicly subsidised and fees are low. Opening hours are normally from 8.30 a.m. to about 4.30 p.m.

Elementary schools are compulsory for children aged 6 to 10. Opening hours are generally 8.30-16.30, Monday to Friday, or, if shorter, supplementary child care services are frequently available.

However, no provision is generally available for the care of children after their elementary education, that is after their 11th birthday, when school hours are normally limited to the morning.

3.2 Income transfer programs.

Families in Italy are subject to a wide variety of taxes, and benefit from several in-kind services (like public education, and medical assistance), or monetary transfers, which are difficult to summarise in just a few lines: indeed, they are often difficult even to understand. This is due to the fact that several different laws have been introduced at various stages, each of them intended to solve a particular problem, but the whole of them resulting, ultimately, in a rather confusing general picture (Rossi, 1997).

The main measures are as follows: beyond paid maternity leaves (see above), family allowances are given to wage-earning employees, civil servants or retirees on the basis of (quite strict) means testing and family size¹⁹. Furthermore, the financial act of 1999 introduced some special help for

¹⁷ Or (recently) fathers. Only one member of the couple, though, can take such a leave, and this is generally the woman.

¹⁸ Very recently their age limit has been raised to 8 years.

¹⁹ To be entitled to these allowances, gross family income must not exceed 34 million for families with 3 members, 42 million for families with 4 members, 49 million for families with 5 members (Palomba, Menniti, 1994). There is also a check on income composition: at least 70% of it must come from what is defined as dependent income (wage or pension).

families with economic difficulties and three or more children. Note, however, that all of these measures are intended to fight poverty, not to foster fertility.

Tax relief is provided for tax payers with economically dependent, co-residing household members: children (200.000 lire each), spouse (1 million lire) and others. Moreover, tax deduction is possible for certain expenses the tax payer may incur for the benefit of these dependent members (basically, education and health).

As in all of Europe, nowadays, each earner is taxed separately, and joint taxation of the household is prohibited, so as not to penalise households with more than one worker. On the other hand, for any given total income, this solution penalises one-earner, as opposed to multi-earner households, and the above-mentioned tax relief for the dependent spouse proves generally insufficient to compensate for this (O'Donoghue and Sutherland, 1998).

Overall, the fiscal burden in Italy is largely independent of family size, and this is alleged to act as an implicit (and undesired, but nonetheless present) anti-natalist measure (Rossi, 1997).

3.3 Housing and labour policy.

Ownership of the house where one lives has long been favoured by *ad hoc* policies (tax deductions, etc.), and is traditionally common in Italy: indeed, more than 70% of households own the place where they live. Even policies originally intended to control rents and “protect the poor”, launched in the early 70s, had the main effect of hindering the market mechanism for rented houses, and encouraged ownership.

Publicly owned houses are now being sold on the market, and no longer used to help needy families. When this happened, however, “needy” basically meant “dislodged”, with little or no concern for the presence of children (Saraceno, 1998).

So, in short, there is no housing policy in Italy – surely not in any possible pro-natalist meaning.

The labour policy too, is scarcely developed. Once, when the labour market was predominantly confined to men, preference was given to fathers and husbands, as opposed to other workers: e.g., when hiring new workers, or when firing some of the existing ones. In the same spirit, public support to families was primarily channelled through the father's wage (Saraceno, 1998; Gauthier, 1996).

Nowadays these measures have been almost totally abandoned. Beyond the parental leaves described above, however, mention should be made of the circumstance that women can benefit from 4 months of virtual pension contributions for each child they have, up to a maximum of one year (=3 children). This measure allows them to retire up to one year earlier than otherwise possible.

3.4 Local policies.

As mentioned, an opposition is forming against the central state, and several initiatives are being taken at the local level²⁰. These are too many and too varied to be discussed here. What they have in common is that since they are all financed locally, they are targeted to residents (often to people

²⁰ This may mean *regioni* (of which Italy has 20), *province* (103) or even *comuni* (municipalities, around 8,100).

having resided there for a minimum lapse of time), which causes concerns both on the equity ground (remarkable territorial differences of available services are beginning to emerge) and on the mobility ground, because such policies discourage internal mobility which, most observers agree, is already too low in Italy.

4. Italians' opinions on population and demographic policies

As indicated above, public opinion in Italy is starting to feel that the problem of low fertility is a pressing one²¹. This change is documented through the surveys on opinions and attitudes about marriage, children, family life, demographic and social policies, etc., which the Italian Research Institute on Population (IRP - Rome) conducts approximately every four years. The last wave, which dates back to 1997, involved some 1,500 respondents aged 20 to 49.

Marriage is still the preferred form of union (for more than 80% of respondents), although an increasing proportion of people has a favourable attitude towards cohabitation, this growth being particularly evident for women (11% of them approved it in 1983, 20% in 1997). Anyway, cohabitation is mainly considered as a temporary experience preceding marriage (16%) and only rarely as an alternative to it (8%). Still few are those who reject the idea of marriage (2% in 1991, 8% in 1997) and consider it as an old-fashioned institution (78% of people disagreed with this definition in 1997). Not surprisingly, preference for legal unions becomes stronger when there are children (and a childless marriage is scarcely attractive: merely 8% of respondents desire it).

Even though the number of children is low, Italians still value parenthood²²: to most of them, children represent a long-term relationship, and one of the greatest satisfactions in one's life; moreover, they depend completely on their parents so that parents have the pleasant feeling of being necessary to them (Table 2).

TABLE 2. ATTITUDES TOWARDS PARENTHOOD: PERCENTAGES AGREEING WITH EACH SENTENCE

	1988	1991	1997
Children need you	82	92	95
Parenthood is one of the greatest satisfaction in one's life	80	85	87
The ties with children are the closest one can have in life	88	78	78
Only at home, with one's own children, can one be really happy	52	63	70
To have children is a duty towards the society	45	50	36
A person without children cannot be happy	58	44	33

Source: Bonifazi *et al.*, 1998

Most respondents state that the ideal number of children compatible with their life aspirations and aims is approximately equal to 2. But it is interesting to note that, when confronted with

²¹ About 70% of the Italian population consider the decline of births very negatively.

²² Only 1% of respondents do not attach any importance to children.

specific aspirations potentially conflicting with parenthood (like work, career, leisure, money, etc.), respondents adjust their answers downwards (Table 3).

TABLE 3. AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN COMPATIBLE WITH SELECTED AIMS IN ONE'S LIFE.

	1991		1997	
	males	Females	males	females
To have enough time for home and work full time	1.60	1.37	1.42	1.30
To try and realise oneself	1.64	1.49	1.53	1.44
To have time for one's personal interests	1.57	1.52	1.44	1.48
To have enough money	1.44	1.47	1.30	1.46
To make one's career	1.26	1.01	1.18	0.92

Source: Bonifazi *et al.*, 1998

As regards the attitudes on women's participation in the labour force, and gender roles more generally, the old family model based on a male breadwinner and a housewife is gradually disappearing, even among men²³. About 50% of male respondents state that men and women should collaborate to housework: unfortunately, other statistics reveal that, in practice, they do *not* collaborate and that women, including working women, are often the sole responsible for domestic duties (Palomba, 1997).

Most respondents (80%) think that all the important decisions regarding a household should be taken jointly by the two members of a couple, but they also generally share the idea that women should reduce their working time when there are young children at home (Table 4).

TABLE 4. WORKING MODELS FOR MEN AND WOMEN BY SEX AND PRESENCE OF CHILDREN, 1997 (%).

WORKING MODELS	RESPONDENTS					
	MEN			WOMEN		
	With children	Without children	Total	With children	Without children	Total
<i>Male</i>						
Full-time work	90	88	89	92	87	90
Part-time work	10	12	11	8	13	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Female</i>						
Full-time work	16	26	21	23	25	24
Part-time work	64	60	62	58	66	61
No work, if mother	20	14	17	19	9	15
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Bonifazi *et al.*, 1998

²³ There are differences by age, educational level and geographical area, to be sure. Younger and better educated men are more favourable to the idea of a working woman. Women living in the South (45%) and housewives (58%), on the contrary, tend to prefer the housewife model, at least when man's incomes are sufficiently high.

The 1997 IRP survey also enquired about opinions on demographic and social policies. Most respondents argue that the low level of fertility in Italy is due to the lack of support, facilities and services for families with children. Therefore, they hope that the government will intervene on this matter and identify three main areas of intervention: tax and housing policies favouring families with children, labour policies making part time jobs more easily available, and public services, especially child care centres for pre-school children.

On average, men are more interested in financial measures while women would rather prefer childcare services. There are also differences according to the number of children: childless people are scarcely sensitive to these problems; families with only one child tend to prefer child care services, plus labour and housing policies; while people with two or more children request mainly family allowances.

76% of people intentioned to have at least a(nother) child in the future state that if the desired policies were introduced, it would be easier for them to fulfil their desires. Among people that do not want to have children, 9% more would probably change their mind (and have at least one baby), and 13% more might reconsider their decision (Table 5).

TABLE 5 CONSEQUENCES OF THE ADOPTION OF DESIRED POLICIES BY INTENTION TO HAVE A(NOTHER) CHILD AND SEX OF RESPONDENTS(%). (1997)

<i>If the desired policies were introduced.....</i>	People undecided about whether to have children in the future			People not intentioned to have children in the future			People intentioned to have children in the future		
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
No answer	3	2	2	3	1	2	3	2	3
It would be easier to have the desired number of children	33	34	34	12	9	10	77	74	75
I would have my first child earlier	10	5	8	2	1	1	8	8	8
I would reconsider the possibility of having children	32	38	34	16	11	13	5	4	5
Probably, I would decide to have a(nother) child	13	15	14	7	9	8	6	9	7
I would not desire other children	9	6	8	60	69	65	1	3	2

Source: Bonifazi *et al.*, 1998

5. Determinants of low fertility: the quest for an interpretation

The list of possible factors underlying the current low level of fertility in Italy is probably very long. However, in an attempt to identify at least the most important among them, some scholars start from the expected number of children at the end of the reproductive age span, one of the questions of the second Italian Fertility Survey of 1996 (De Sandre, Pinnelli, Santini, 1999) (Table 6). Since this expected number is close to replacement level²⁴, but far from the number cohorts are

²⁴ Most respondents, over 90% of both women and men, indicate two children. These expectations are homogeneous across generations, but they differ according to the region (the expected number of children is 2.3 in the South and

actually likely to have (cf. again Figure 1), these scholars conclude that there are obstacles to the fulfilment of expectations, and therefore, as Chesnais (1998) would put it, that there is a “latent demand for family support”.

TABLE 6 . AVERAGE EXPECTED AND CURRENT NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY AGE OF MOTHER AND AREA (1996)

Age	Cohort	North		Centre		South		ITALY	
		Expected	Current	Expected	Current	Expected	Current	Expected	Current
20-24	1971-75	2.0	-	2.0	-	2.2	-	2.1	-
25-29	1966-70	1.9	1.2 ^a	2.2	1.3 ^a	2.3	1.7 ^a	2.1	1.4 ^a
30-34	1961-65	1.9	1.3	2.0	1.4	2.3	1.9	2.1	1.6
35-39	1956-60	1.8	1.5	1.8	1.6	2.3	2.1	2.0	1.7
40-44	1951-55	1.7	1.6	1.9	1.7	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.9
45-49	1946-50	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.8	2.6	2.4	2.1	2.0
Total		1.9	1.5 ^b	2.0	1.6 ^b	2.3	2.1 ^b	2.1	1.8 ^b

Source: De Sandre *et al.*, 1997; own elaborations on: Istat, 2000.

Notes: ^aCohort born in 1966; ^bCohorts born in 1946-1966;

But what kind of support? Some analysts, like Del Boca (1997), point their finger at institutional rigidities: opening hours for child care centres are inadequate, while private services are insufficient²⁵; unemployment, and in particular youth unemployment is high; loans are expensive and anyway rarely granted to the young (who do not have any collateral to offer); and so forth. In this sense, the particularly strong tie that connects the Italian children to their parents is not a cause, but a consequence of market and institutional failures: parents feel forced to step in, because they realise that their children, even if grown up, cannot have a good start without their help. In the same vein, Bettio and Villa (1993, 1998) complain that the labour market is over-protective for those who already have an occupation (mostly, people in their thirties or older), but extremely demanding on young job-seekers, who are required to be “flexible”, which basically means two things: unpredictable working hours, and few guarantees for the future. When it comes to prescriptions, this analysis calls for deregulation (e.g. in the labour market), and for specific policies aimed at improving the effectiveness of certain services (e.g. child care centres).

Saraceno (1998), among others, argues that a typical Italian rigidity is that on working hours, which do not adapt to the necessities of the family life-cycle. Moreover, part-time jobs are rare. In the Second Italian Fertility Survey of 1996, for instance, only 18% of employed women stated they worked part time, a percentage²⁶ which does not seem connected to the number or age of children (Table 7).

1.9 in the North) and the educational level (women with higher education expect to have fewer children than those with lower education, and responses vary in the 1.7-2.2 range). Cf. De Sandre *et al.* (1997)

²⁵ These aspects are very relevant nowadays, since women are more and more present on the labour market and, following a new participation model, they no longer stop working after marriage or childbirth. Among mothers of children aged between 0 and 2 the working-woman model is predominant in the North (63%), widespread in the Centre (55%), and still limited, but increasingly widespread, in the South (31%) (Sabbadini, 1999).

²⁶ Other sources give even lower proportions: just 14% in 1998, for instance (Istat, 2000).

TABLE 7 PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYED WOMEN WORKING PART TIME BY NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND OWN AGE (1996)

Number of children	Age group/Cohorts						Total
	20-24 1971-75	25-29 1966-70	30-34 1961-65	35-39 1956-60	40-44 1951-55	45-49 1946-50	
0	11.6	10.3	5.1	3.1	2.8	3.0	6.0
1	0.6	3.9	5.6	8.6	3.2	5.8	4.8
2	0.0	2.7	6.7	7.3	10.6	10.3	6.2
3+	0.0	0.0	0.5	1.8	3.3	2.2	1.3
Total %	12.2	16.9	17.9	20.8	19.9	21.3	18.3
No. cases	334	433	449	417	366	317	2,316

Source: De Sandre et alii, 1997

Some (female) scholars insist on the disproportionate share of household tasks that falls on the woman's shoulders (e.g. Palomba 1997; Saraceno, 1998; Sabbadini, 1999): even if she works just as much as her partner, or even more, an Italian woman is always the ultimate responsible for keeping a household going, and much more so when there are children (Tables 8 and 9).

TABLE 8 RESPONSIBILITY FOR HOUSEHOLD TASKS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF WOMEN (ALL COUPLES)

	Woman	Man	Both	Others	Total
PREPARE MEALS	%	%	%	%	%
Working woman	70.2	3.9	19.6	6.3	100
Non working woman	92.2	0.8	4.9	1.4	100
CLEAN THE HOUSE					
Working woman	74.2	0.7	16.6	8.4	100
Non working woman	92.2	0.3	4.6	2.1	100
SHOPPING					
Working woman	49.3	10.0	37.7	2.9	100
Non working woman	70.4	5.6	22.9	1.0	100
DO THE WASH UP					
Working woman	62.7	5.0	22.3	10.0	100
Non working woman	89.3	0.6	7.0	3.0	100

Source: Samoggia, 1999

TABLE 9 RESPONSIBILITY FOR PARENTAL TASKS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF WOMEN (COUPLES WITH AT LEAST 1 CHILD AGED LESS THAN 15)

	Woman	Man	both	others	total
PREPARE MEALS	%	%	%	%	%

<i>Working woman</i>	67.7	2.3	15.1	14.9	100
<i>Non working woman</i>	92.6	0.7	3.1	5.7	100
HELP CHILDREN TO DRESS					
<i>Working woman</i>	50.7	2.3	23.0	24.1	100
<i>Non working woman</i>	75.1	0.4	8.5	16.0	100
LOOK AFTER SICK CHILDREN					
<i>Working woman</i>	53.3	1.6	33.7	11.4	100
<i>Non working woman</i>	77.3	0.6	16.8	5.3	100
PLAY WITH CHILDREN					
<i>Working woman</i>	17.8	8.2	59.5	14.5	100
<i>Non working woman</i>	36.8	4.3	48.0	11.0	100
HELP CHILDREN DO THEIR HOMEWORK					
<i>Working woman</i>	32.0	4.3	22.6	41.0	100
<i>Non working woman</i>	45.5	4.3	17.6	32.6	100

Source: Samoggia, 1999

Households where both partners work are relatively more likely than others to share responsibility for most duties, like go shopping (37.7%), play with children²⁷ (59.5%), or look after them when they are ill (33.7%). But the situation is still far from equitable. Since the division of housework between the two spouses is unbalanced, working mothers often need to work very hard: 50% of them declare they work more than 60 hours per week; whereas only 21% of working fathers do that much²⁸ (Sabbadini, 1999).

Part of the problem here is that homework is not socially recognised, is not valued in any sense, and is therefore in a way non-existent (Saraceno, 1994). Here, once again, prescriptions are not easy. A "salary for housewives", although sometimes advocated, seems out of question for various reasons²⁹. And how to induce men to co-operate more actively in household chores is an open question, but one which it seems difficult to solve by law.

De Sandre (1994), among others, suggests that uncertainty, lack of points of reference, fear that things may change abruptly, and the like, are all factors which conjure to discourage couples from such a long-term commitment as having a baby. This is also connected to increased marriage fragility: since so many unions end up in a divorce, one, and in particular a woman, cannot rely on their resilience any more, which means that it is safer not to have many children, and probably even

²⁷ Even a recent Istat survey reveals that fathers would rather play with their children than take care of more routine tasks such as housekeeping or child caring. 39% of fathers with children aged between 3 and 5 play every day with their children, although this percentage declines as children age, to 24% for children aged 6 to 10, and to 9% for children aged 11 to 13. Sabbadini, 1999).

²⁸ Anyway, progress towards a more equitable share of the working load between partners is perceptible among the youngest generations: cf. De Sandre *et alii* (1997).

²⁹ The productivity of a housewife can not be ascertained; if anything, her salary should be paid to her by those who benefit from (and can evaluate) her services, i.e. the other household members; and the feminist movement itself is strongly against such a solution, which would confine women at home.

not to have children at all. In part, this overlaps with Bettio and Villa's (1998) critique of labour market obstacles against younger workers: their career is going to be highly uncertain, future events may force them to move to some other location almost at any time, etc.

What to do, then? The internationalisation of the world economy will likely make it impossible to grant younger workers the same benefits their predecessors had, for instance in terms of salary and career. On the other hand, the increase of divorces and legal separations appears irreversible, and beyond government control, since it affects part of what is nowadays considered a strictly private sphere. However, at least in principle, a government might express a firmer commitment in favour of large families and young babies, which could counterbalance the apparently augmented risks of parenthood.

Dalla Zuanna (2000) echoes Lestaeghe and Moors's (1995) claim that hedonism, post materialism, and secularisation are at the root of the same short-sightedness which De Sandre (1994) attributes to stricter external constraints, but which is here imputed to the individuals themselves, as a consequence of a societal evolution in the very way of viewing life. People basically do what is convenient to them, and gives them leisure, but does not require too much in terms of effort, or time, or commitment. Children are too demanding in all possible senses, and therefore scarcely compatible with this new prevailing philosophy.

This line of reasoning does not seem too far from that of those scholars who think that the youngest generations are less and less mature, less ready to self sacrifice, and unprepared to accept that life may not always be easy: they would rather spend most of their adulthood in their parents' home than set up a new home for themselves – in part on the ground that they need to invest more years in the education process than ever before (Sabbadini, 1999; Billari and Ongaro, 1999). In both cases, prescriptions here are hard to give: what is called for is a general change of attitudes, which it does not seem easy to bring about, especially nowadays that things appear rather to be drifting in the opposite direction.

Familism is, according to several (Italian) authors, another possible interpretation of the fertility decline. The idea is: parents feel that their children are their own blood and flesh; they love them so much that they want to give them as good a start as possible, and therefore they invest in them enormous energies, and time, and resources (Palomba, 1995; Gribaudo, 1997; Dalla Zuanna, 2000). Among other things³⁰, this requires that potential parents have accumulated a certain amount of wealth before they can afford to have their first child, and, after that, they are likely to find out that they can have another child only at the expenses of the first one, which they would rather avoid. This explains why parenthood is so late, and why only children are on the increase. As is the case with several of the interpretations indicated above, this one too does not guide to easy and immediate prescriptions: what is pivotal here, is an attitude, which, at best, can only be changed with considerable time and energy.

³⁰ Familism, it may be noted in passing, is alleged to imply a scarce sense of belonging to the society as a whole: one's own family is the only thing that really matters.

Economists, like Del Boca herself (1997) or Cigno (1991), are more likely to think that the true causes of the fertility decline lie in the increased opportunity costs of motherhood: women study more than they used to do; therefore they can work and earn more than it was the case until not so long ago. Any hour that they do not spend working (for instance, because they are looking after their baby) brings about an opportunity cost (=unearned wage) which may be very high (Davies and Joshi, 1994). Here the prescription for a pro-natalist government is: try and set up an effective system of child care and (more generally) family services, which will free at least part of the mother's time. Another line of reasoning is: make fathers participate more in parenthood, for instance by discouraging mothers from taking too long maternity leaves, and encouraging fathers to take paternity leaves instead. Incidentally, this is partly being done already, although to push it farther contrasts, in part, with the notion that the State should not interfere too much with what is basically a couple's decision on the proper allocation of time and resources among partners.

Finally, others have attempted to calculate, beyond opportunity costs, also the current cost of maintaining a family, and a child in particular (e.g. Ekert, 1994). Although the results of this kind of studies are far from conclusive, child costs appear to be high. What is worse, several public actions unintentionally make children even more expensive: the introduction of pension systems is an example. The idea is: if you have children now, they will help you when you are old, so that, in a sense, they are an investment. But where a public pension system exists, nobody needs his or her own children for his or her own old age. Children still cost, but they will not bear fruits any more, and the balance may become heavily negative (De Sandre, 1994; Cigno 1991). Another example is that of compulsory education: the longer you make it, the longer a family will have to support its children, and the more expensive they will ultimately result.

The prescription here is straightforward: children cost too much, and their cost is on the increase. So, if a society thinks that children are, at least partly, a public good (because they perpetuate culture, because they are essential for a pay-as-you-go public pension system, etc.), it must be prepared to pay for them more than it customarily does. Many possible ways of doing this have been suggested: lump sums or monthly instalments; cash or payments in goods and services; subject to means testing or not; of fixed or varying amount (depending, for instance, on the economic status of the household, on birth order, etc.), etc. Although we find some forms preferable to others, and we also believe that some (non negligible) amounts make more sense than others, we will not delve into these details here. Rather, we would like to answer some of the possible general objections against explicit child support.

Some (e.g. Cigno, 1994) have expressed fears that child benefits, if they were to be introduced in any relevant amount, would indeed encourage fertility, but at the expense of the quality of the future generations: more children would be born, but each of them, on average, would study less, would be less cared for by his or her parents, etc. While we agree that such an objection could be raised in principle, we find it out of place in a country like Italy, where fertility is so low that, if anything, one should conclude that we're already investing too much in the "quality" and too little in the quantity-

of future generations. Indeed, this may well be the economic-jargon equivalent of what others call familism.

Most demographers, as we noted before, contend that the true causes of the fertility decline are not (mainly) economic, and, therefore, that child benefits would not stimulate fertility. In principle, we find this chain of reasoning scarcely convincing: imagine an extreme situation, in which bearing and rearing children has become an undesired activity, but one which society needs to survive: wouldn't this become a work, just like most other works, which people do for pay, and not for self satisfaction? Given a proper pay, a socially convenient number of "workers" (i.e., mothers) could be enrolled. So, even in this extreme case, the question essentially becomes an empirical one: how much does society have to pay to reach the desired level of fertility? Although some attempts at estimations have been proposed (Blanchet, Ekert-Jaffé, 1994), we tend to believe that nobody can answer such a question, less than ever can anybody claim that financial stimuli would be fruitless. The only general consideration that one can make is that since, fortunately, we are still far from the paradox we depicted above, it is likely that the same result (i.e. close-to-reproduction fertility) may be reached with a considerably smaller financial effort.

But the main point that we would like to make is that one does not need to be absolutely sure that economic reasons are the main responsible for the fertility decline to advocate financial support. It may be familism, and by giving families enough resources per child, one may hope to induce them to have not only high-quality children (which they do anyway), but also more children (which they would not do otherwise). It may be a matter of social recognition, and by attaching a formal payment for the very fact of bearing and rearing children, one automatically upgrades it to the dignity of an officially recognised, and socially valued, activity. It may be uncertainty, and this solution would be tantamount to firmly stating that investing in children is part of the society's commitments for the foreseeable future. And so on.

As mentioned, however, this solution, can only be effective if one is prepared to invest a considerable amount of resources in it. Unfortunately, this is very unlikely in a country like Italy, which has a huge public debt inherited from the past (roughly as large as the Gdp itself), and, after its entry in the European Union, is subject to strict controls on the balance between current expenses and fiscal revenues. So, no large reform is going to be possible, and no relevant investment is going to be made on future generations, unless such a legislative change goes along with other major fiscal reforms.

One possibility exists, though. Italy has long been one of the countries with the most generous pension system in the western world. Coupled with rapid ageing and slowdown of economic growth, this system was heading towards bankruptcy, until two major reforms were implemented in 1992 and 1995. All observers agree that, although moving in the right direction, these steps are not enough yet, and another (major?) adjustment is foreseen in 2001. In principle, that occasion could be exploited to reform the intergenerational transfer system more thoroughly, taking explicitly into account also the youngest generations. How this could be done technically is a subject for other studies (e.g., De Santis, 1997a, b): what one can notice, here, is that this would have the double

advantage of encouraging fertility and stabilising the financial flows of the transfer system itself, even in case of future fertility fluctuations.

Chances are low, but can we at least timidly hope that this opportunity will not be wasted?

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