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The rise and fall of immigration in a divided country. Italy 1977-2016

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Abstract

Over the last forty years, Europe has experienced two new migratory flows: exit from ex-communist countries, entry into Mediterreanean countries, including Italy. The first part of the 21st century saw a immigration boom, and then subsequently, in the years of economic crisis that followed, a immigration bust, accompanied by a revival of emigration abroad. We show how this “stop and go” migrants of recent years are due to demographic and demand/supply labor market structural changes and the inability (or lack of will) of public authorities to govern entries from and exits abroad. Moreover, several particularities of Italian society (strong family ties, widespread home ownership, the abundance of small businesses) have shaped foreigner presence in Italy, in ways different than those seen in central and northern Europe. We distinguish also between the Center/North and the South/Islands of Italy, as the migratory histories of these two areas are quite different.

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Over the last forty years, Europe has experienced two new strong migratory flows: exit from ex-communist countries, entry into Mediterreanean countries. This second flow has been striking for its speed and magnitude (Table 1). At the beginning of 2017, more than ten million foreigners were living Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece, and their proportion compared to the total population was close that of countries with long histories of migration. Yet forty years earlier, there were hardly any foreigners living in these countries (King et al. 2000; Bonifazi 2013, 2017; Strozza and De Santis 2017).

(Table 1 here)

Italy has contributed significantly to the writing of this new chapter of international migration. In a reversal of a secular trend, at the beginning of the 1990s the net number of migrants due to international migration became positive. While the final two decades of the twentieth century were characterized by a gradual increase in entries, the first part of the twenty-first century saw a veritable immigration boom, and then subsequently, in the years of economic crisis that followed, a sudden immigration bust, accompanied by a revival of emigration abroad.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, we describe forty years of Italian migration (1977-2016), systematically distinguishing between the Center/North and the South/Islands of Italy, as the migratory histories of these two areas are quite different (Avola 2015). We show how the “stop and go” migrants of recent years can be understood in light of demographic and demand/supply labor market structural changes (Reyneri 1998; Dalla-Zuanna 2006; Bonifazi and Marini 2010; 2014), and the inability (or lack of will) of public authorities to govern entries from and exits abroad (Barbagli et al. 2004; Sciortino 2012). Second — without delving into the complexities of the integration of foreigners into Italian society, beyond the scope of this paper — we observe how several persistent and structural particularities of Italian society (strong family ties, widespread home ownership, the abundance of small businesses) have shaped foreigner presence in Italy, in ways much different than those seen in central and northern Europe.[1]

1. The boom in immigration from abroad

Beginning in the late 1970s, foreigners began to settle in Italy: 122 thousand immigrants were counted as residents in 1971, 211 thousand in 1981, 356 thousand in 1991, 1 million 335 thousand in 2001, 4 million 335 thousand in 2011, 5 millions 144 thousand at the beginning of 2018. During this time, internal movement continued, although its intensity was much lower than in the 1950s and 1960s (Bonifazi and Heins 2000).

To highlight the relationship between migrations and their potential demographic and economic pull factors over the forty years between 1977 and 2016, we use three simple indicators, which can be constructed annually using official sources for the entire period. We summarize these factors with working population turnover ratio $(P_{15\text{-}24}/P_{55\text{-}64})$x100 or $(P_{20\text{-}24}/P_{60\text{-}64})$x100 – henceforth *turnover ratio*. Economic factors are observed using the

[1] We thank Corrado Bonifazi, Emilio Reyneri and Salvatore Strozza for reading a preliminary version of this paper.

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unemployment rate (ratio between persons looking for work and labor force by the large age class 15-64). Both indicators should have an inverse relationship with the net number of migrants. Finally, to allow for spatial-temporal comparisons, migrations are measured using the *net migration rate*, calculated as the ratio between the net number of migrants and average population in the period to which the balance itself refers. These three indicators were calculated for both Italy and the two large subdivisions Center/North and the South/Islands of Italy, for each of the 40 years between 1977 and 2016 (Fig. 1). The available data allow to distinguish – for the Center/North and the South of Italy – between net migration due to internal migration and that due to international migration (Fig. 2).

(Figures 1 and 2 here)

During these forty years, the migratory histories of the Center/North and South/Islands of Italy were fundamentally different. In the Center/North, the net migration rate (without distinguishing between internal and international) was always positive, less than 4‰ annually in the twenty-year period 1977-96, rising above 10‰ in the decade that followed, and then returning to around 4‰ in most recent years. These trends are mostly due to variations in net migration rates due to international immigration, while the net number of migrants with the South of Italy remained positive, around 1-2‰ and with limited fluctuations over the forty-year period. During the *migration boom* decade, both demographic and economic pull factors were strongly favorable to migration (Bonifazi and Marini 2010). The turnover ratio had already fallen below 100 in 1995, and then stabilized around 75 potential new workers for every 100 potential new retirees beginning in 2005. Unemployment was below 6% in the first decade of the century, and then rose in the years that followed — right when the net migration rate declined — but never over 10%.

In the South/Islands of Italy, instead, the net migration rate was positive (but never above 2‰) for only a few years during the first decade of the century. This occurred because, despite the fact that net migration due to international immigration had already become positive in 1995, that with the Center/North, beginning that same year, remained negative. For the entire forty-year period, the annual net number of migrants between the South/Islands and Center/North was rarely less than 40 thousand (Bonifazi e Heins 2000). The weak migratory attraction of the South/Islands is in line with its demographic structure and levels of unemployment. The turnover ratio went below 100 only in 2010, 15 years after the Center/North. Unemployment also remained high compared to the Center/North, rising above 20% in the worst years (such as 1989 and 2014), and never going below 10%, even in the best years.

We further our analysis of working population turnover by also considering not just the "quantity" but the "quality" of those who enter and exit at working ages. For women resident in Italy, official data allows to complete the series calculated by Caltabiano and Dalla-Zuanna (2015) of women by age and level of education.[2] Table 2 shows the considerable difference in potential renewal of the labor force when women with and without a high school diploma are considered. The decade of the immigration boom is also the period that saw, each year, a potential shortage of 200 thousand non-graduates women (a figure that doubles when also considering men). This shortage was much smaller in previous years, while it remained large – even if tending to decrease – after 2011 (figure 3).

[2] The estimation for men as well of the entire series in Table 2 would be very laborious. Differences by sex are, in any case, minimal, with the proportions of men with high school diplomas slightly higher compared to women for the older cohorts, and a slightly lower for the younger cohorts.

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(Table 2 and Figure 3 here)

Certainly, the socioeconomic condition and social position of a high school graduate 50 years ago was quite different than that of a graduate today. That said, three aspects should be considered. To begin with, in the first decade of the twenty-first century the potential shortage of unskilled labor (represented by non-graduates) is of the same order of magnitude, year after year, as the net number of migrants due to international immigration during the same period (between 300 and 500 thousand a year). Secondly, this potential shortage of unskilled labor was not present — in the national average — before the 1990s. Thus, foreign immigrants helped compensate for the continual shortage of unskilled labor in the first decade of the new century, as we will be better see in the next section.

Table 2 also shows an opposite phenomenon: a high number of graduates aged 20-24 compared to those aged 60-64, an imbalance that — both in absolute values and in tornover ratios — has diminished only in recent years. Up until the beginning of the employment crisis, this imbalance was easily absorbed by the large increase in office jobs and technical jobs, both in public administration and private companies. In the decade of crisis following 2008, the increase in skilled jobs slowed considerably (also due to repeated blocking of public administration turnover), while the continual increase in high school and university graduates unable to fulfill their employment aspirations translated into a strong push factor for a renewal of Italian emigration abroad.

In the northwest regions and in the cities of the Center/North of Italy, beginning in the 1980s the immigration of manual workers from abroad replaced Italian migration for filling the lower levels of the social scale (Dalla-Zuanna 2006). In constrast, in the "new industrial outskirts" (Anastasia and Rullani 1979) of Northeast and Central Italy, foreign immigrants were instead the first major influx of arrivals different from the native population after centuries in which, instead, large outflows of laborers predominated. Finally, in the South/Islands of Italy, for all of the forty-year period, less but still significant flows of unskilled workers from abroad overlapped with equally significant movement towards other Italian regions, even of individuals with high school and university degrees. These new migratory flows can also be understood in light of rapid change in the composition of the Italian population in terms of levels of education, together with a consequent rising of youth employment expectations.

2. Work and the settlement of immigrants during the immigration boom

International migrations towards Italy intersected with changes in the productive system of the country: tertiarisation, segmentation, growing importance of medium-small and small businesses, the success of "industrial districts" (Fuà and Zacchia 1983). In 1970, 17% of employees still worked in agriculture, 39% in industry, 45% in the tertiary sector. Forty years later, only 5% worked in agriculture, while just under 70% worked in the service industry (Felice 2015). These years also saw a change in labor force demand, where evermore flexibility was required and where, alongside traditional permanent contracts, there appeared, sometimes in substitution, sometimes in addition, atypical forms of work. Large pockets of irregular work remained in particular, but not only, in the South/Islands of Italy, especially in the areas of agriculture, construction, personal services, logistics, tourism, and catering. Finally, in Italy the wage gap between unskilled and skilled work remained relatively wide (Istat 2016; Oecd 2017 Figure A6.1).

In the meantime, as mentioned above, the supply of labor offered by Italy's potential workforce also changed considerably. While the pocket of underemployment in agriculture

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was rapidly exhausted, education and family income increased, in a context of a continual decline in the turnover ratio and a rise in high school graduates. All this raised the reservation wage of young Italians (the level of remuneration below which the person no longer finds it advantageous to work), thanks also to resources available to youth who continued to live in the parental home much longer than their peers in Northern and Central Europe.[3] This shift in the offer and demand for work meant that, unlike their parents, young new Italian workers in the Center/North of Italy could look for — and until the beginning of the crisis find — work mainly on the "upper levels" of the market, while on the "lower levels" huge chasms of unfilled jobs opened up.

Only a small part of this demand for unskilled labor attracted new immigrants from the South/Islands of Italy. In fact, some of the phenomena described above also occurred in the poorest areas of the country (i.e., gradual weakening of demographic push factors, rise in education, ability of families to offer support to their adult children). Although income and wealth continued to be lower in the South/Islands of Italy than in the Center/North,[4] family incomes were, however, much higher compared to the 1950s and 60s, and the cost of living remained much lower than in the Center/North (Cannari and Luzzolino 2009). In addition, many areas experienced processes of economic modernization thanks to the consolidation of several large industries, the spread of industrial clusters, the development of tourism and quality agriculture. This development of the South/Islands of Italy — "patchworked" and almost always more fragile compared to the Center/North — was nevertheless enough to slow the exodous of Italians and attract flows of foreign workers. While always fewer compared to the Center/North, the number of foreigners was still significant: at the beginning of 2017, 4% of residents in the South/Islands of Italy were foreigners (Table 1).

A last important new factor intertwined with migrations was the steady increase in the number of Italian women engaged in the labor market: their activity rate, while remaining much lower than in other countries such as France, the UK or Germany rose, especially over the last twenty years. More specifically, the activity rate of women between the ages of 15 and 64 increased from 35% in 1977 to 56% in 2017. This shift was especially apparent in the Center/North — where the rate in 2017 was 63% — compared to the South/Islands, were it remained 41%. This major change increased competition for higher-paying jobs, also because Italian women had on average higher levels of education compared to men. Since the increased presence of women was above all due to young mothers who chose not leave the labor market early, with a subsequent rise in older female workers, the latter also contributed to slowing the demand for youth, male and female. In addition, the prolonged presence of women at work attracted a large number of foreigners (or better female immigrants) hired to care for small children, the elderly, and the homes of Italians. Finally, the persistence or the return of women to the labor market may have contributed to reducing the number of foreigners entering the country, especially during the last decade of economic crisis.

These considerations, taken together with the data provided in the previous section, suggest that up until the 1970s, international migration towards Italy was governed by the intersection between unskilled labor supply and demand, decentralized and spontaneous, with little or no immigration policy regulation. Immigration was almost exclusively geared

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[3] In 2015, average age at departure from the parental home for men was 19.7 in Sweden, 21.5 in Denmark, 24.5 in Holland, 25.3 in the UK, 24.8 in France and 24.6 in Germany, 30.1 in Spain, 30.8 in Greece, 29.7 in Portugal, 31.5 in Italy. http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do, Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna (2017).

[4] In 2011, for example, while the overall GDP per capita in Italy was 1.00, it was 1.17 in the Center/North and 0.68 in the South.

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towards the following four areas: small and medium industry enterprises, construction, agriculture (particularly that requiring temporal and seasonal work), unskilled labor in the service sector. To these areas of dependent work, there were also some business sectors in industry (perhaps the most extensive example is the presence of Chinese enterpreneurs in the textile district of Prato in Tuscany) and in services (catering, hairdressers, cafes, etc.) – Arango and Baldwin-Edwards 1999; Ambrosini 2001; Paterno et al. 2016.

Figure 4 and Table 3 confirm three important characteristics of the relationship between foreigners and work in the Italian case: the share of foreigners in the labor force has always been higher than in the population as a whole. Employment of foreigners is considerably higher in the Center/North than in the South/Islands; participation is almost exclusively concentrated in unskilled employment – in the Centre/North in 2011-2016, 40% of all active workers in this area were foreigners. In the South/Islands, the proportions of foreigners are much lower, but the occupational characteristics are similar. From this point of view, these immigrations from abroad are very similar to most of internal migration before the 1980, only that the area of arrival has expanded to the whole Center-North and part of the South/Islands (Dalla-Zuanna 2006).

(Figure 4 and Table 3 here)

The category of unskilled work includes the vast area of private domestic services provided to families, to a large extent by women but also men, charged with the care of people and domestic spaces (Andal 2000; Anderson 2000; Parreñas 2001; Sarti 2006, 2008; Colombo 2007; Catanzaro and Colombo 2009: Ambrosini 2013). This is among the most conspicuous in terms of foreign presence, and begs attention, as it is typical of immigration towards Italy and – more generally – towards Southern Europe. Figure 5 shows that over the course of the 1990s and up until the crisis, the number of foreign workers legally hired by Italian families continually grew, passing 800 thousand individuals. At the beginning of the 1990s, there were only 35 thousand foreigners in this sector, and going back even further, there were just 5 thousand in the late 1970s (Sacconi 1984). The crisis reversed this trend, but in early 2017 there were still 650 thousand foreigners, making up 75% of the total number of workers in this area, which began to show signs of contraction, at least in its legal component, beginning in 2013.

There were three factors that influenced and shaped this market for private personal services, for the most part fulfilled by foreign women. The first, as mentioned, was the growth in female participation in the labor force. The persistence of traditional gender models in the division of household chores made recourse to paid domestic services one of women’s main labor market access strategies. It has, in fact, been shown that the willingness of foreign women to carry out domestic work had a casual effect on the increase in the employment rate of Italian women (Barone and Mocetti 2010).

The second factor is purely demographic in nature and consists of constant growth of the elderly population, due to increasing life expectancy (Bonifazi and Marini 2010). According to the 1951 Italian census, there were 3 million 895 thousand people aged 65 and over, which rose to 7 million 485 thousand in 1981, and 12 million 345 thousand in 2011. According the 30-year predictions of the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat), this number will rise to a little over 20 million people aged 65 and older in the year 2041.

Finally, there was also an institutional factor. The Italian welfare system is predominantly family-rooted (Esping-Andersen 1990; Viazzo 2003), based in large part on monetary transfers to families, particularly in the form of pensions. Families are thus the mainstay of welfare provision, and the model encourages recourse to the market for the care of people. It is much more common in Italy, than in countries of Central and Northern Europe, for the elderly to live near their children, who in turn are able to manage

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relationships with domestic workers mainly if their parents have motor or cognitive difficulties (Share 2013). Such an extensive presence of domestic workers is thus a typically "Mediterranean" phenomenon: according to Eurostat (accounting only for legal hires), 70% of the domestic work carried out in the 14 countries of Western Europe takes place in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, and this when only 30% of the total population of this area lives in these four countries (Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna 2017).[5] Foreign women from the Philippines, South America, and former communist countries after 1989 have responded to a demand for labor that — unless there is some major change — will continue to grow, and grow substantially, in the years to come.

This section has underlined a number of particularities of foreign migration towards Italy — characteristics that are not unsurprisingly largely shared with Spain, Portugal, and Greece — mostly intertwined with the characteristics of the Mediterranean family (Finotelli 2008). We conclude by highlighting two aspects of the settlement of immigrants in Italy, mostly positive, once again determined more by the structure of the Italian family than by conscious political decisions: the territorial dispersion of foreign residence and the absence of ethnic ghettos.

(Figure 5 here)

Unlike that which happens in other European and non-European countries, in Italy immigrants are not concentrated in cities. In Turin, Milan, Genoa, Bologna, Florence and Rome (the cities in the Center/North with more than 300 thousand inhabitants), the percentage of foreign citizens at the beginning of 2017 was only slightly higher compared to the average for the Center/North as a whole (15% vs. 11%). In these six cities, there were less than 1 million foreigners (22% of the total of the Center/North), while the overall population resident therein made up 17% of the total of the Center/North. The urban concentration of foreigners is slightly more pronounced in the South/Islands, but nothing in Italy compares to that seen in other European countries such as the UK, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Sweden. This is primarily because immigrants have moved following work opportunities. Since — in contrast to what happened in the 1950s and 60s — the demand for work has not come almost solely from large industrial centers, but from families and companies scattered across the country, and thus immigrants too have dispersed throughout the national territory.

Levels of residential segregation of foreigners in Italy are also lower than those observed in other areas of Europe (Iceland 2014), and there are no large ethnic ghettos.[6] This is essentially due to the strong tendency of Italian families to own and live in the same house for years and years. A ghetto forms when, in a working-class area with a high tenancy rate, a cohesive ethnic group ends up living in homes close to one another, advantageous for managing forms of solidarity and more or less legal economies. This causes – in contiguous areas – the exit of locals, the pushing down of rents, and the attraction of other families belonging to the same ethnic group. In Italy, this has occurred only very rarely, as there are relatively few areas devoid of apartments or homes occupied

[5] The fourteen countries include: Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, France, Germany, the UK, Switzerland, Austria, Ireland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland, and Denmark.

[6] Although in Italy there are no ghettos comparable to those of other European countries, some nationalities tend to concentrate in particular areas such as large cities or some productive districts (Ferrara et al. 2010). More generally, in all this article foreigners are considered as a whole, without distinguishing according to nationality. It must be said, however, that the wide prevalence, among foreigners living in Italy, of unskilled jobs is valid regardless of their nationality, with the exclusion of groups, numerically of little importance, coming from rich countries.

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by their owners. Even when new neighbors of other ethnicities arrive, home owners rarely move. Moreover, (little available in Italy) social housing is usally assigned taking care not to concentrate people of the same origin. In this way, 5 million foreigners are scattered across Italian cities and towns without the creation of closed neighborhoods such as Rinkeby, the ghetto of Stockholm, where 95% of the population are either first or second generation immigrants and where 40% of the children are poor, compared to just 3% on average in other neighborhoods of the Swedish capital. It is thus almost comical when the Italian media define, with alarm, “ghetto” neighborhoods within cities where the presence of foreigners hardly exceeds 20% of residents (Barbagli and Pisati 2012).

3. Rules that don’t work

Italy has in fact given up on defining its own “migratory model,” The implicit idea was more to protect local workers and a self-sufficient population model than to favor the matching of labor supply and demand. Such anachronistic and inadequate rules, part of which came directly from the laws regulating the internal migration movements during the Fascist Era, didn’t work, but they did have the paradoxical effect of favoring self-regulation, based precisely on matching labor supply and demand. The inadequacy of migration legislation also extended to that governing the granting of citizenship.

Reforms of entry policies, or better the a posteriori regularization of the latter and, above all, expulsions, have been issued in almost regular succession since the mid-1970s (Leenders 1995; Colombo and Sciortino 2003; Einaudi 2007; Finotelli and Sciortino 2009; Sciortino 2012). The leitmotiv that unites these policies is a cultural resistence to defining Italy as a country of immigration, as much in terms of population as in work. This makes continuous legal stays for anyone looking for dependent employment in Italy difficult if not impossible. The — apparently common sense — idea has been to allow stable stays only for those who, coming directly from abroad, have been officially nominated by an employer, within a regime of national quotas defined each year. This protectionist attitude persists throughout the entire period considered here, even in the context of multiple legislative reforms on the subject (the most important of which issued in 1986, 1990, 1998, and 2002).

The idea of regulating entries by means of abstractly predefined quotas and specific nominations has proved ineffective in a country where most foriegners work in families, small or very small businesses, or in intermittent and occasional employment. In practice, the large majority of foreigners entered Italy either with a tourist visa or illegally, and then legalized their positions by taking advantage of a succession of amnesties offered up until 2012, demonstrating that they had jobs. The backbone of these migratory policies was to legalize, a posteriori, illegal immigrants, defined differently depending on the political winds at the time. The modest relevance of actually feasible legal channels of entry brought about periodic “accumulations” of illegal foreigners, which were from time to time thinned by ex-post regularizations. Figure 6 clearly shows this cyclical pattern: periodic inflations of undocumented migrants, interrupted by regularizations which considerably reduced the number of illegal immigrants for a period of one to two years, followed by new expansive phases interrupted by new exceptional enlargement measures. The highest peaks in the number of illegal immigrants were, in fact, in 2002, 2006, and 2008. The phase following 2012 is clearly expansive and has brought about a slow new peak in irregular presence (close to half a million in 2017), even if, as we will shortly see, Italy has gradually become less attractive to migrants compared to the past.

(Figure 6 here)

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Over the course of forty years in Italy, more than 2 million illegal immigrants regularized their situations (Tab. 4). A sample survey of the foreign population carried out in 2012 revealed that more than a third of foreigners legally present in Italy received their last residence permit thanks to a regularization measure. This proportion rises to two-thirds when considering their entire migratory "careers."[7] After 2012, regularization measures ended, while at the same time the numbers of legal entries were minimal (30 thousand a year in the five-year period 2013-2017, a third of that in the previous five-year period).

(Table 4 here)

These numbers suggest that Italian entry/expulsion policies were an uninterrupted series of failures. That said, such a posteriori legalizations are not an Italian peculiarity. An evident example is that of France, where in the 1960s and 70s similar legalizations took place, much like the Italian case in the decades that followed. These have similarly been applied in other countries of Mediterranean Europe, and in places such as Austria (Colombo 2012) not to mention the USA.

While amnesties constitute the mainstay of Italian admission policies, active recruitment policies played only a small role, and they were often bent to play a substitutional role for a posteriori amnesties. This especially when political conditions did not allow for the adoption of explicit regularizations, or when regularizations were too recent. Some foreign workforce recruitment measures were, in fact, only formally addressed to entry candidates residing abroad but were actually also accessible to foreign workers already living in Italy to whom the possibility of legalizing their situation was offered, if they were employed. In some cases, the recipients were directly employers, who were allowed to regularize existing but undocumented situations (Ankica and Triandafyllidou 2006).

Entry measures for work purposes did slowly begin to be adopted as early as the 1990s, although it wasn't until 1998, with approval of the Turco-Napolitano law, that the quotas became large enough to speak of actual active policies of recruitment from abroad of wage laborers and autonomous and seasonal workers. Excluding amnesties, in this period these policies allowed 90 thousand foreigners a year to legally enter Italy for work. It was, however, short-lived, as the economic crisis led governments to drastically limit admission quotas, bringing them back to the levels of the early 1990s. A particularly dramatic turn occurred in 2012, when entry quotas began to steadily decline until reaching very low levels. Such low quotas contributed to generating pockets of illegal immigrants: according to estimates from the ISMU foundation, between 2013 and 2017 illegal immigrants increased in number from 300 to 500 thousand (see again Figure 5).

Over the course of the entire forty years, regeneration of the population of illegal immigrants was also determined by the difficulty of expelling foreigners without a residence permit (Pastore 2004). Expelled illegal immigrants were, in fact, far fewer in number than those regularized. Systematic data is available only up until the first decade of the new century, but they communicate a clear message. The quota of foreigners really expelled after having been intercepted as illegal by the police fluctuated for years around 10% in the 1990s, then grew with the reform of 1998 reaching around 30-40%, with the highest values in 2003, right after the new amnesty that followed the Bossi-Fini law (when just under half of intercepted illegal immigrants were expelled). But from that year on, the quota steadily fell, and in 2010 is was just over 26% (Colombo 2012). According to recent

[7] Analysis conducted by the authors using microdata files from the Istat survey, "Condition and social integration of foreign citiznes. 2011-2012". Further information can be found at: https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/10825.

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partial data published by the parliamentary commission of inquiry into the system of reception, identification, and expulsion, in the first seven months of 2016 the quota of expelled immigrants on the total of those intercepted, net of entry refusals at the border, was 25%, and lower than 20% in the first 11 months of 2017.[8] Variations in control capacity generally depend much less on the severity of norms and much more on the availability of bilateral agreements between States on the transit and readmission of identified illegal immigrants. These variations indicate that since 2004 the recovery, though partial, of the control capacity of illegal immigration has weakened considerably, returning to levels prior to the reform of 1998.

This semi-illegal system has caused much suffering for foreigners and hassles for employers. That said, one might also look at things from a different point of view. The inability to regulate entry and exit flows and the mechanism of amnesties have been powerful factors in attracting immigration. Migrants well knew that — once they entered Italy — it was very difficult to be forced to leave against their will. In the years leading up to 2011, 2 million illegal immigrants were legalized, while less than 400 thousand were actually expelled. Moreover, as reiterated, the inability to regulate immigration flows favored the informal and spontaneous matching of labor supply and demand, especially for those sectors with greater entry and exit flexibility, often characterized by seasonsality or cyclical in nature.

Policies on the awarding of citizenship also reveal the institutional and cultural difficulties of accepting that Italy has now become a multiethnic country and that immigration from abroad is structural, not occasional. There remain, for example, extremely generous rules for granting citizenship to descendents of Italians emigrated abroad. It is in fact sufficient to demonstrate that one's ancestor emigrated from Italy after Unification (or after 1861-70, depending on the region of origin) to have the right to obtain Italian citizenship. In 2017, there were 200 thousand pending requests at the consulate in San Paolo, Brazil, mostly from people who had no intention of settling in Italy, but who wished to obtain an Italian passport so as to travel without a visa to the United States or through Europe. In the decade of 1998-2007, Italian citizenship was granted to a little under one million descendents of Italians abroad, between recognitions and reacquiries under the provisions of the 1992 law (Tintori 2009). This law, however, also set very restrictive rules — from an international perspective — for the granting of citizenship to foreigners, requiring 10 years of continual legal presence in Italy (plus two more of bureaucratic rigmarole), without any fast-track procedures for minors born or raised in Italy. A legislative proposal to accelerate the process for minors was approved by the Lower House in 2015, but foundered in the Senate in 2018, at the end of the seventeenth legislature, submerged by pre-electoral controversies.

Despite this restrictive legislation, the number of citizenships granted in Italy has rapidly increased, due to the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of foreigners who have now been living in the country for more than a decade. Changes in citizenship from foreign to Italian recorded in the municipal registries rose above 25 thousand in 2005, 50 thousand in 2008, 100 thousand in 2013 and 200 thousand in 2016. As we will see in the next section, many foreigners sought to obtain an Italian passport not to remain in Italy, but to be able to freely move through the European Union, go to the United States, and many other countries of the world, much like Italian descendents in South America.

[8] Values calculated net of entry refusals at the border. These are normally included in the number of explusions in reports issued by various institutions, but they only formally meet this definiition, given that they were not "expelled" after having been tracked down within the national borders.

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4. The crisis and the immigration bust

In Italy, the economic crisis hit particularly hard. The GDP fell heavily from 2008 to 2013, and in 2016 it was still far from the levels of 2008 (almost 10% less in real terms, accounting for inflation). For the entire decade of 2008-17, the economy in Italy grew less or diminshed more compared to the average in other countries of the European Union and the Eurozone. Over the 5-year period from 2008-13, the number of employed decreased by 1 million 300 thousand (-5%). In the subsequent 5-year period this number grew, returning to pre-crisis levels in 2017, but the number of full-time equivalent jobs is still far from that of 2008, as the average number of hours worked per employee has decreased.

The decline in the number of employed individuals was particularly notable in sectors using much immigrant labor (Bonifazi and Marini 2015). For example, workers in construction in the five-year period 2008-13 fell by 400 thousand (from 1 million 952 thousand to 1 million 553 thousand), and this trend continued in the years that followed, although at a less intense pace. In addition, even the sectors that recovered after 2014, such as metalworking, experienced important processes of restructuration, which often led to a reduction in unskilled labor. The personal services sector was, instead, less impacted by the crisis.

Between 2008 and 2013, the employment rate of foreign men aged 15-64 declined by 14 percent in the Center/North (from 85 to 71%) and 11 percent in the South/Islands (from 72% to 65%), while in both areas the unemployment rate of foreigners increased by 10 percent (from 6 to 16%). The situation was negative for foreign women as well, but less dramatic: the employment rate in both the Center/North and the South/Islands declined by 2-3 percent while the unemployment rate rose from 10 to 16 percent. For Italians, the impact was less severe, although this more positive outcome was due exclusively to growth in the number of employees over the age of 55, accentuated by the pension reform of 2012 (Dalla Zuanna and Giraldo 2017). It has been shown that the increase in older workers during the crisis limited the number of new entries into the workforce (Bertoni and Brunello 2017) and lowered the probability of finding new work for those who had lost their jobs.

In the context of job and income destruction, poverty increased. The number of families in absolute poverty resident in Italy in 2008 rose from 937 thousand in 2008 to 1 million 619 thousand in 2016 (+73%), while individuals in absolute poverty increased from 2 million 113 thousand to 4 million 742 thousand (+124%). The increase of families in poverty occurred in both the Center/North (from 2.7% in 2008 to 6.9% in 2016) and the South/Islands (from 5.2% to 9.8%) – Istat 2017a. Impoverishment hit foreigners especially hard (Table 5). In the two-year period of 2015-2016, 27% of families composed exclusively of foreigners were in absolute poverty, compared to 4.4% of Italian-only families. In the Center/North, the incidence of absolute poverty was 10 times higher among foreign-only families compared to Italian-only families. Moreover, almost half of foreign minors with two or more siblings lived in absolute poverty.

(Table 5 here)

To better understand why a situation so unfavorable to foreigners could come about in just a few years, it is important to consider other factors in addition to the above presented labor market data. First of all, up until 2018 there was no universal public measure to combat poverty. While several aspects of the Italian welfare system succeeded in protecting the neediest better than in other countries (thanks to free public health and

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schools), the crisis highlighted other serious shortcomings, particularly in terms of income support and housing poverty. Hardship was accentuated, in the post-2008 decade, by the local financial crisis, which saw budget cuts or lack of increases for many municipal social services, precisely in the years in which poverty was rising: average municipal expenditure for per capita assistance, which increased from 90 to 114 euros from 2003 to 2009, remained constant until 2015, in spite of the increase of poverty, and with large territorial disparities (Istat 2017c).

Secondly, in Italy there are no fiscal advantages for families with children. Such families are relatively more widespread among foreign couples, whose fertility rates for the entire forty-year period were higher than those of Italian couples. Children of unemployed parents — who are most needy of public support — are paraxodically those that have the least protection, because they do not enjoy either tax deductions (because they don't pay taxes) or family benefits (in Italy given almost exclusively to the employed). Not unsurprisingly, in the post-2008 decade, the increase of poor individuals and minors was more intense compared to the rise in poor families.

Thirdly, foreigners can rarely count on the familial protection characteristic of "Italian-style" welfare. Italians who lose their jobs or who earn very little can often count on the support of their parents or other relatives, and are frequently homeowners. For the foreigner, however, the loss of employment almost always occurs in the absence of a "safety net," which rapidly translates into the inability to afford basic expenses (rent, bills, food).

Finally, for foreigners who have more recently arrived in Italy, the loss of work also means losing the right to obtain a residence permit, which is conditional on having regular work, as described above. This traps the immigrant in a vicious circle, as without a residence permit it is almost impossible to find regular employment.

So, less work, less income, more poverty: among Italians, but above all among foreigners. This difficult situation has radically changed the framework of international migrations, both entry and exit (Figure 7). Beginning in 2009, immigration from abroad declined and emigrations increased in both the Center/North and the South/Islands. At the national level, net international migration declined from more than 400 thousand in the two-year period 2007-2008 to less than 200 thousand in the 2015-2016 two-year period.[9] Net international migration would have been even lower if it hadn't been for the increase in entries of asylum seekers, often recorded in the registry of the municipality where the outcome of the application was awaited.

(Figure 7 here)

International net migration also declined due to a strong upturn in emigration abroad, both of individuals born in Italy and those born abroad (Table 7). Compared to the period of 2002-08, in 2009-15 departure towards more attractive European countires (UK, Germany, France, and Switzerland) increased by 79% for people born in Italy, and 61% for those born abroad. Moreover, as already mentioned, recent years have seen a rush to obtain Italian citizenship, often motivated by the desire to be able to move freely within Europe.

(Table 6 here)

[9] It should be pointed out however that Italy – among the four South-European countries of table 1 – is the only that around 2015 mantains a positive net migration rate (Bonifazi and Strozza 2017).

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5. Discussion and future prospects

This article has shown how the relationship between Italy and migrations during the forty-year period between 1997-2017 was shaped by five factors: (1) changes in the economy and the labor market, (2) demographic shifts, (3) internal territorial imbalances, (4) the strong-family structure of Italian society, (5) regulatory shortcomings.

(1) The immigration boom of the first decade of the twenty-first century was primarily caused by a situation of full employment across large areas of the Center/North, accentuated by a dramatic lack of unskilled labor due to the exhaustion of a reserve army of labor from the South/Islands and the rapid increase of young high school and university graduates. Symmetrically, the immigration bust that followed 2008 and the resumption of emigration abroad were determined by the destruction of income and work generated by the economic crisis, which hit foriegners particularly hard compared to native Italians. The first signs of economic recovery suggest that — if improvements continue — Italy could once again become attractive, even if changes in the productive system (in particular structural contraction of the building industry and reduction in the offer of unskilled labor positions) make it difficult to imagine another immigration boom similar to that at the beginning of the century.

(2) The changed age composition of the Italian population forms the backdrop to the inversion of the net number of migrants due to international migration. Beginning in 1995 (in the Center North) and 2011 (in the South/Islands) the number of young people aged 15-24 became smaller than those aged 55-64. The turnover ratio should also act as a pull factor in the future. According to the zero-migration predictions of the United Nations (2017 version), the turnover rate $100xP_{15\text{-}24}/P_{55\text{-}64}$ in the coming years in Italy will be 65 in 2020, 58 in 2030, and 66 in 2040. However, even a turnover ratio largely below 100 is not itself sufficient to attract migrants, much depends on the qualitative composition of new retirees and new job seekers, and very much on the actual demand for new workers expressed by the labor market.

(3) Economics and demographics affected the Centre/North and South/Islands very differently. In the Center/North (two-thirds of the country’s population in 2018), migratory attraction was very strong: in the northwest regions (historically the Milan-Turin-Genoa industrial triangle) and in Rome, foreign immigrants took on work previously occupied by Italians from other regions, filling the bottomless “reservoir” of unskilled jobs (Dalla-Zuanna 2006). In the northeast and central regions (excluding Rome), the immigration flow from abroad was instead, after centuries, the first substantial contribution of a non-native population, again willing to do jobs that Italians could now afford to refuse. In the South/Islands, on the other hand, a continually weak economy pushed emigration towards the Center/North, even if to a lesser extent than in the first thirty years following the war. At the same time, however, processes of development – more or less endogenous – and demographic changes translated into a considerable in-flow of immigrants from abroad, accentuated by the greater presence of illegal employment, particularly in the primary sector. Although the natural demographies of the Center/North and the South/Islands are now almost indistinguishable, the data show no clear signs of closure of the gap between the two areas in terms of migratory behavior. Much will depend on economic trends. If the South/Islands continue to move at a slower or equal pace to the Center/North, it is difficult to imagine a convergence in the migratory histories of these two parts of the country.

(4) It is not possible to understand many of the characteristics of immigration towards Italy without taking into account the strong-family structure of Italian society, reflected

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(among other things) by very close living proximity between relatives and the diffusion of family businesses and homeowners. These characteristics — which Italy shares with Spain, Greece and Portugal, three other countries that experienced an immigration boom at the beginning of the 21st century — have profoundly shaped migrations and have determined particular situations: widespread presence of foreigners in domestic services, dispersion of immigrants throughout the country, a lack of ethnic ghettos. In a certain sense, Italy experienced an unplanned positive integration, not determined by far-sighted political or administrative choices, but by a deeply-rooted societal structure. These characteristics are unlikely to change in the future. Rather, foreigners are seemingly "infected," given that — when economic conditions allow — they tend to join Italians in the race to become homeowners (Barban and Dalla-Zuanna 2010), in choosing a home near relatives, and in establishing family businesses.

(5) Finally, regulatory shortcomings. Neither active immigration policies nor explusions were — over the course of the entire forty-year period — of great significance. Rather, the majority of foreign immigrants settled in Italy through four steps: legal entry (more or less) into Italy, loss of legal status, amnesty for those who could show they had a job, integration process. A path that was not free of risk or suffering, but did favor migration largely regulated by the matching of labor supply and demand.

This non-linear management of the migratory process made, however, its weight felt when Italy — left essentially on its own by other European countries — found itself having to respond after 2013 to tens of thousands of requests for asylum on the part of migrants landing on its shores after having crossed the stretch of sea separating Libya from Sicily. Each of these requests should be addressed in full accordance with the law, avoiding shortcuts and loopholes. The great difficulty of providing rapid responses to asylum requests has resulted in paradoxical situations, with youth who are parked for months or years in often unsuitable places, almost always without work and with very uncertain prospects. It is to be hoped that — above all for the good of the asylum seekers — that the link between migration and work is quickly restored.

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TABLES

Table 1. Foreigners living in select Western European countries at the beginning of 2017 (*) and net migration rate 1975-2015

	Foreign population		Net migration rate (per thousand)				
	#	%	1975-90	1990-00	2000-05	2005-10	2010-15
Scandinavian							
Denmark	484,934	8	0.7	2.7	1.7	3.2	3.8
Sweden	841,165	8	2.0	2.5	3.2	5.7	5.3
Norway	559,059	11	1.4	2.4	3.0	6.9	8.8
Finland	242,003	4	0.2	1.4	1.2	2.2	3.0
Great Britain							
United Kingdom	6,071,093	9	0.0	1.2	3.2	6.6	3.1
Ireland	564,844	12	-2.1	1.9	9.9	9.0	-6.0
Central Europe							
Germany	9,219,989	11	1.7	4.2	2.0	0.1	4.4
Belgium	1,346,358	12	0.9	1.6	4.2	5.5	4.7
The Netherlands	914,997	5	1.7	2.4	1.8	0.8	0.7
France	4,638,556	7	1.1	1.2	1.6	1.7	1.1
Austria	1,333,239	15	1.2	3.7	4.4	3.7	6.3
Switzerland	2,099,319	25	0.7	4.5	5.1	9.1	9.8
Mediterannean Countries							
Spain	4,419,621	9	-0.1	3.0	13.4	9.9	-2.4
Portugal	397,731	4	-0.0	3.2	3.4	1.7	-2.7
Greece	810,034	8	4.1	7.1	2.0	1.4	-2.9
Italy	5,047,028	8	0.5	0.7	5.6	3.4	0.9
- Italy Center/North(**)	*4,212,689*	*11*					
- Italy South/Islands	*834,339*	*4*					

(*) The figures in this table do not depend only by migration in the past years, but also by the different rules followed by each state for giving the citizenship.

(**) The Center/North regions are: Piedmont, Valle d’Aosta, Liguria, Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna, Marche, Tuscany, Umbria, Lazio. The South/Islands regions are: Abruzzi, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia.

Sources. Population: Eurostat (for states) and Istat – The National Italian Statistics Institute (Italian regions); Net Migration Rates: Population Estimates and Prospects of Population Division UN

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Table 2. Labor market turnover: women living in Italy between 1971 and 2016

	100x P_{20-24}/ P_{60-64}	100x P_{20-24}/ P_{60-64}	100x P_{20-24}/ P_{60-64}	(P_{20-24} – P_{60-64}) / 5	(P_{20-24} – P_{60-64}) / 5	(P_{20-24} – P_{60-64}) / 5
	Graduates	Non-graduates	Total	Graduates	Non-graduates	Total
1971	1,325	94	131	113,168	-18,348	94,820
1976	1,628	74	120	144,480	-80,551	63,929
1981	826	91	159	173,728	-21,672	152,056
1986	623	70	130	198,155	-93,652	104,502
1991	659	60	128	220,309	-122,638	97,671
1996	699	46	123	243,964	-162,922	81,042
2001	418	30	93	186,101	-210,593	-24,493
2006	335	28	94	166,385	-184,465	-18,079
2011	208	22	78	125,542	-208,177	-82,635
2016	162	20	78	95,628	-179,317	-83,689

Sources: 1971-2001 Caltabiano and Dalla-Zuanna (2015) on census data; 2006-16 our elaborations on 2011 Census and Istat Sampling Survey on Labor Supply.

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Table 3. Proportion (%) of foreigners by job in the Center/North and the South/Islands. Italy 2011-2016

	Upper class	White collar	Skilled manual workers and craftspersons	Unskilled workers	Total
Center/North	2.3	10.2	16.2	39.8	11.6
South/Islands	0.5	4.9	4.3	18.5	5.2
Italy	1.9	8.7	13.2	32.5	9.9

Source: Istat, Sampling Survey on Labor Supply.

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Table 4. Total number of regularized foreigners. Italy 1973-2018

Period	# Regularized
1970s	5,000
1980s	118,979
1990s	679,242
2000s	1,079,150
2010s	156,576
Total	**2,038,947**

Source: our calculation based on data published by the Ministry of the Interior

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Table 5. Proportion (%) of families in absolute poverty by citizenship in the Center/North and the South/Islands. Italy, 2015-2016

	Center/North	South/Islands	Italy
Italian-only	2.7	7.9	4.4
Both Italian and foreigner	18.4	15.2	20.7
Foreigner-only	26.7	28.9	27.0

Fonte: Istat 2017d

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Table 6. Permanent emigration (in thousands) from Italy to the UK, Germany, Switzerland, and France by year of population register cancellation and place of birth. 2002-08 and 2009-15

	Born in Italy	Born abroad	Total
2002-08	107	51	158
2009-15	191	82	273
Total	298	133	431

Source: Istat, population registers

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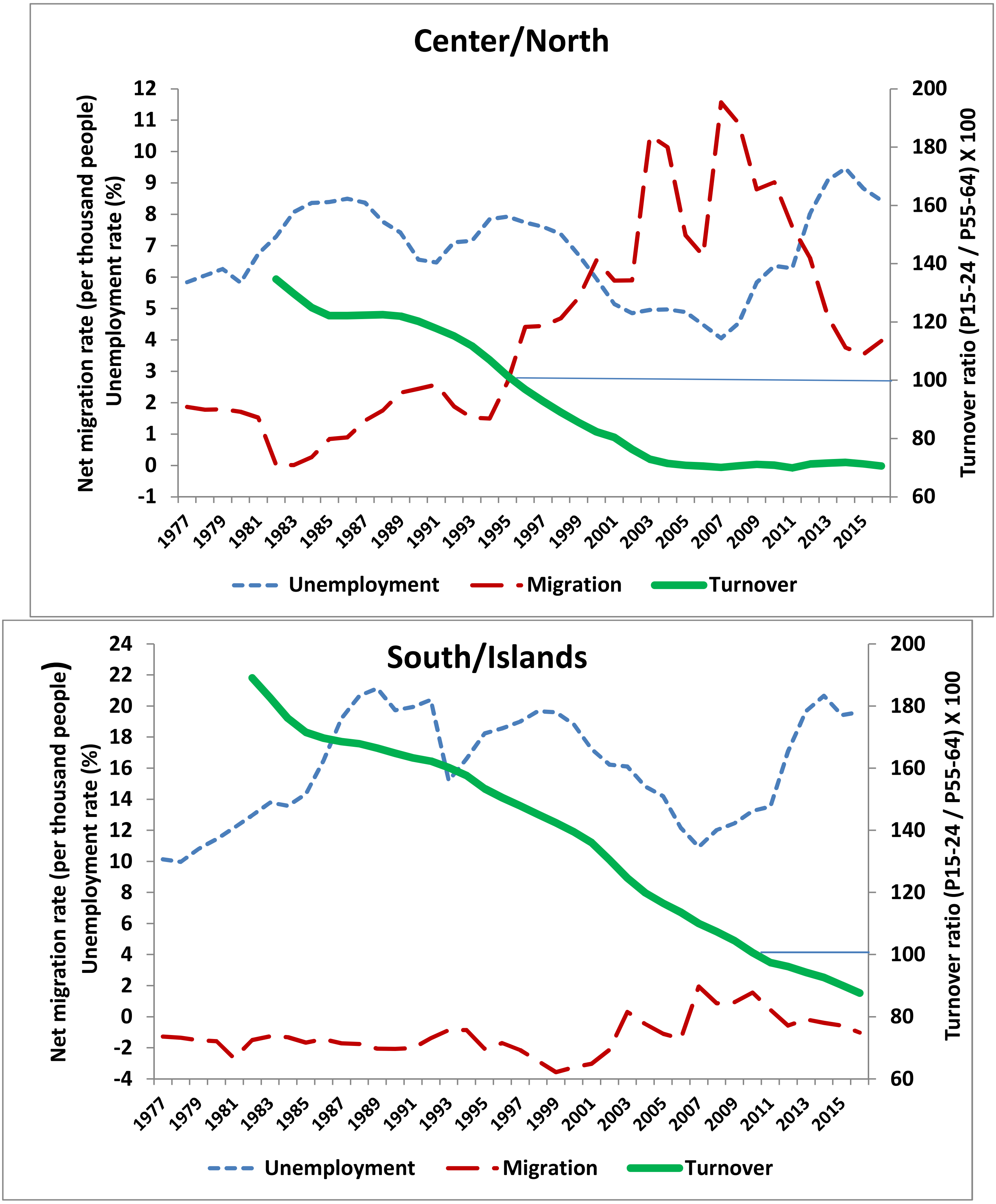
FIGURES

Figure 1. Net migration rate (without distinguishing between internal and international), unemployment rate, and turnover ratio. Center/North and South/Islands, Italy 1977-2016



Source: Istat population registers (net migration rate); Sample Survey on Labor Supply (unemployment rate); population reconstruction based on census and population registers (turnover ratio).

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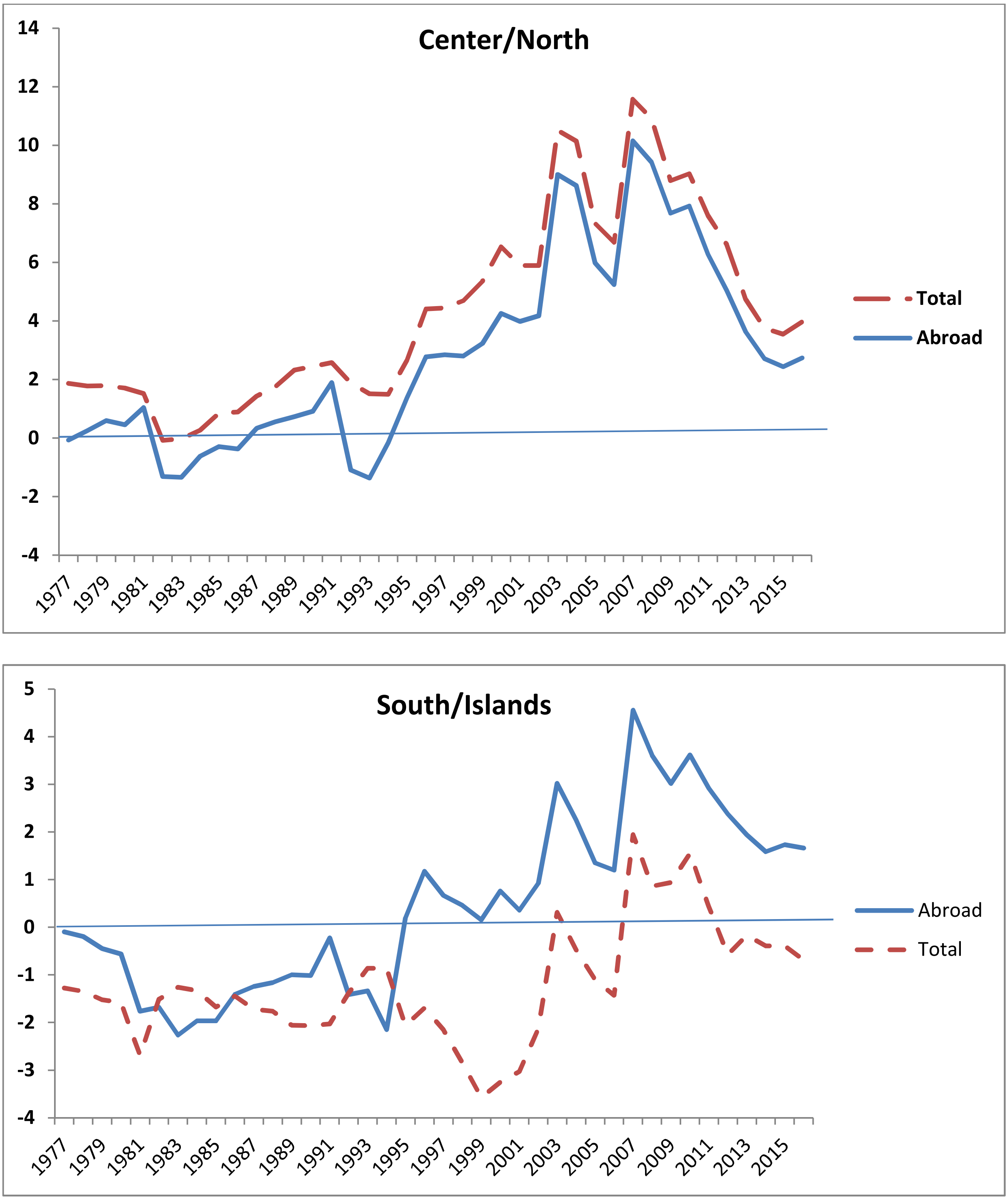
Figure 2. Total and abroad net migration rate. Center/North and South/Islands, Italy 1977-2016



Source: Istat, population registers

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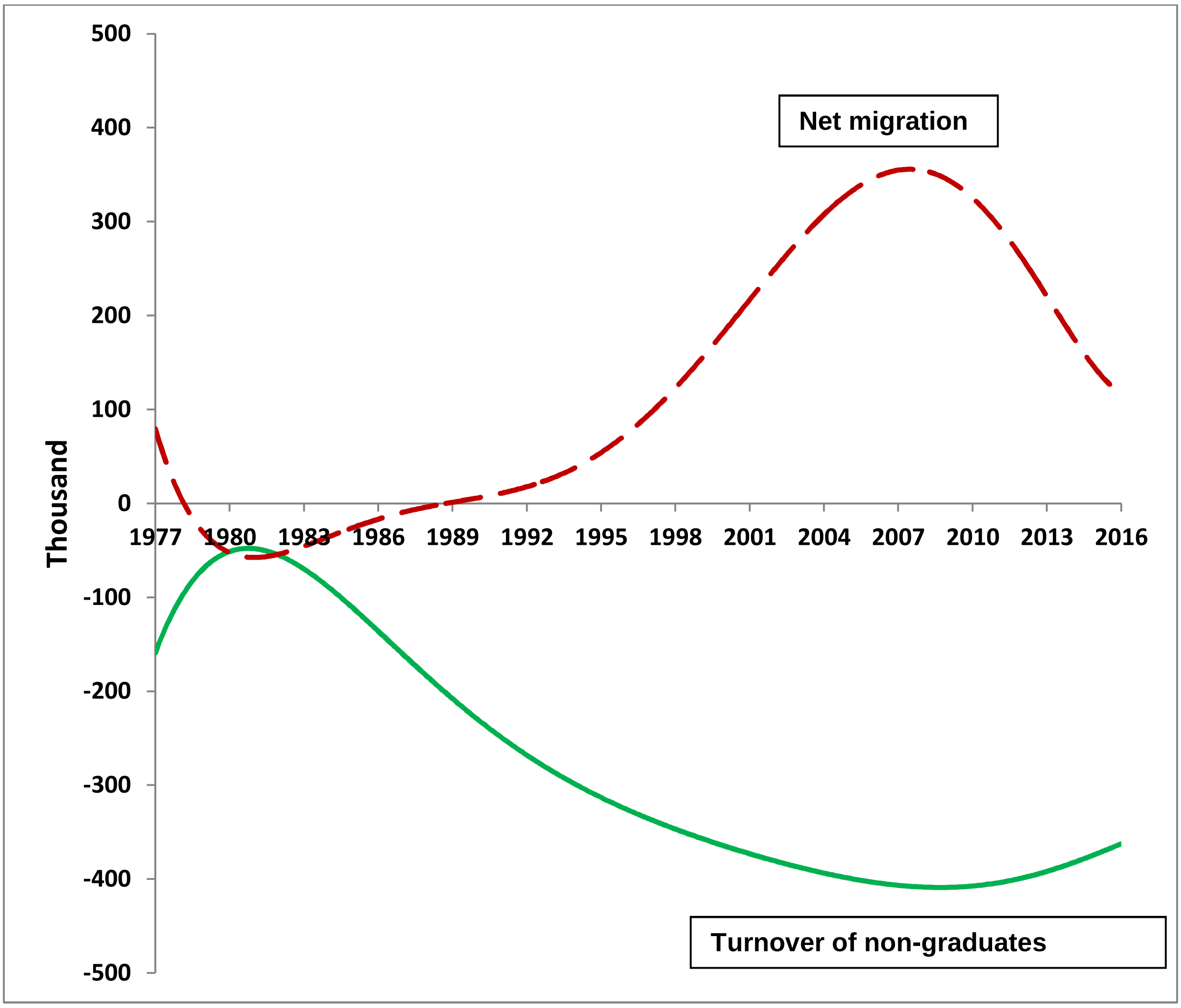
Figure 3. Net migration and turnover of non-graduates ($P_{60-64} - P_{20-24}$). Italy, 1977-2016



Source: Net migration: Istat, population registers; turnover of non-graduates: 1977-2001 Caltabiano and Dalla-Zuanna (2015), 2006-16 our elaboration of Istat 2011 Census and Istat Survey on Labor Supply. Data from both series are interpolated with a 6th-degree polynomious.

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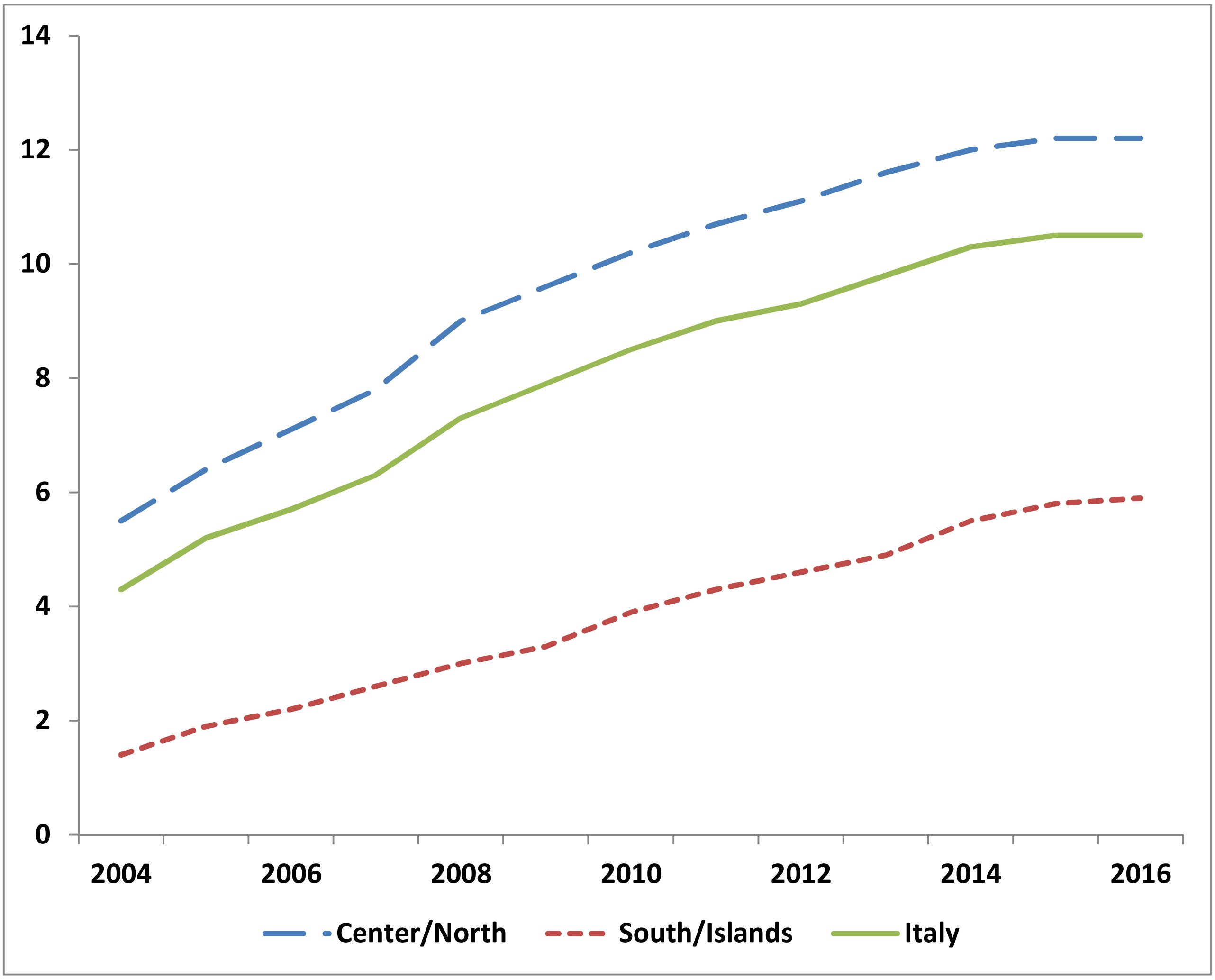
Figure 4. Proportion (%) of foreigners among workers in Italy, Center/North and South/Islands, 2004-2016



Source: Istat Survey on Labor Supply.

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Figure 5. Regular domestic workers by citizenship. Italy, 1991-2016

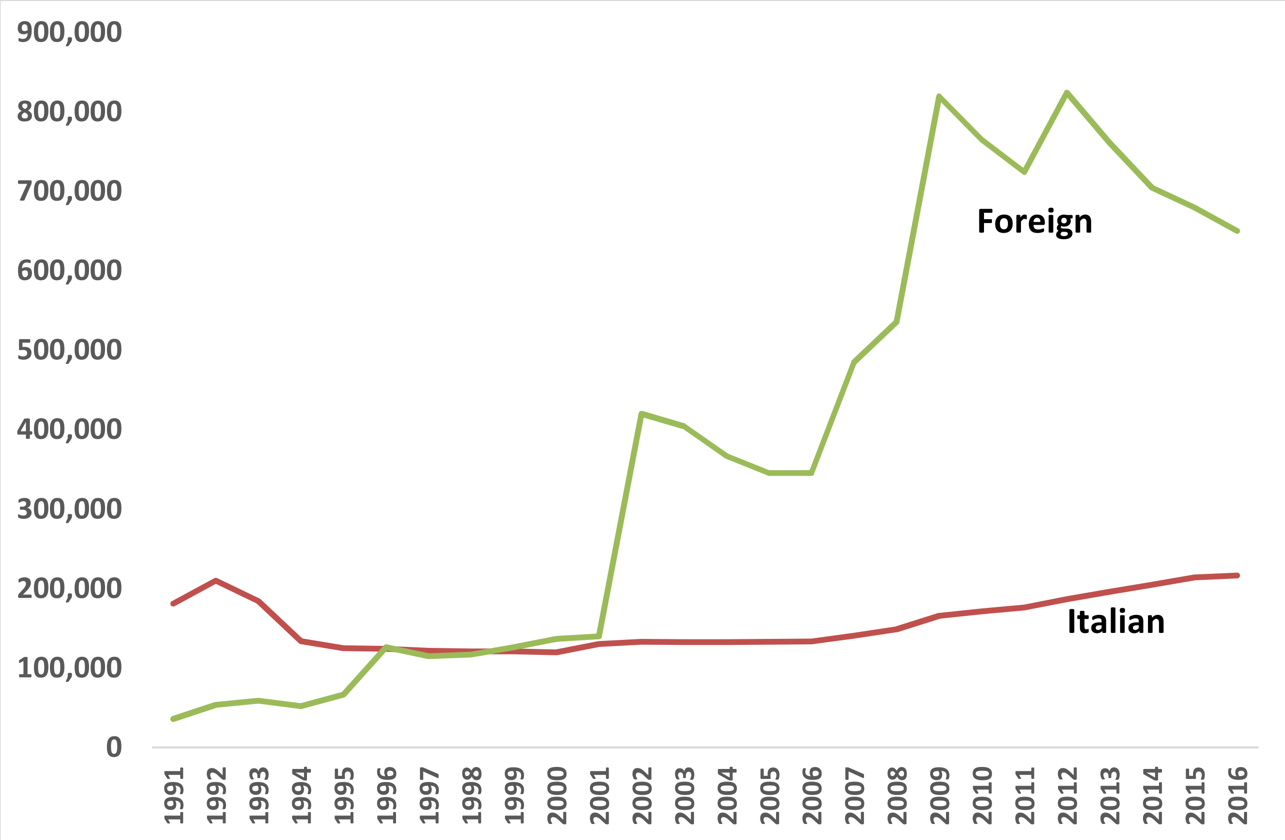

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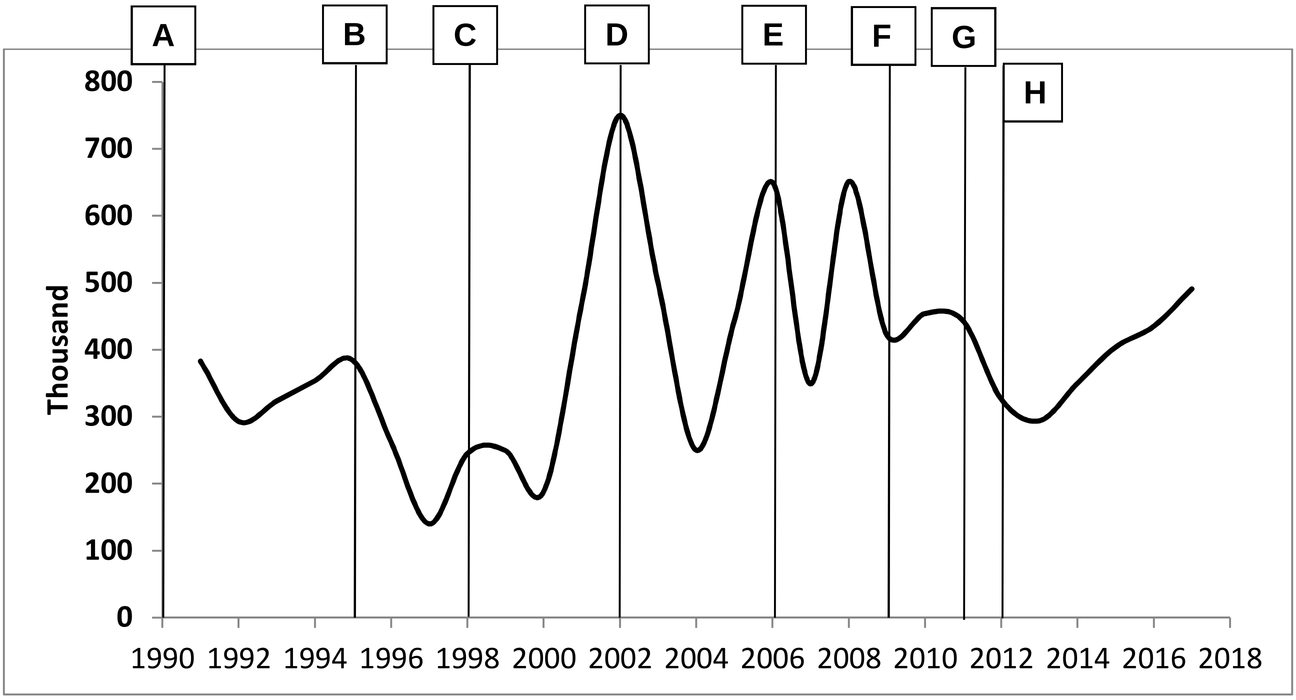
Figure 6. Estimation of irregular foreigners living in Italy. 1991-2016



A: “Martelli” Act, February 1990 (217 thousand)
B: “Dini” Act, November 1995 (245 thousand)
C: “Turco-Napoletano” Act, March 1998 (217 thousand)
D: “Bossi-Fini” Act, July 2002 (650 thousand or more)
E: “Prodi-Ferrero” Act, May 2006
F: “Anti-crisi package,” August 2009 (174 thousand)
G: “Arab Spring,” 2011 (22 thousand)
H: “Monti-Riccardi” Act, September 2012 (141 thousand)

Sources: the number of irregular foreigners is estimated every year by ISMU, using snowball sampling. Data on regularization measures were collected by the authors from several sources.

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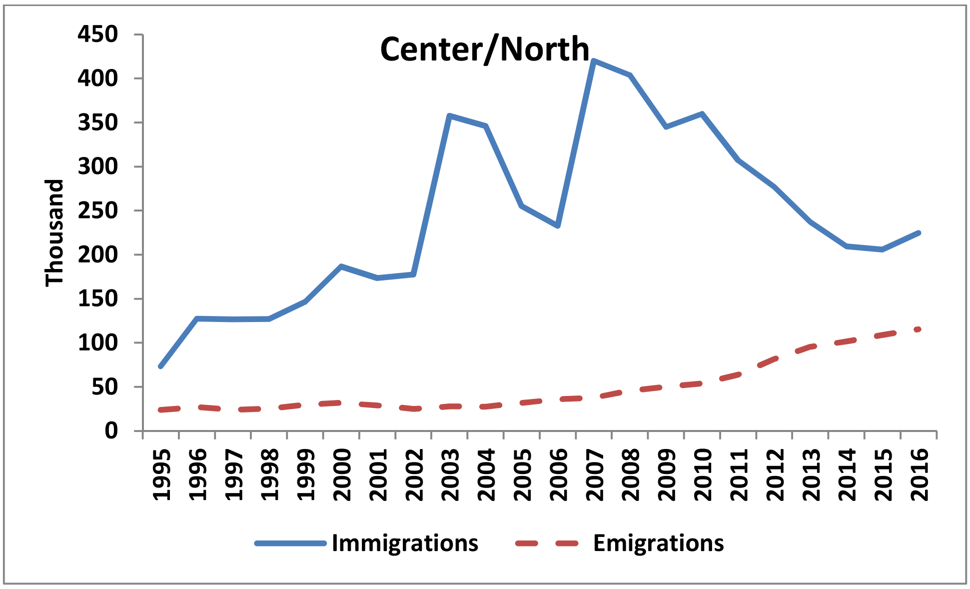
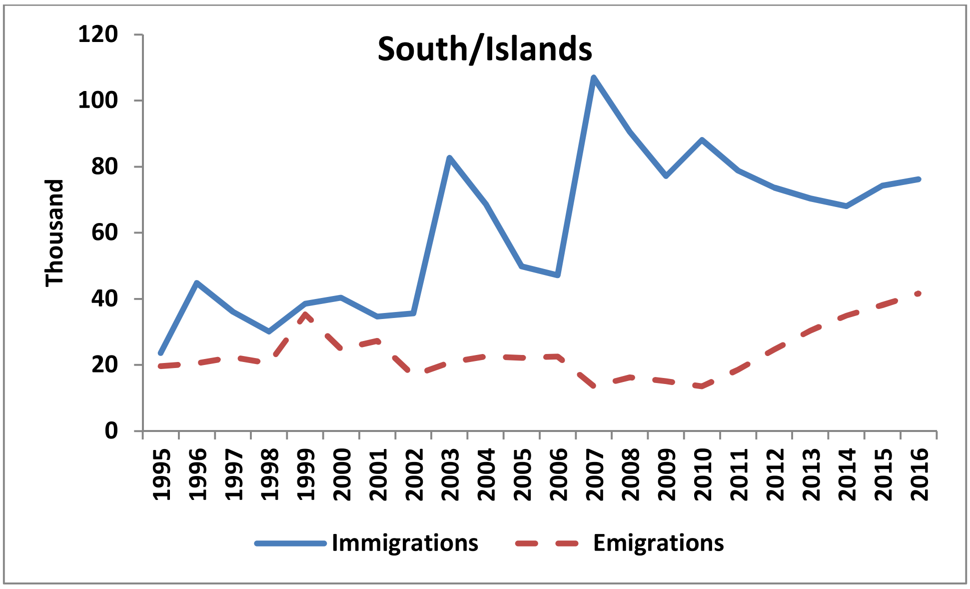
Figure 7. International migration. Center/North and the South/Islands. Italy, 1995-2016





Source: Istat, Population Registers

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