Istat

LABORATORI tematici

Progetti di ricerca tematica in Istat

Risultati della seconda call

FERTILITY INTENTIONS AND REALIZATIONS THROUGH A LONGITUDINAL REGISTER OF INDIVIDUALS IN ITALY

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22/23
SETTEMBRE
2025

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Italy's Fertility Decline – A Persistent and Growing Gap

- **Key Facts (ISTAT, demo.istat.it):**

370,000 births in 2024 (preliminary data) → lowest ever in Italian history

Total fertility rate: 1.18 in 2024 (estimate) *vs*. 1.19 in 1995

Mean age at childbirth:

1952: 26 years

2024: 32.6 years (estimate)

- **Desires vs. Reality:**

73% of adolescents (17–19 years) wish to have children.

Of these: 62% prefer 2 children, 18% prefer 3+ (ISTAT, 2023)

Italy's Fertility Decline – A Persistent and Growing Gap

But in reality, women born in 1973:

- 22% is childless
- 35,6% had 2 children
- 10,3% had 3 or more

→ A clear-cut "fertility gap" between intentions and outcomes

Childlessness and Unrealized Fertility Intentions

Current Trends:

45% of women aged 18–49 are childless

Yet, in 2016 (FSS):

>75% of childless women expressed a desire for children

<25% declared no intention to have children

“Excess Childlessness” in Italy

Italy shows the largest gap between intended and actual childlessness in Europe

>20 percentage points of "unrealized fertility" (Beaujouan & Berghammer, 2019)

Postponement often turns into renunciation

New Data to Understand Fertility (Non-)Realization

Key Question:

Why do so many individuals have fewer children than they initially intended?

- The only Italian study: **FSS 2003–2007** (Regnier-Loilier & Vignoli, 2011)
  - **Found socioeconomic conditions to be key predictors**
  - **No recent data available**

- **Our Contribution:**
  - **First fertility longitudinal register in Italy**
  - **Built via record linkage techniques**
  - **Enables monitoring of fertility intentions and realizations over time**

→ A new foundation for understanding the **barriers to childbearing** in contemporary Italy

Data and methods

The project within the ISTAT Research Laboratory

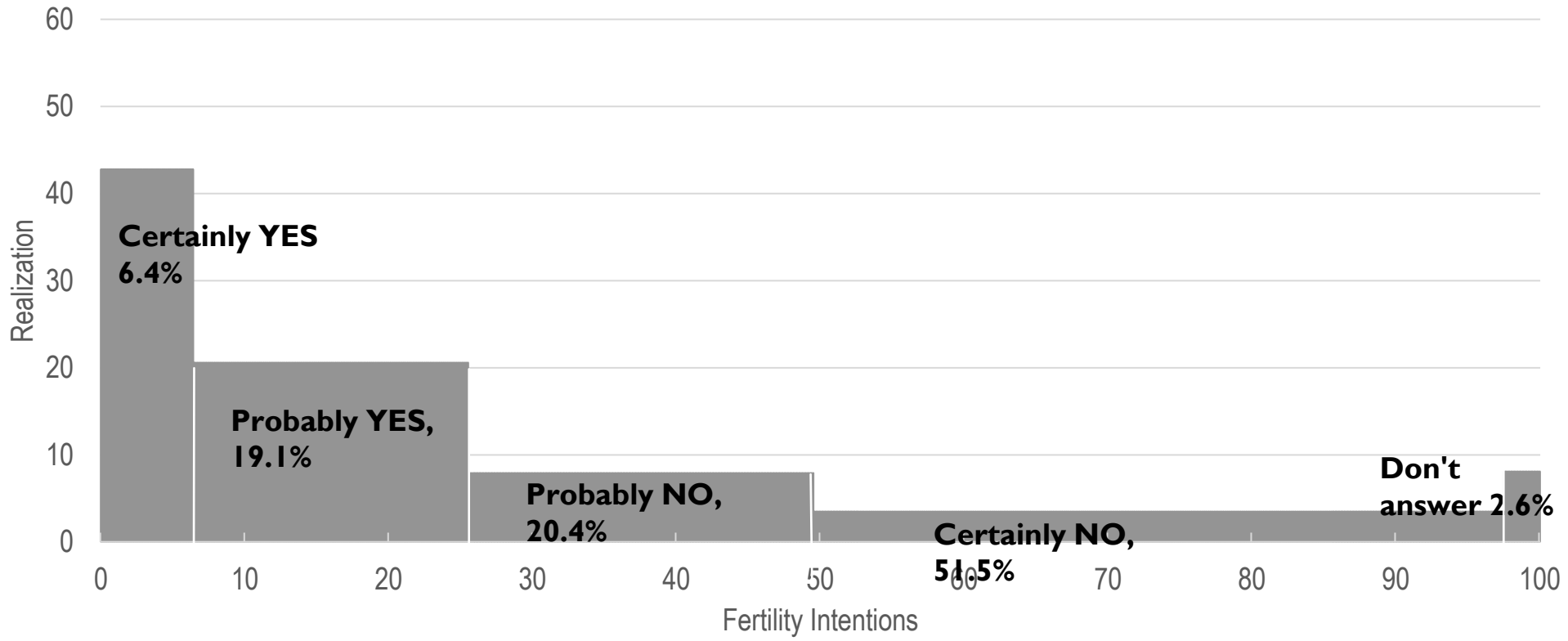
- creating a **thematic longitudinal register by linking FSS16** (Families, Households, and Life Cycle Survey) and **RBI2023** (Base Register on Individuals as of December 31, 2022).
- By using **pseudonymized keys** to connect these sources
- Analysis births among women aged 18 to 49 and demographic changes within families.

Procedure followed:

- **Pseudonymization and Linkage**: FSS16 was pseudonymized using individual keys (SIM), allowing linkage with the 2023 Base Register of Individuals (RBI23). The family key (cod_famiglia) was used to connect the women interviewed in FSS16 with RBI23 data to include all members of the same family.
- **Sample Selection**: from FSS16, 5,587 women aged between 18 and 49 were selected, totaling 5,432 families and 17,185 individuals in RBI23.
- **Final Results on Births and Mothers**: **1,031 children born after 2016 were included in the dataset**. The number of corresponding mothers is divided by parity as follows (unweighted totals): 686 had 1 child; 160 had 2 children; 7 had 3 children; only one had 4 children, for a total of **854 mothers**.

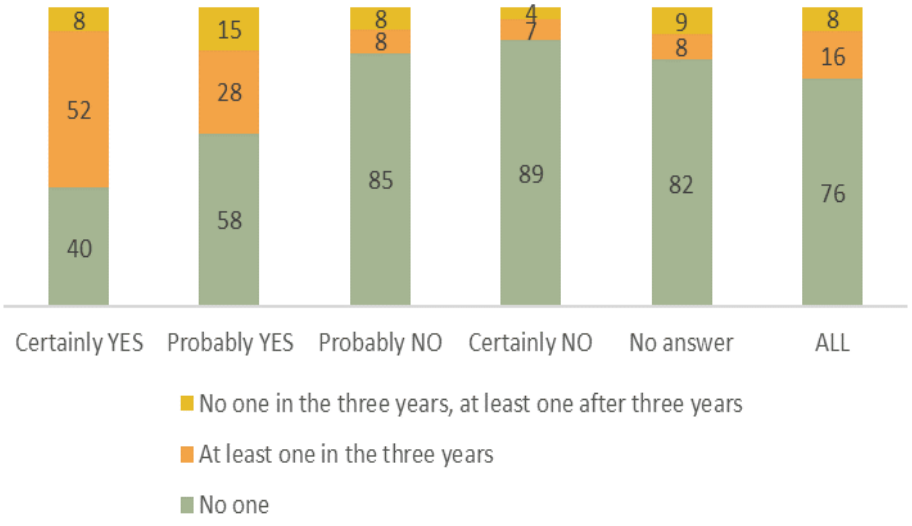
Fertility realization

WOMEN AGED 18–49 IN 2016 WHO HAD AT LEAST ONE CHILD IN THE THREE YEARS FOLLOWING THE INTERVIEW, BY FERTILITY INTENTIONS. YEAR 2016.

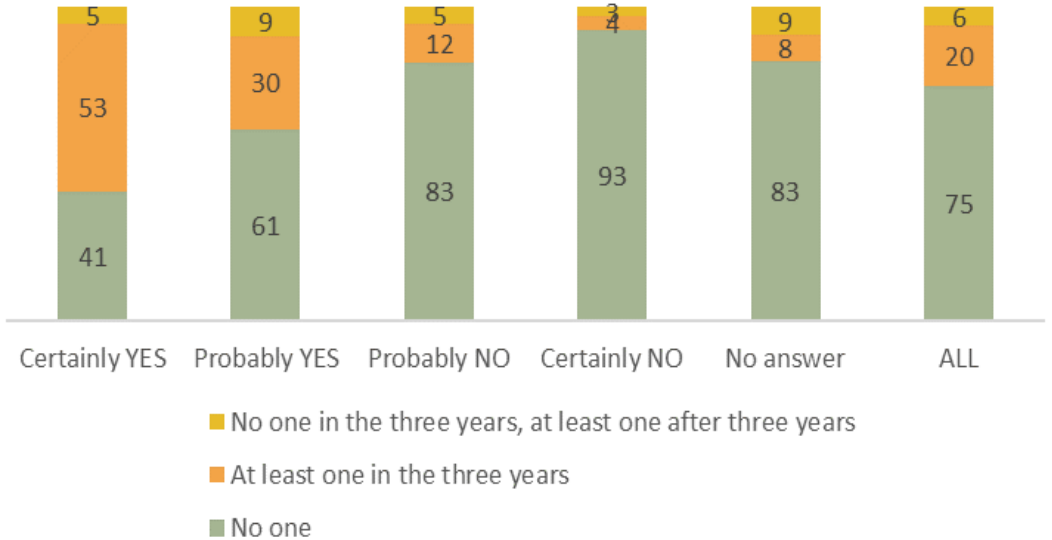


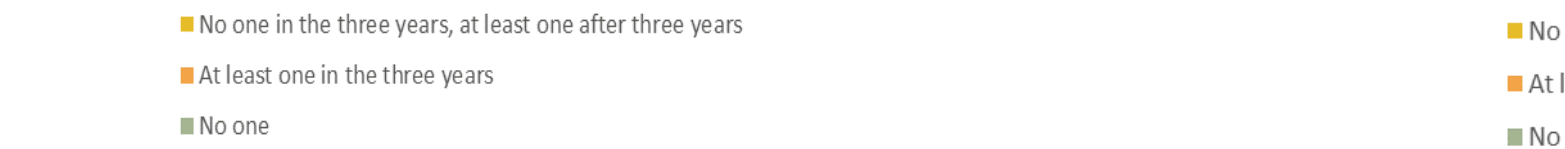
Fertility realization by Age

18-29 YEARS

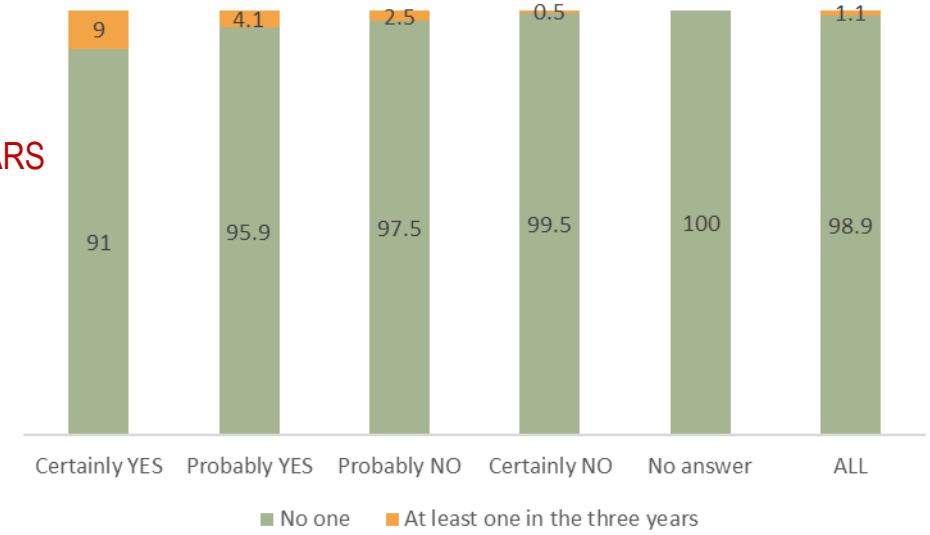


30-39 YEARS



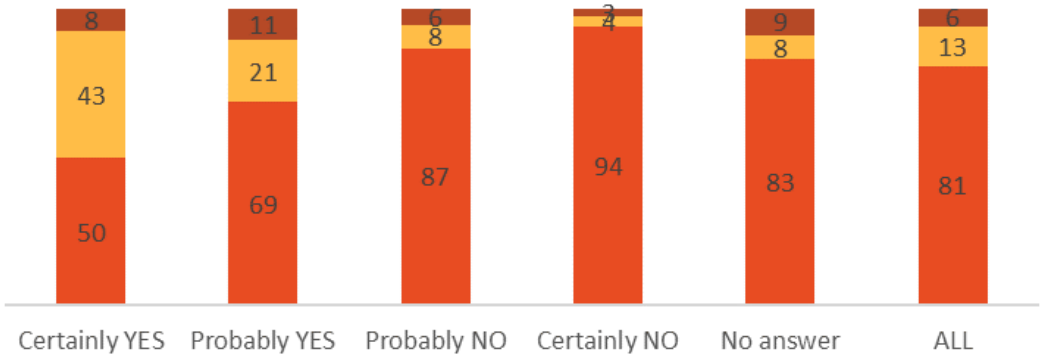


40-49 YEARS

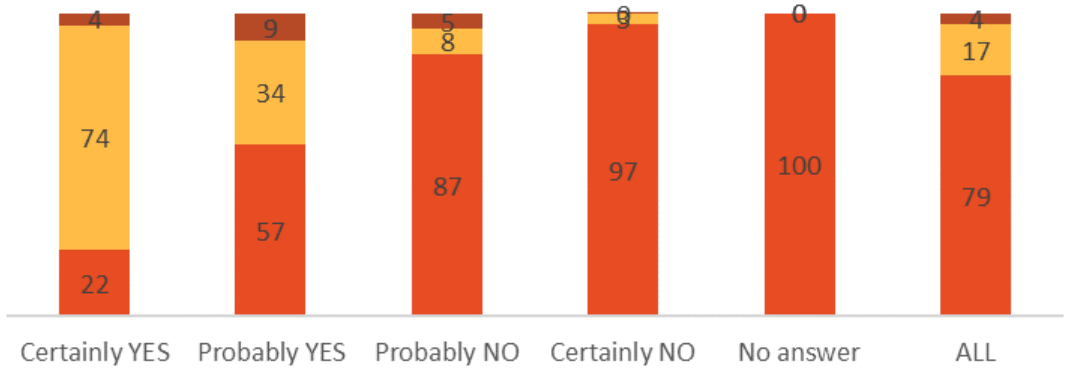


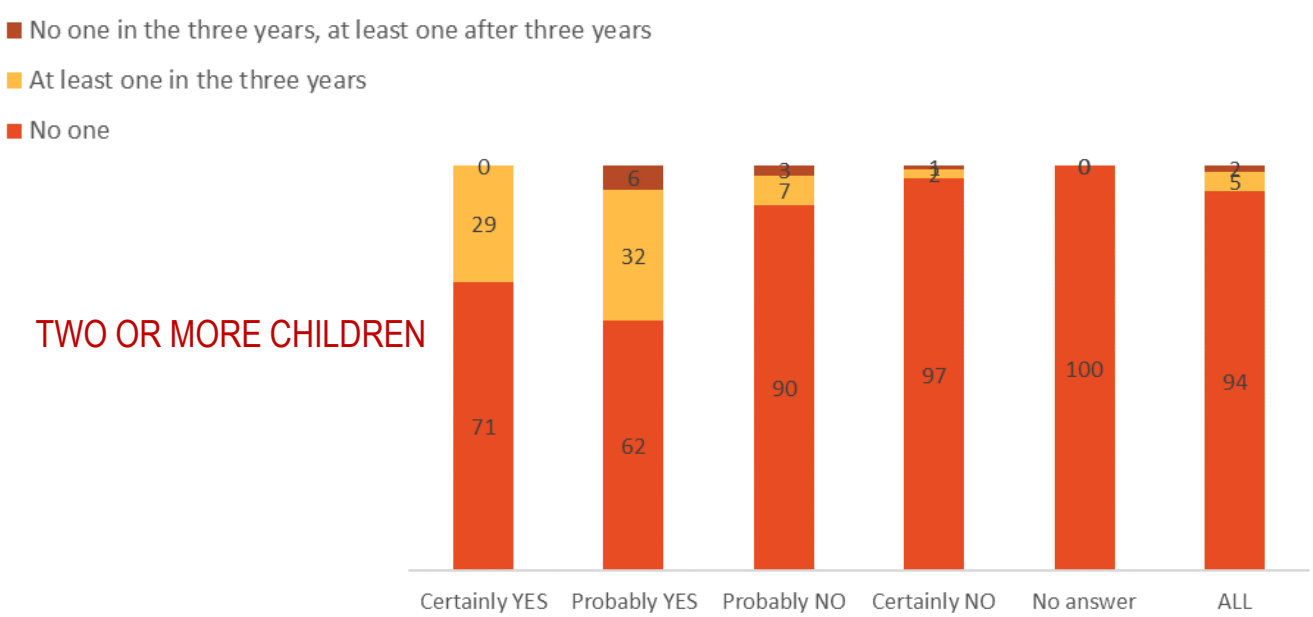
Fertility realization by Parity

CHILDLESS



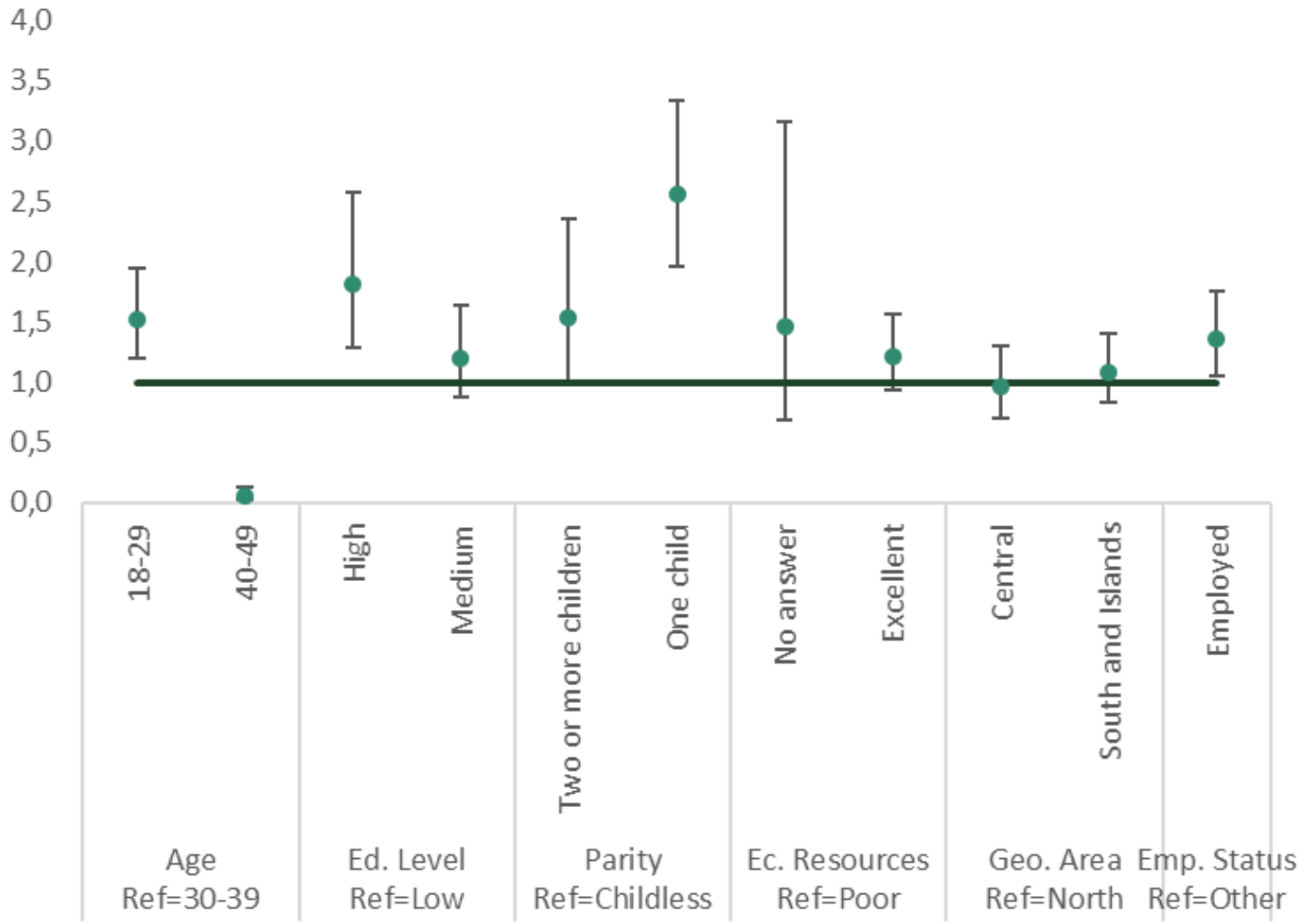
ONE CHILD





TWO OR MORE CHILDREN

What Predicts Realization? Insights from the Logistic Model



Conclusions and further steps

1. There is a persistent and **growing gap** between how many children people say they want—and how many they actually have.
2. Italy exhibits a unique pattern of **postponed** and **unrealized** fertility, particularly among younger cohorts.
3. Thanks to this new longitudinal register, we now have the tools to investigate this phenomenon **in depth**, and **over time**.

- Looking forward, we aim to expand the dataset, refine our models, and translate our findings into actionable recommendations for policymakers. If we want to support people in achieving their fertility aspirations, we need more responsive social policies that address the real obstacles they face.

Dissemination

- Cinzia Castagnaro, Eleonora Meli, *Life course register on population aged 50+,* in “The Demography of Ageing State-of-the-Art and Challenges”, Workshop held under the auspices of PNRR “Age-It” Research Program – Spoke 1, 14 sept 2023

- Bruno Arpino, Eleonora Meli, Elena Pirani, Marta Pittavino, *Kinship networks, kinlessness and friendship across the life course. An extensive Analysis of the Italian case over a 20-year period*, in “La demografia dell’invecchiamento - Un approccio di Data Science per prendere decisioni”, Workshop held under the auspices of PNRR “Age-It” Research Program, 20-22 May 2024, Venice

- Alessandra Burgio, Cinzia Castagnaro, Agnese Vitali, Daniele Vignoli, *The contribution of medically assisted reproduction to fertility in Italy,* European Population Conference 2024 – 12-15 June Edimburgh

- Eleonora Meli, *Living in Inland Areas: Family Composition of People Aged 65 and Over*, in “The Demography of ageing, Workshop held under the auspices of PNRR “Age-It” Research Program – Spoke 1, 4 October 2024, Rome

- Cinzia Castagnaro, Eleonora Meli, Letizia Mencarini and Daniele Vignoli, *New insights into fertility intentions and realizations through a longitudinal register of individuals in Italy*, Popdays 2025 – SIS-AISP, 4-6 June 2025, Cagliari

Thanks to:

Internal participants to the Project:

Valentina Joffre; Manuela Michelini; Daniele Spizzichino; Tania Cappadozzi; Ginevra Di Giorgio; Salvatore Filadelfo Allegra; Laura Cialdea; Martina Lo Conte; Francesca Di Patrizio; Gianni Corsetti; Marco Battaglini; Marina Attili; Francesca Rinesi; Cinzia Castagnaro; Antonella Guarneri; Sabrina Prati; Lucia Coppola

External participants to the Project:

Bruno Arpino, Alessandra De Rose, Cecilia Tomassini, Daniele Vignoli, Maria Letizia Tanturri, Letizia Mencarini

grazie

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