



DATI ALLA MANO

I PODCAST

## YOUNG GENERATIONS

The first data to take into account is that young generations in Italy are steadily decreasing in number. It must be considered that the ageing index on 1 January 2024 is 199.8, and this means that for every 100 very young people up to 14 years old, there are almost 200 people aged 65 and over. That's not good!

I am Cristiana Conti, and this is Dati alla mano (Data at Hand), a podcast by Istat, the National Institute of Statistics, where I work in the Directorate for Communication, Information, and Services to Citizens and Users. This initiative is part of a broader project to promote statistical literacy.

In this episode, we will talk about young generations and we will try to understand how they live, what they do and what they think.

Let us start with a positive fact: young people of today are more educated than those of the past. And by 'the past', I mean about twenty years ago, not the last century. To give you an idea: between 2002 and 2022, the share of 20-24-year-olds with only the compulsory school certificate has halved, the percentage of those who obtained a high school diploma has increased, and if we look at the older age group, 25-34-year-olds, those who have achieved the goal of a tertiary qualification, at least a degree to be clear, have increased from just over 12% to over 29%. But one fact remains: we have few young people. Italy is ageing; in just twenty years, the average age of residents in our country has risen from 42 to over 46 and a half years. And this is a reality that worries us because human capital is extremely important for any country. And precisely because it's important, it's important to understand it. In May 2024 Istat published, with a report, the data from a primary survey focused on young people aged between 11 and 19. How many are there? They represent 8.7 per cent of residents in Italy, while the EU average is 9.5%. So we have fewer young people compared to the European average. But let us go into detail and take a look at our main neighbouring countries. Germany is even worse off than us because the percentage of young people aged between 11 and 19 is lower than ours: 8.3%. But Spain's share is 9.6% and France's is as high as 11.3%. In short, Spain and France are doing much better.

These few young people – there are just over 5 million 140 thousand, a figure that may sound large, but ultimately is not – these few young people, how do they live and what do they think? We asked Cinzia Conti, head of the primary survey addressed to them.

Cristiana. Hi Cinzia and welcome.

Cinzia. Thanks, hi everyone.

Cri. Let us start with a rather widespread perception: for young people, the web – especially via mobile phone – is their daily bread, isn't it? Incidentally, this primary survey was conducted via the web, and I read that the vast majority of young people completed the questionnaire not on a computer but on a tablet or, indeed, a smartphone.

Ci. That's true, we are talking about a "connected" generation. And girls are more so than boys. Over half declare they are online with friends continuously or several times a day.

Cri. And boys?

Ci. Just over 4 out of 10.

Cri. Are social media also very popular?

Ci. I would say so. Almost 85% have a social media profile, and this figure exceeds 97% if we only consider the older ones, young people aged between 17 and 19.

Cri. In your opinion, doesn't this constant use of social media, this ever-present connection in their lives, risk prioritising virtual relationships over real ones?

Cri. Actually it would seem not, at least concerning this age group. Those who have many online relationships also have direct relationships, and vice versa.

Cri. What do you mean by "vice versa"?

Ci. We found that those who are never online with friends often do not meet them in person either. This is particularly frequent in foreign young people.

Cri. What does this mean?

Cri. Foreign young people, in general, have fewer relationships with friends, both direct and online. If we consider those who see friends every day or at least a few times a week, there is a 10% gap between Italians and foreigners.

Cri. One aspect that struck me about the report is the fact that many young people imagine their future not in Italy but abroad.

Cri. Yes, more than one in three. And even more so foreigners, among whom there are those who think of returning to their country of origin and others – many more – who imagine themselves in a third country, different from both Italy and the country of origin of their parents. And in all this, it is the girls - both Italian and foreign, but particularly foreign girls - who are most motivated to go abroad.

Cri. Well, this data somehow seems related to another thing: the fear of the future that emerges from the report.

Cri. It is probable that this propensity to go abroad is linked to the fear for the future. Also because, compared to 2021 data, the percentage of young people who fear the future has increased, while the percentage of those who are fascinated by it has decreased. However, fortunately, those who are fascinated still outnumber those who are scared.

Cri. Some numbers?

Cri. Just over 40% are fascinated and a little over 30% are worried. But for girls, it's the opposite.

Cri. Are they more scared than fascinated?

Cri. Yes, and this fear grows with age. More than half of girls between 17 and 19 years old fear the future.

Cri. Worry about one's future can affect ambitions, I suppose. For example, on the choice of whether to continue studying.

Cri. It is mainly the migratory background and socioeconomic conditions that influence the ambitions and choices of young people, both after compulsory schooling and after high school. And I'll tell you more, these two aspects also influence the fulfilment of aspirations. We have seen this with data from previous years: there is a significant proportion of unfulfilled aspirations.

Cri. Shattered against the wall of reality?

Cri. Halted by a broken social ladder.

Cri. Going back to aspirations, how do these young people see themselves in the future? As a couple? With children or without?

Ci. The good news is that in general they have not adopted the single-child model. More than 60% plan to have two children and over 18% even plan to have three or more. And in any case, family is still part of the picture for these young people.

Cri. Is there hope for a demographic recovery?

Ci. We'll see, as always, the real world interferes between aspirations and achievements. Furthermore, the young people interviewed are very young indeed.

Cri. You're right! Thank you, Cinzia, for being with us.

Cri. Thank you and goodbye.

Cri. Talking about young people makes one want to delve deeper into other aspects and other age groups. That's why I asked Emanuela Bologna to join us. Together with her colleague Andrea Cutillo, she edited a chapter of the latest Istat Annual Report that focuses specifically on young generations. Welcome Emanuela.

Emanuela. Thank you and hello everyone.

C. Let us talk about mental health – a topic that emerged in the immediately post- pandemic era – how are our young people doing?

E. There is a worsening, and it concerns especially the girls. As you mentioned, we had noticed the problem already in 2021 — as an effect of the living conditions brought about by the pandemic. But the mental health index, which refers to psychological well-being, continues to decline in girls: it was 68.2 in 2022 and is 66.5 in 2023.

C. How does this indicator work?

E. The indicator can take values from 0 to 100, and the closer it gets to 100, the better the condition.

C. How is it measured?

E. By means of an international questionnaire. The value results from the sum of the scores totalled by each individual in the answers to 5 specific questions. So the index provides a measure of psychological distress of people and includes conditions related to anxiety and depression.

C. Worsening conditions in our young people is very bad news.

E. Indeed.

C. To offset that, can you tell me something positive in girls' lifestyles?

E. I can tell you they do more sport. In 2023 sport participation involved more than half of girls aged 16 to 24, whereas twenty years earlier the percentage was considerably lower.

C. And boys?

E. They remain stable. Just over six out of ten boys play sports, as they did twenty years ago.

C. Are there other aspects concerning the health and lifestyles of our young people?

E. Well, compared to twenty years ago, the percentage of those who eat an adequate breakfast has decreased, and the percentage of those who skip breakfast at all has increased.

C. And that's not good.

E. On the positive side, however, the habit of consuming fizzy drinks daily has decreased, and daily alcohol consumption has also decreased... but occasional use has spread, and for girls, fizzy drinks

daily has decreased, and daily alcohol consumption has also decreased... but occasional use has spread, and for girls, binge drinking got worse.

C. ... you mean drinking until drunk. And what about cultural participation?

E. I can tell you that it's a sore point.

C. Tell me more!

E. Well, Eurostat data from 2022 show that Italy is among the last in Europe both for levels of out-of-home cultural participation and of reading at least one book per year.

C. But girls read more than boys, right?

E. Right, but in the last twenty years they have reduced their reading habit, so the gap has narrowed.

C. Smoking and alcohol? How do young people today behave compared to those of yesterday?

E. They smoke less, but the progressive reduction that began in 2003 stopped in 2020. On the other hand, since 2014 we have observed the use of electronic cigarettes and we know that it is growing, especially among young people.

C. But also this type of smoking is not good for health, both if it is heated tobacco or when you only inhale vapour, because the process produces formaldehyde.

E. Indeed.

C. There is another topic I am interested in discussing with you: education.

E. Tell me.

C. We know that young people today are more educated than previous generations.

E. This is true.

C. Do they find a job adequate to their skills?

E. Well, let's say that our labour market is not very efficient at absorbing qualified human resources. Consider that 34% of employed graduates – regardless of their age – are overqualified for the tasks they perform. For young people aged 25 to 34, the proportion is higher: it is 36.9%

C. And within this percentage, are there gender differences?

E. Yes, if we disaggregate by gender, the proportion of overqualified young women is 39.8%, and for their male peers is 34.5%. In the same age group, overqualified foreign nationals account for 52%. However, between 2019 and 2023, the proportion of overqualified young people decreased.

C. And we hope that more and more qualified young people find employment that matches their qualifications. This is important especially to prevent them from seeking abroad what they cannot find at home, thus depleting the country of valuable human capital.

E. True. Consider that in ten years, between 2012 and 2021, over 120 thousand young graduates emigrated abroad.

C. A significant number. Thank you, Emanuela, for this chat. See you next time.

E. Goodbye everyone!

Italy is ageing, younger generations are increasingly scarce, but more educated and more technological. Overall, with a daring comparison, something very precious comes to mind – an art object, a valuable artefact – that must be preserved with extreme care. Also due to some fragility that the pandemic has intensified.

I am Cristiana Conti and this was Dati alla mano (Data at Hand), a podcast from the National Institute of Statistics.

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Are there any topics you would like to explore further? Write to me at [datiallamano@istat.it](mailto:datiallamano@istat.it).

Cinzia Conti, Emanuela Bologna, Oreste Nazzaro and Francesca Licari worked on this episode.