

# THE CHANGING ROLE OF IMMIGRATION IN REVERSING DEPOPULATION BEFORE AND AFTER THE GREAT RECESSION

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## Abstract

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This paper aims to investigate the long-term potential of international immigration to reverse population decline in an intermediate rural-urban setting. It relies on a demographic analysis led by a set of indicators, for autochthonous and foreigners over the period 2002–2016, at municipal level. The focus is on two Italian regions representative of extensive, long-lasting demographic *malaise* (according to which municipalities are split in clusters), the widespread presence of foreign immigrants and the deep impact of the Great Recession. All data used were sourced by ISTAT, the Italian National Institute of Statistics.

Results shows that international immigration reversed depopulation only during the cycle of economic expansion (2002–2008). However, the local picture is quite complex because foreigners played different roles in different demographic and socio-economic contexts. The magnitude, geography and impact, of foreign population flows deeply changed with the Great Regression and in 2009–2016 they exacerbated shrinkage rather than countering depopulation. The investigation of age, gender and fertility differentials by citizenship allows to assess the contribution of foreigners in the reduction of the demographic *malaise*.

In conclusion, differently than in the past when the arrival of foreigners occurred spontaneously, now regions need comprehensive demographic and social policies in order to favour their permanence and reproduction in the long run, in spite of changing economic contexts.

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