

Not Only the Poor! A Closer Look at Regional Differences in Italian Emigration (1946-2019)

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ABSTRACT

Although much research on migration has been carried out over the years, the focus of the attention has been mostly on immigration and its effects on the host countries and the economic drivers for choosing migration. Italian emigration abroad in post-World War II (1946-73) and in the 21st century (2004-19) forms a key part of Italy's recent history. Converging and diverging trends in Italian emigration have not received enough attention in literature to date. The aim of this study is to compare the two periods of mass emigration, highlighting differences and similarities by analysing the emigration trends from the various Italian Regions, using percentage values, as opposed to absolute values, which can often distort the true picture. The study provides a historical overview of the changes in Italian emigration on both the macro-area and regional levels. The use of secondary literature and data allowed for an analysis between the different regional origins of the migrants and the emigration trends in the regions, as well as for the formulation of hypotheses regarding the emigrants' migration motives. This research helps fill the gap in literature through the comparison of the 1946-1973 and 2004-2019 periods of Italian mass emigration. The findings reveal the scale of this emigration, the various regional origins of the emigrants, the regional differences in the trends, the attitude to emigration in sender societies and also the potential reasons behind the emigrants' departure. Results provide enough information to affirm that today Italian emigration is due to the increased movements of people in a globally interconnected labour market, but, unlike the 1946-1973 mass migration, it pertains mainly to higher-income Italian regions, highlighting the importance of the need to look beyond the purely economic drivers and determinants to better understand the reasons behind the choice to emigrate.

1. Introduction

For centuries migration has been one of the most typical responses of humanity to the numerous changes in their environment. This still holds true today. The theoretical notion of emigration is varied, with definitions comprising the movement of individuals for numerous motives among which, political, religious, social or economic reasons, within one's own country or abroad, for long or short-term stays (D'Acunto et al., 2019). However, these definitions generally include three main points: movement or changes in residence, time (long or short term) and personal objectives (higher earnings, better living conditions, etc.) (Remeikiene and Gaspareniene, 2019).

Emigration abroad can have numerous effects on both the host and destination countries. The potential effects on the country of origin, besides the mere decrease in the number of citizens can include, among others, a negative flow or stock of human and financial capital. Although these questions mainly concern developing nations, wealthier and more developed nations are not exempt from them (Trebilcock and Sudak, 2006). In order to formulate policies to avoid these and other potentially negative effects of emigration, it is necessary to analyse its drivers in more detail.

One of the most traditional views of emigration states that it generally occurs when the difference between the potential post-migration lifelong earnings of an individual, minus the costs of the transaction, is positive. This view has been challenged both empirically and theoretically and numerous scholars have investigated international migration throughout the years and have proposed various models to explain the reason behind this phenomenon. Each model, based on different premises, attempts to answer three main questions (Bodvarsson and Van den Berg, 2013): Who migrates? Why? And what are the effects of migration on the countries of origin and destination? No theory of migration addresses every issue. In fact, each theory considers one or more particular aspects (Borjas, 1989), sometimes integrating variables: economic and non-economic drivers, macro and micro levels, effects on the sending and receiving countries, specific categories of workers, or push and pull factors.

In particular, Italian emigration has a long history starting from its Unification. Emigration from Italy has always been both affected by and had an influence on the economic and social transformations that have taken place throughout the years. Starting from its Unification in 1861, three cycles of Italian emigration can be identified. The first is that known as the Great Emigration of 1876-1927, consisting mostly of the transoceanic emigration of working age males (Del Boca and Venturini, 2005). Although the first part of the second period (1946-1973) showed some similarities with the previous flow, the early '60s, with the closing of the USA borders and the many regulatory policies put into place by the receiving countries, saw a change in destination with the largest part of the emigrants headed to Northern European countries (Maccari-Clayton and Bertagna, 2013). The third or current cycle began in 2004 and is characterized by the young age of the emigrants and the relevant number of highly educated individuals (Giannola, 2015).

The aim of this study is to compare the last two periods of Italian emigration, highlighting their similarities and differences, analysing the emigration trends in the different Italian regions and three macro-areas. The novelty of this work is found in the latter aspect that is in the specific comparison of the two periods on a regional level, coupled with the use of percentages of emigrants rather than absolute numbers, allowing us to better capture the phenomenon and, therefore, carry out a more comprehensive interpretation. The remainder of the study is as follows: Section 2 briefly discusses the main theories of migration proposed by scholars in literature. The methodology, consisting of data collection and analysis, is explained in Section 3. Sections 4 and 5 present the results and related discussion while Section 6 contains the conclusions.

2. A brief review of the major theories of migration and their approaches

Many of the major theories regarding migration examine its deter-

minants, using quantitative modelling and an economic approach to attempt to explain and predict migration patterns (Carling and Talleraas, 2016). The oldest and probably the most well-known theory is that offered by neoclassical economics, which was originally developed to explain labour migration. In fact, the neoclassical theory of international migration stemmed from models intending to justify the movement of people from the countryside to the city in the so-called dual economies; that is, developing economies where the expansion of one sector, the modern one, takes labourers from the traditional one (agriculture-based), (Lewis, 1954; Harris and Todaro, 1970). It focuses on wage differentials, the conditions and probability of employment and the costs of migration. The neoclassical theory of migration offers both macro and micro models to explain and elaborate on migration determinants.

From a macro perspective, the model concentrates on the geographic differences between labour supply and demand. It assumes wage differentials, which encourage migration from labour abundant countries (where wages are lower) to labour scarce countries (where wages are higher). Migration will continue until the wage differences are eliminated (Massey et al., 1993).

The micro model of the neoclassical theory focuses on individual choice (Todaro 1969; Todaro, 1976). Known as the Human Capital Theory of Migration (Sjaastad, 1962), it incorporates the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals (Kurekova, 2011) and views the potential migrants as subjects who make a rational decision to move where they can make the most of their skills (Todaro and Maruszko, 1987). They choose to go where they can make the most of their abilities. However, this involves certain investments, both financial (travel costs, money to support themselves – and perhaps their family – while they look for work) and non-financial (learning and adapting to a new culture and language, leaving family and friends behind) (Porumbescu, 2018).

The main criticisms of the neoclassical theory and its models lie in its mechanical reduction of determinants, its inability to explain differential migration, and its lack of consideration of market imper-

fections (de Haas, 2011) and of the social aspect of migration, i.e., family ties and belonging to a community. It generally views migrants as individuals looking to maximize their benefits, while overlooking other non-economic motives (de Haas, 2010) and the role of remittances to countries of origin (Taylor, 1999).

The New Economics of Labour Migration, depending on the point of view, is either considered to be a strong criticism – at least in part – of neo-classical models, or a variant of the same (Arango, 2000). The main criticism of the neoclassical theory offered by proponents of new economics is that the former largely ignores constraints and is considered to be too rigid in analysing the many diverse facets of migration and development interactions (de Haas, 2010). New economics examines the drivers on both macro and meso-levels. It considers the decision to migrate as a collective/household choice, rather than an individual one and focuses on market criticalities, including, but not limited to, those in the labour market (Stark and Levhari, 1982), while also examining the relative deprivation of income. Theories of new economics continue to place push and pull factors – generally economic ones – at the centre of the focus in the determination of the choice to migrate, although they also acknowledge the numerous variables which may either aid or impede migration. Migration researchers of new economics focus on the role that family and friends may have in assisting migrants in their eventual move, offering their financial and emotional support and helping them settle in (O'Reilly, 2015; Stark and Bloom, 1985). The main criticisms of new economics lie in its (i) appearing more as a critique of the neoclassical theory, rather than a self-standing one, (ii) presence of sending side bias, and (iii) difficulty in separating the market failures and migration risks from income distribution and employment variables (Kurekova, 2011).

The World Systems Theory, instead, adopts a global approach to the topic of migration drivers. It looks at migration as a natural result of the process of capitalist development and the political and economic organization of an ever-growing global market (Petras, 1981; Massey, 1988). The world itself is seen as a single capitalist system

where less developed and poorer nations are the suppliers of cheap labour to the developed and more powerful countries which lie at the heart of the system (O'Reilly, 2015). In fact, it implies that migration stems from disparities, from the spread of capitalism and serves to fulfil the needs of large corporations and various economic interest groups (de Haas, 2011). Furthermore, some scholars add that international migration can be both the cause and the solution to the same inequalities (Skeldon, 2002).

Besides the obvious critique of its applicability solely on a world-wide scale, one of the major criticisms to the World Systems Theory lies in its interpretation of migrants as passive actors who are "manipulated" by the global economic macro forces.

The Dual Labour Market Theory (Piore, 1979), which is applicable on both macro and meso-levels, considers variables such as labour demand, immigration policy and recruitment efforts. It highlights the structural nature of the demand for foreign workers in developed countries and provides for convincing explanations for said demand and for the continual flow of low-skilled workers to these countries (de Haas, 2011), while also allaying concerns that immigrants are in competition with native workers (Arango, 2000). However, this theory, due to its demand-based nature, has a receiving state bias. It also over accentuates the formal aspect of labour recruitment mechanisms (Kurekova, 2011) and excludes push factors (Arango, 2000; Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana, 2016).

Finally, the Network Theory helps to better understand the benefits of interpersonal connections between sending and receiving countries (Kumpikaite and Zickute, 2012). It is a concept connected to social capital (Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana, 2016) based on migration networks. These networks can be defined as "sets of interpersonal relations that link migrants or returned migrants with relatives, friends or fellow countrymen at home" (Arango, 2000). Through the transmission of information, the assistance in finding work and the provision of financial aid, the networks facilitate and encourage migration, reducing both costs and risks involved in relocation. Furthermore, Massey et al (1993) suggest that the growth of these net-

works, over time, leads to a process of cumulative causation; that is, each subsequent migration leads to further social changes, turning migration into a self-perpetuation phenomenon (Arango, 2000).

The limits of this approach pointed out by some scholars are that it is not really a theory, but simply a conceptual framework and the fact that in some cases networks may be restrictive and therefore, thwart, rather than facilitate migration (Kurekova, 2011).

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

For the purpose of this study, that is based on data collection, by emigration we refer solely to emigration abroad. Data is collected at a regional level on the number of Italian emigrants for each year of the two periods of study.

The first period of study dates from 1946 to 1973, and is known as the intra-European post war emigration whereas the years of the second analysed period, that is the current period of mass emigration, are 2004-2019 – the last year for which complete data is available (Vitiello and Pugliese, 2020). For the years 1946-1968 data was taken from the “Annuario di Statistiche del lavoro e dell’Emigrazione: Vol. XI, Tavola 33. Tavola 33 “Espatri per paese di destinazione e regione di provenienza” (expatriation by destination country and region of origin) is a two-part summary table consisting of retrospective data for the years 1946-1968. The above-mentioned “annuari” or annuals of data collection were published by the Italian “Istituto Centrale di Statistica” – later known as ISTAT (the Italian national institute of statistics). The second part of the table, providing the number of emigrants per region per year, was used for this study. The values in the table refer to Italian citizens, who emigrated abroad for work or to join a working family member already residing abroad, or who transferred their residency abroad for other reasons. As specified in the notes of Tavola 33, the regional data from 1946 to 1957 are estimated values of collected, but incomplete data.

Instead, the numbers of emigrants per region for the years 1969 through 1973 were collected from the annuals entitled “Annuario Statistico Italiano” published again by the Istituto Centrale di Statistica (later known as ISTAT) from 1971 to 1975 and in particular, from the following tables (aka Tavola): Tavola 39A (1969), Tavola 33A (1970), Tavola 34A (1971), Tavola 44A (1972) and Tavola 39A (1973). It should be noted that the above resources concerning the first period of study are pdf files, and the data was transferred manually to excel files for data processing.

Instead, the number of emigrants per region per year for the second period of study (2004-2019) was collected directly from the ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) database, as was the population data per region for the two periods of study (ISTAT, 2021), excluding the regional populations for the years 1946-1953 for which the values were estimated as they are not available.

TABLE 1
Data source for the number of Italian emigrants
over the periods 1946-1973 and 2004-2019

Year(s) of reference	Title	Table	Source/date of publication
1946-1968	Annuario di Statistiche del lavoro e dell'Emigrazione: Vol. XI	Table 33	Istituto Centrale di Statistica (1970)
1969	Annuario Statistico Italiano	Table 39A	Istituto Centrale di Statistica (1971)
1970	Annuario Statistico Italiano	Table 33A	Istituto Centrale di Statistica (1972)
1971	Annuario Statistico Italiano	Table 34A	Istituto Centrale di Statistica (1973)
1972	Annuario Statistico Italiano	Table 44A	Istituto Centrale di Statistica (1974)
1973	Annuario Statistico Italiano	Table 39A	Istituto Centrale di Statistica (1975)
2004-2019	Migrazioni (trasferimenti di residenza)	Emigrati all'estero per provincia di origine	Istituto Nazionale di Statistica

3.2. *Empirical analysis*

The empirical analysis was carried out in three steps. First, using the collected data, the annual number of emigrants for each single region was compared to the resident population of the same region at the time of expatriation for all years of study. The resulting value indicates the percentage of emigrants compared to the resident regional population, instead of an absolute value of emigrants as found in the annuals and in the database. In fact, since the absolute value is influenced by the size of the regional population, it does not appropriately capture the migratory phenomenon whereas the percentage value presents a more accurate picture.

After calculating the percentages of emigrants per each region, regional values were then averaged to obtain the resulting percentages of emigrants from the three Italian macro areas per year, capturing the trends in each of the two periods of analysis separately.

In the third step, the annual percentage values of emigrants per region were averaged over each period of study to allow for the comparison of the obtained values for the two periods by region, also represented through the maps below.

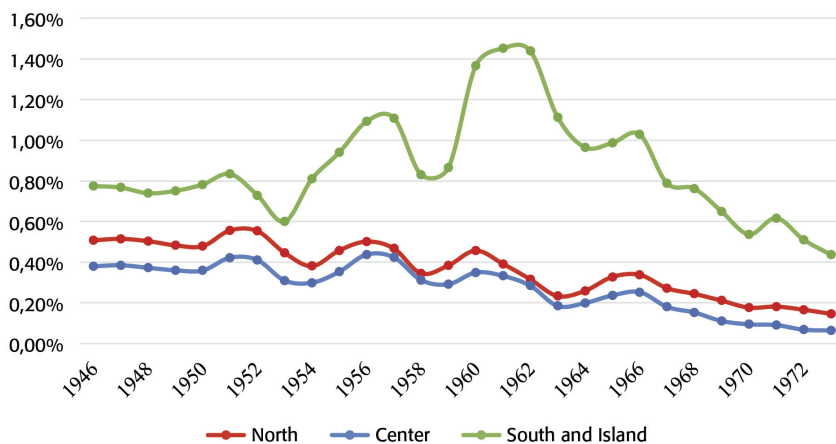
4. Results

Figure 1 shows the post WWII Italian emigration trends (1946-1973), considering the geographical areas of origin – North, Centre, South & Islands – of the emigrants, expressed as the percentage of emigrants compared to the average population of the single areas. Although the trends are similar in all three areas, the percentage trends of emigrants from the South are more accentuated. Moreover, the emigration percentages from the North and Centre follow each other closely, with the former staying just slightly above the latter for the whole period under examination. The overall tendency in the North and Centre is a decline in emigrant percentages. And even though there are occasional increases during the timeframe under analysis, neither in the North, nor in the Centre does the percentage ever rise

much above the initial values recorded in 1946 of 0.507% and 0.380% respectively. And in fact, in 1973 the final values in each area are lower than the initial ones (North 0.146% and Centre 0.064%).

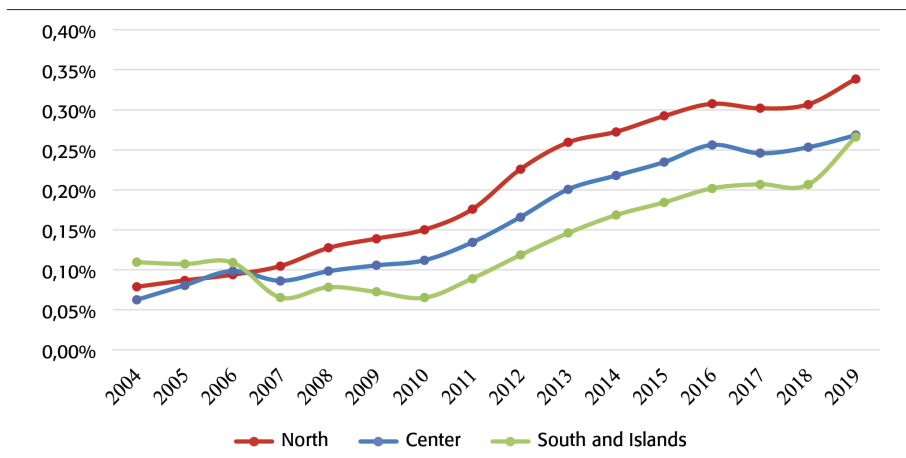
As previously stated, the trends of the percentage of emigrants from the South are similar to those of the North and Centre, but are much more pronounced and the overall values are much higher compared to the other two areas. In the South, the initial value of 0.775% in 1946 is surpassed many times over the period in consideration. Indeed, the rather large drop in 1958 (0.830%) is followed by an increase leading to the peak of 1,452% for the entire timeframe in 1961. Similar to the North and Centre, in 1973, the final percentage (0.437%) of emigrants from the South is lower than its initial value.

FIGURE 1
Trends of emigrant percentage as to total population
over the period 1946-1973 per geographical areas



In Figure 2 the Italian emigration trends are illustrated for the years 2004-2019, considering the macro-areas of origin of the emigrants, i.e., the North, Centre, South & Islands of Italy. Initially, the highest values registered for the percentage of emigrants as to the total population are those from the South. In fact, in 2004, it leads the trend with 0.11%, followed by 0.079% of the North and 0.062%

FIGURE 2
Trends of emigrant percentage as to total population over the period 2004-2019 per geographical areas

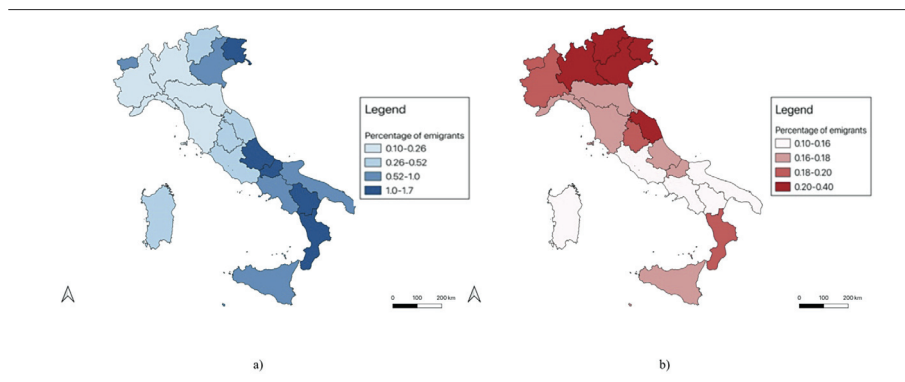


of the Centre. This trend continues until 2006 when the percentages are almost identical among the areas (0.094% North, 0.099% Centre and 0.109% South). During 2006 an inversion in the tendency can be observed where the North takes the lead in the average percentage, followed by the Centre and then the South. From 2007 until 2019 this ranking continues, and there is an overall gradual growth in the percentage of emigrants with the exception of 2017 when there is a slight decrease in the values of the Northern and Central areas and this same slight decrease occurs in the South in 2018. In fact, the largest values can be observed at the end of the time frame in 2019 with the percentage of emigrants from the North still being the highest with 0.344%, followed by similar emigration percentage rates of the Centre and the South, 0.265 % and 0.268% respectively.

Besides the inversion in tendency in 2006, the emigration percentage from the South undergoes a slight decrease in values between 2008 and 2010. Whereas this same area has a rather sharp increase in 2019 when it goes from 0.206% to 0.266% in a single year.

Figure 3 shows the two maps of Italian emigration for the two periods analysed in the present study. The maps indicate the percentage of emigrants in each region as to the total population of the same

FIGURE 3
Regional distribution of average percentage of emigrants
over the periods a) 1946-1973 and b) 2004-2019



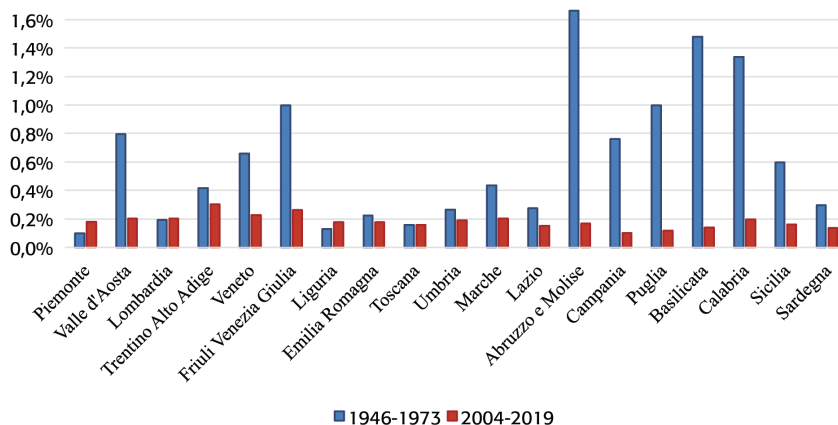
region, divided into classes of quartiles of the distribution of the data. As can be seen from the darkest areas on the map on the left, the highest percentages of emigrants in the period 1946-1973 are mostly observed in the southern regions, confirming the values determined in Figure 1 above. Moreover, the map on the right (2004-2019) confirms the opposite trend, highlighting the darkest areas corresponding to the regions in the North, as found in the values in Figure 2.

The bar graph in Figure 4 shows the average percentage of emigrants compared to the total population of each region during the two periods analysed.

The values registered in the 1946-1973 period are noticeably higher in the Southern regions as compared to the Northern and Central regions, with the highest averages observed for Abruzzo-Molise (1.661%), Basilicata (1.481%) and Calabria (1.337%). Notable values are also found in Friuli-Venezia-Giulia (0.998%), Valle D'Aosta (0.795%) and Veneto (0.658%) where the values are much higher than their other Northern counterparts.

Compared to the first period, generally in the second period the overall values are lower and, in many cases, noticeably lower. In particular, Abruzzo-Molise drops from 1.661% to 0.169%, Basilicata from 1.481% to 0.141% and Calabria from 1.337% to 0.195%. There are, nonetheless, some exceptions. One exception is the Centre re-

FIGURE 4
Average emigrant percentage as to total population per each region over the two analysed periods



gion of Toscana where the value remains the same for both periods (0.159%). However, the most notable exceptions are the three regions in the North whose values increase in the second period as compared to the first: Piemonte with a value of 0.099% in the first period and 0.181% in the second, Lombardia with 0.194% in the first period and 0.201% in the second, and Liguria with 0.130% in the first period and 0.176% in the second.

Finally, it is important to note that in the second period under analysis, the highest values belong to regions in the North – Trentino Alto Adige (0.304%), Friuli Venezia Giulia (0.264%) and Veneto (0.228%).

5. Discussion: data interpretation and comparison

After the end of the Second World War, Italian emigration began to increase. The determinants for emigrating were varied and included economic, social and political factors. Most of the time, the objective of the emigrants who left was simply to raise enough money to provide for their family or plan for their future (Colucci, 2019).

After 1945, in the political uncertainty following the war, the government aided in the migration of Italians abroad, believing that it was an important way to help both the emigrants and the economic recovery through their remittances (Sanfilippo and Colucci, 2010). In fact, after 1945, various institutions of the Italian Republic acted as intermediaries for the aspiring emigrants and the Italian government signed agreements with numerous countries especially in Europe (Strangio, 2019).

As previously stated, the overall percentage of emigrants per population in the macro area of the South is much higher than that of the Northern and Central regions. The post war years (up until the oil crisis) gave way to a unique period of convergence between the two Italian macro-areas. In fact, while Italy was catching up with the more advanced European economies, the Southern regions' growth rates even surpassed those of the North (Lepore, 2012). However, in spite of the overall convergence, the percentage of emigrants from the South remained higher than those in the Centre and North. The higher values can initially be attributed to worse economic conditions in the South compared to those in the North and Centre. In fact, the South, strongly characterized by an agriculture-based economy, suffered the post war effects mainly due to the large drop in productivity (Fanfani, 2004), and by receiving much lower funding from the Italian share of the Marshall plan as compared to the Northern regions. Although the productivity of the Southern regions matched that of the North in various sectors (agriculture, industry, occupational structure), the rate of unemployment did not match in the same way (Felice, 2015), leaving many with no choice but to emigrate.

Moreover, an element that decisively influenced the size, composition and destination of Italian migratory flows and that cannot be overlooked is the Treaty of Rome, signed in 1957. The Treaty initiated the process of European integration and determined the start of the free movement of workers, providing an explanation of the mainly European destinations that characterized the Italian emigration in the post-World War II period. The principle of free movement

was applied in practice with a certain slowness and was decisive above all in the increase in the movement of skilled workers (Ferrucci, 1971; Del Gaudio, 1978; Romero, 1991, 2004). In particular, the phase of the early 1950s was characterized by Italy joining the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community) in 1951. Article 69 of the treaty, establishing the ECSC, provided for the principle of free movement of labour between the signatory countries, even if it included a significant constraint, speaking of workers with “confirmed qualifications” and, in fact, closed the doors, at least in part, to low or unskilled labour. The Italian delegations that had begun to follow the preparatory tables in view of the creation of ECSC insisted in every possible forum to favour the inclusion of free movement in the Treaty.

In fact, through the Treaty, Italy had hoped to find a possible solution to the problem of national unemployment.

The first phase of free movement was established in 1961 with the approval of the EEC Regulation n. 15, which recognized the priority of hiring national manpower, but after a three-week period of jobs being unfilled by nationals, the competent bodies of the individual states were to contact the co-signatory countries to fill the vacant jobs. Trade unionists and entrepreneurs also participated in the discussions on Regulation n. 15 and Italy was satisfied with the conclusions, which among other things, provided for equal wage treatment for migrant workers and streamlined the procedures for the renewal of residence and stay permits. The following stage was Regulation n. 38, approved in 1964, which basically brought an end to the principle of national priority in recruitment and was met with great consensus from Italy (Colucci, 2021).

When, instead, examining the second period under analysis (2004-2019), there is no doubt that the financial crisis of 2008 spurred a new wave of Italian emigration – in fact, it would be unrealistic to state that economic reasons do not play a part. However, it is evident that the more dynamic Northern regions of Italy (Strozza, 2018), those with a positive economic growth rate during this period (EUROSTAT, 2021), have the highest percentage emigrant rates. One ex-

planation for this could be that the 2008 financial crisis generated a larger relative effect in the northern regions, where unemployment and job instability were less common than in the south, even though the per capita income continued to be higher than that of the south. Indeed, the southern regions have noticeably lower percentages of emigrants compared to the previous post-war period, although they are still the poorest regions from an economic standpoint (EUROSTAT, 2021).

Perhaps the most striking cases from a regional point of view are Piemonte, Lombardia and Liguria where the percentages of emigrants are even higher than those in the post-war period, in spite of their economic growth; and Abruzzo/Molise, on the contrary, whose emigration value dropped noticeably although registering a negative growth rate.

This suggests that when looking at the motivations to emigrate, we have to go beyond merely economic reasons. In fact, although some authors continue to confirm that the emigrants leave to escape severely disadvantaged economic situations (Sanguinetti, 2016; Bartolini et al., 2017), it seems unlikely that this is the main determinant; or rather while merely economic reasons are certainly important above all for emigration from the South, they cannot completely explain the higher values from wealthier northern regions.

One possible reason that may partially explain the regional differences in Italian emigration in this period, moving beyond strictly economic motivations, lies in the dualism that characterizes the Italian labour market. In particular, until the early 1990s, the Italian labour market was characterized by a strong rigidity of the rules governing employment protection. The consequences of this rigidity were a lack of dynamism in entering the labour market and high unemployment, especially long-term. Since then, employment protection legislation has undergone several changes in an attempt to mitigate these problems (Paci, 1998). Examples include the Treu laws of 1997 and the Biagi law of 2003, which broadened the possibilities of using fixed-term contracts and introduced a wide range of new flexible and “atypical” types of contracts.

In most cases, these were reforms that introduced greater flexibility only for new hires. However, the rules regarding open-ended contracts have not changed (Corbo, 2015). As a result of these “partial” labour market reforms, a situation of unequal treatment has emerged between incumbent workers (typically older workers) and entrants (new workers, who are often younger) (Barbieri and Sestito, 2008), generating the so-called “dualism” of the labour market (OECD, 2007). This phenomenon has especially affected younger workers, resulting in lower entry wages, a reduction in job protection, prolonged job insecurity, but also in the difficulty in finding a job that is appropriate to one’s study background and one’s expectations. These consequences have been felt even more profoundly in the most developed economic contexts, where the level of wages is not adequate to the cost of living (Brida et al., 2014), which could, indeed, at least partially explain the higher rates of some northern regions in the 2004-2019 migrations.

Besides lack of income and work, many other determinants have also been studied by the authors, especially in reference to higher skilled emigrants. For some scholars, other push factors include: corruption, a general lack of opportunity, transparency, nepotism in the workplace, bribery, limited career development opportunities, social injustices and political conflict (Khoo et al., 2007; Mihăilă, 2019). Pull factors of the destination countries have also been examined as drivers for emigration, among the main ones are the socio-cultural aspects of the same (Cenci, 2018), efficiency of institutions (Ketterer and Rodríguez-Pose, 2015), judiciary systems and public administration.

Putting aside the pull factors, which mainly affect the choice of the final destination of the emigrant (Dorigo and Tobler, 1983), attracting the migrant to one place rather than another (Krishnakumar and Indumathi, 2014) and not the choice to emigrate per se and, in any case, appear to have a uniform effect on all areas of Italy, the other determining push factors are still insufficient when attempting to explain the gap between the emigration percentages of the North and South. In fact, an in-depth examination of the same, on the con-

trary, would explain higher values of emigration from the South, if this were the case, as these negative aspects are certainly worse in the southern areas (Felice, 2013; Daniele, 2019).

There is, however, another aspect to take into consideration when looking for emigration drivers. An aspect that would, at least in part, explain why people emigrate even from areas that are wealthier and generally better off and would also shed some light on why some individuals, who live in the same area and under the same general conditions choose to emigrate, while others do not. A certain x-factor that is innate. A personal characteristic, which could be defined as a mix of resourcefulness, brassiness and audacity. Some authors have considered these qualities over the years, although most often referring to a single aspect or a specific context, such as higher skilled migration or a certain destination country. Variante (2021) discusses the resourcefulness of some Italian emigrants to England, in reference to their ability to use their class “resources”, such as degrees or professional status, to integrate better and overcome their “Southernness”. Moreover, in the vast range of brain drain literature, authors often refer to the emigrants as the best or the brightest, not necessarily in relation to their levels of education (Dumont and Lemaître, 2005; Sukhatme, 1994).

6. Concluding remarks

This study examines the regional differences in Italian emigration in the two main periods of migration, using percentage values to provide for a clearer picture than the one the absolute values can provide, which can sometimes be misleading. The results reveal two interesting finds: an inversion of north-south emigration trends and an increase in emigration from some northern regions in the second period of study where the percentage of emigrants is even higher than in the post-World War II period. These results are interesting because they tend to highlight the insufficiency of purely economic theory, as well as other theories which consider corruption, social

injustices, overall discontent, etc., as a basis for the reasons behind the choice to migrate. In fact, until recently, the focus of migration theory and models has essentially been on the economic aspects of migration – migrants leaving unfavourable economic situations for more favourable ones. Through the years scholars have added to or modified previous theory in a never-ending search for a single model to explain the choice to migrate.

However, the fact is that emigration is certainly a complex choice and cannot be whittled down to one single factor, such as purely economic factors. There are numerous reasons behind this choice. Indeed, in our study, the numbers cannot be logically explained by these types of theory. In fact, the results show that, notwithstanding the worse economic/ political situation of the southern Italian regions compared to the Centre and the North, the absolute value of emigrants in these regions is lower than in the first period of study and, in many cases, lower than the values of the better off northern ones. And while there is no denying that economics plays an important role in the decision to emigrate, the most probable scenario is that emigrants, who voluntarily choose to migrate, in times of recession, weakened labour markets, and high unemployment, in particular, take both economic and personal factors into consideration (Bartolini, 2017).

Furthermore, there is certainly an aspect of personal character which also plays an important role in explaining this decision. Indeed, recent studies have elaborated on the purely economic models to include the notion of “migrant personality”, that is, a series of traits, which can aid in the search for the explanation of who decides to stay and who decides to migrate, all other conditions being the same (Fouarge et al., 2019; Jokela, M., 2014; Williams, A. M. et al, 2018).

On this note, one of the limitations of this preliminary study is that, although it reveals that there appears to be an *x-factor* behind the choice to migrate that is not merely a lack of income or employment, and perhaps not easily definable – as it is innate – it does not investigate its nature. Therefore, further research should include

more advanced quantitative methods and even qualitative approaches to analyse international migration of Italians more in depth, particularly the reasons behind their choice.

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