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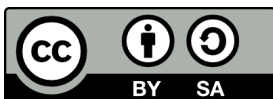
Overcoming generational stereotypes through knowledge.



DESK RESEARCH ON GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN ITALY

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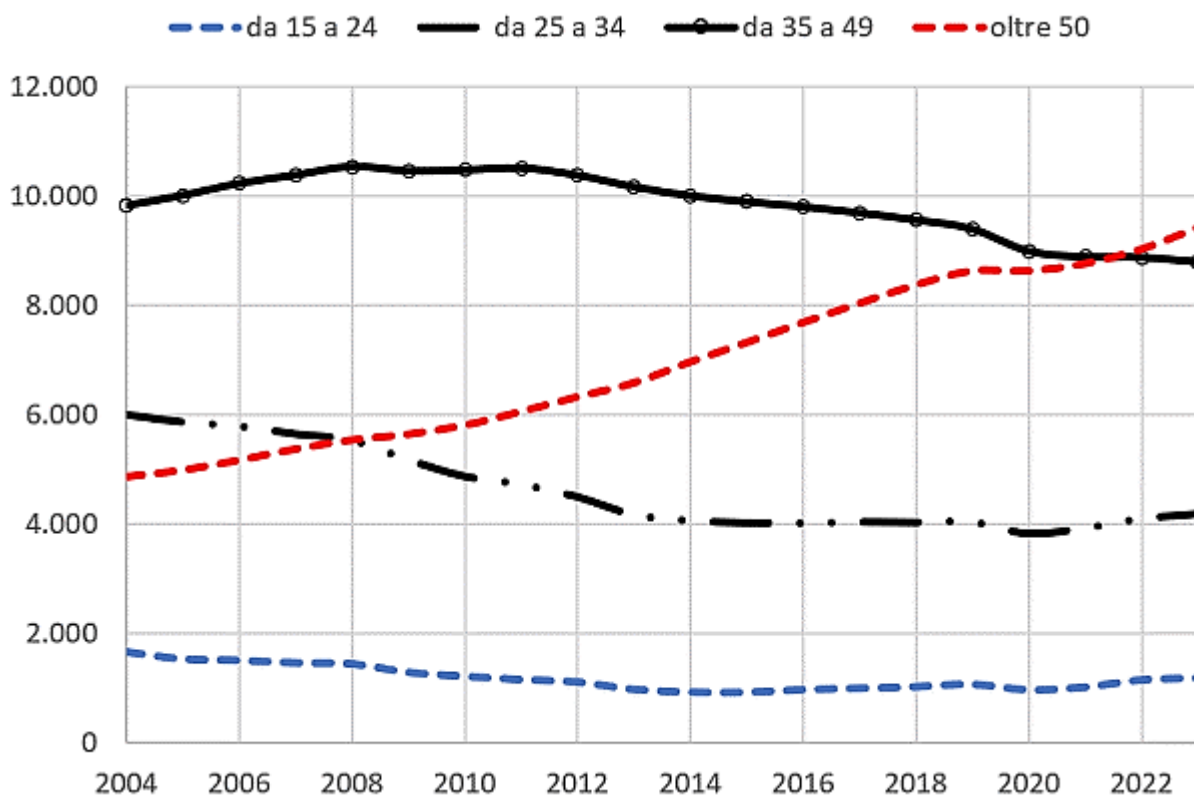
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According to ISTAT data, the level of employment in 2024 in Italy is increasing. This figure, which is generically positive for the country's economy, is at the same time worrying because it is the number of workers over the age of 50 that has the greatest impact on the result.

In fact, the evolution of employment and its distribution across generations is the result of structural changes in the labour market.

In the [flash note](#) published by ISTAT on 9 January 2024, together with a positive change in the number of employed people often interpreted as an effect of the policies implemented by the executive, it is noted that this change affects salaried workers, without substantial differences between males and females.

In the graph below, taken from ISTAT data, we observe the employment trend in Italy by generation over a reference time horizon of 20 years.



Just like the Italian population, the employed labour force is ageing. Due to the low birth rate (which has been declining in Italy since the 1970s) and the postponement of the retirement age, the labour force is getting older and older.

The ageing of the labour force is a point of weakness especially in the future perspective.

In fact, over the last ten years, different trends are observed between the generations with regard to employment:

-Employment growth among the over-55s: From 2011 to 2021, workers over the age of 55 increased by about 1.7 million, from 1.8 million in 2001 to almost 4.6 million in 2021. This is due to the increase in the retirement age and the retention of the older population in the labour market.

- Falling youth employment: Among young people aged 15-34, the employment rate decreased from 54.1% in 2001 to 39.8% in 2020, rising slightly to 41% in 2021. This result is due to demographic decline, job insecurity and the difficulty of stable integration into the market.

The key factors driving these results are:

- **Economic crises:** The 2008 crisis and the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on employment, especially for young people.
- **Labour reforms:** Reforms such as the Jobs Act (2015) introduced more flexibility, but also insecurity for the younger generation.
- **Territorial disparities:** The gap between North and South continues to be significant, with the South having higher unemployment rates.
- **Automation and digitization:** They have transformed the labour market, creating new opportunities, but also excluding those without up-to-date skills.

Specifically

The Baby Boomers Generation shows a trend towards active ageing: Many workers of this generation are continuing to work beyond retirement age. Most of this generation has benefited from careers with permanent contracts, more stable wages and a less competitive labour market and represents a stable pillar of livelihood for families. When they leave active employment to retire, a generation gap is created in some professions.

Generation X has faced the technological transition and has had to adapt to an increasingly flexible labour market. It is the first generation to experience atypical or fixed-term contracts, especially after the 2008 economic crisis. They are a 'sandwich' generation, busy caring for their elderly parents along with their children.

Millennials experienced difficulties related to the 2008 crisis and economic stagnation, with youth unemployment rates often high. This generation has experienced a boom in precarious contracts, with an increase in involuntary part-time work and project-based collaborative ations. Many Millennials have invested in university education, delaying entry into the labour market, but often finding themselves overqualified for available positions. There is an increased propensity to migrate, both internally (from the South to the North) and externally (emigrating abroad in search of better opportunities).

Generation Z has entered a labour market strongly influenced by digitization and automation, with an increased emphasis on technological skills. This generation is entering a market characterized by digital platforms and self-employment (e.g. riders, freelancers). They often experience unstable working conditions, temporary contracts and low wages and therefore prioritize well-being, flexibility and the meaning of work over stability.

COUNTRY SITUATION

The differences we are going to highlight reflect the type of response developed by each generation to the specific cultural, economic and technological changes faced by Italy and the world.

To begin with, Italian boomers experienced an era of enormous transformations, from economic prosperity to political instability, in a context marked by great hopes, but also by deep social and ideological divisions.

1) Technological/digital diversity

- Boomers:

in Italy have lived much of their lives in an analogue age. Many have only adopted technology such as PCs and smartphones in later life. The digital divide is significant especially for those living in rural or less developed areas. In general, the use of digital tools is for practical needs and mainly concerns email and WhatsApp messaging.

- Generation X:

in Italy, is this generation that pioneered the transition to the digital age, and has been using computers and the Internet since the 1990s. It is technologically competent, but not digital native. They use technology in a balanced way between work and leisure.

- Millennials:

They are the generation that grew up in Italy during the rise of the internet and mobile phones, they are digital natives par excellence, facilitated in quickly adopting new technologies. They are very attached to social media, apps and streaming platforms.

- Generation Z:

They are the complete Digital Native generation that has no memory of a world without digital technology. They use multiple devices simultaneously and prefer visual platforms (TikTok, Instagram). They are also inclined towards the use of advanced technology in educational and work environments.

2) Cultural diversity

- Boomers:

They have experienced a traditional Italy that is less exposed to foreign cultures. They often defend Italian traditions but have recently opened up to cultural diversity by accepting it gradually.

- Generation X:

In Italy, this generation began to experience diversity thanks to globalisation and the first significant migration flows in the 1980s and 1990s. It is more open to diversity than the Boomers, but still bound to traditional values.

- Millennials:

In an increasingly multicultural Italy, this generation has grown up in school and work environments with a greater presence of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. They are inclined to value diversity and promote inclusiveness.

- Generation Z:

The most inclusive generation in Italy, accustomed to multiculturalism and attentive to issues such as gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights and social issues. They express a marked sensitivity towards respect for cultural and individual identities.

3) Communication diversity

- Boomers:

They prefer direct and personal communication, such as phone calls or face-to-face meetings. In Italy, many have adapted to tools such as WhatsApp, but find difficulties with more modern platforms.

- Generation X:

Balance between traditional (phone, letters) and digital (email, social media) communication. They prefer a clear and formal communication style.

- Millennials:

Prefer quick and informal communication, often via chat or social media. They also use digital platforms for professional networking (LinkedIn).

- Generation Z:

Predominantly visual and immediate communication (videos, memes, emoji). Strongly oriented towards dynamic platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat.

4) Diversity in approach to work

- Boomers:

In Italy, often associated with stable, long-term careers. They prefer clear hierarchical structures and respect authority.

- Generation X:

Value independence and work autonomy. More pragmatic and result-oriented, but still respect hierarchical structures.

- Millennials:

They look for jobs that offer flexibility and personal meaning. They value work-life balance, preferring collaborative environments.

- Generation Z:

They want economic stability but also flexibility. They look to work in ethical companies with a positive social impact.

5) Transversal diversity

- Boomers:

Traditional values and strong sense of community. They tend to be less willing to make radical changes, but open to gradual progress.

- Generation X:

Resilient and pragmatic, able to adapt to new situations without completely abandoning the tradition.

- Millennials:

Innovative and change oriented. They are sensitive to global issues such as sustainability and inclusion.

- Generation Z:

Globally connected, open to rapid change and actively engaged on issues such as social and environmental justice. They prefer concrete and immediate solutions.

In evaluating the descriptions of the generations currently present and cohabiting in the world of work, it should be considered that, as this research is concerned with investigating contemporary aspects, the description of the different generations does not benefit from an objective point of view that historical distance would have facilitated and that the description is strongly influenced by the different stages of life that the different generations are going through. We must therefore consider that a propensity to explicitly defend rights and values is certainly attributable to youth, while a more individual and defensive perspective characterizes more mature phases of life.

This observation does not detract from the value of the above descriptions with respect to the purpose that characterizes this research, but it does alert us to a simplistic attribution of generational 'labels' that are intended to be a guide to the analysis and not an evaluation principle.

CONCLUSION AND REFERENCES

Over the past 50 years, Italy has changed in many ways and each generation has taken up its own challenge to change, but the speed with which perspectives have changed has created a differentiation of approaches so significant that it has created more grounds for miscommunication than in other historical eras.

At the political level, in recent decades the Italian population has embarked on a gradual, but never fully concluded, weaning off the influence of the Church. The East-West polarisation represented in Italy by the Communist Party and Christian Democracy has been overcome by the consumerism of the 1980s.

While it is true that each generation is a pioneer in some field, the four generations analysed here were or are committed to different and often uneven issues such as women's rights, social equality, the environment and personal empowerment.

The struggle for rights has changed theme and the focus has shifted to the fight against climate change in an increasingly precarious and less protected world of work.

The fight against climate change has become a central issue for the latest generations. Technology and digital are an integral part of everyday and professional life, but generations have faced this transition with a different set of tools.

In addition, in Italy, successive economic crises have pushed the political world to make choices that have inevitably extended the working life of these generations, who are the first to be active at least until the age of 70.

This factor has introduced two different types of emergencies:

- The difficulty of young Italians to find stable work situations with the consequent demographic and consumption decline, brain drain phenomenon abroad and demotivation to work
- The difficulty of older people to keep up to date with new technologies with the related loss of competitiveness of Italian companies in a globalised economy.

In this situation it is essential to facilitate transgenerational dialogue not only with a view to simplifying productive professional activities but also in the direction of transforming generational co-presence in the workplace into a competitive advantage.

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