

# ***Building one's life : children of immigrants towards adulthood. Italian case and comparative remarks***

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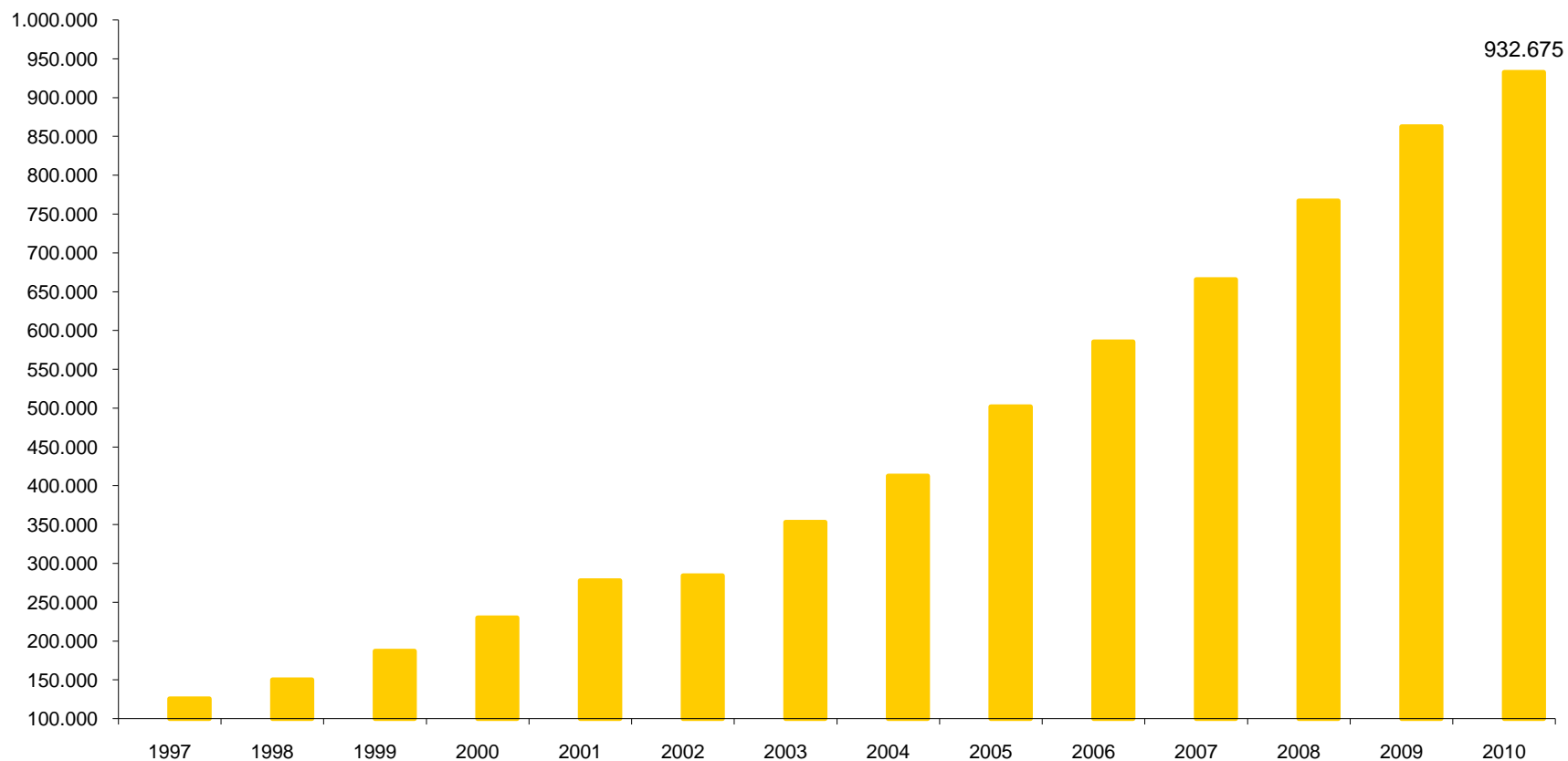


# Italy: policy and institutional environment

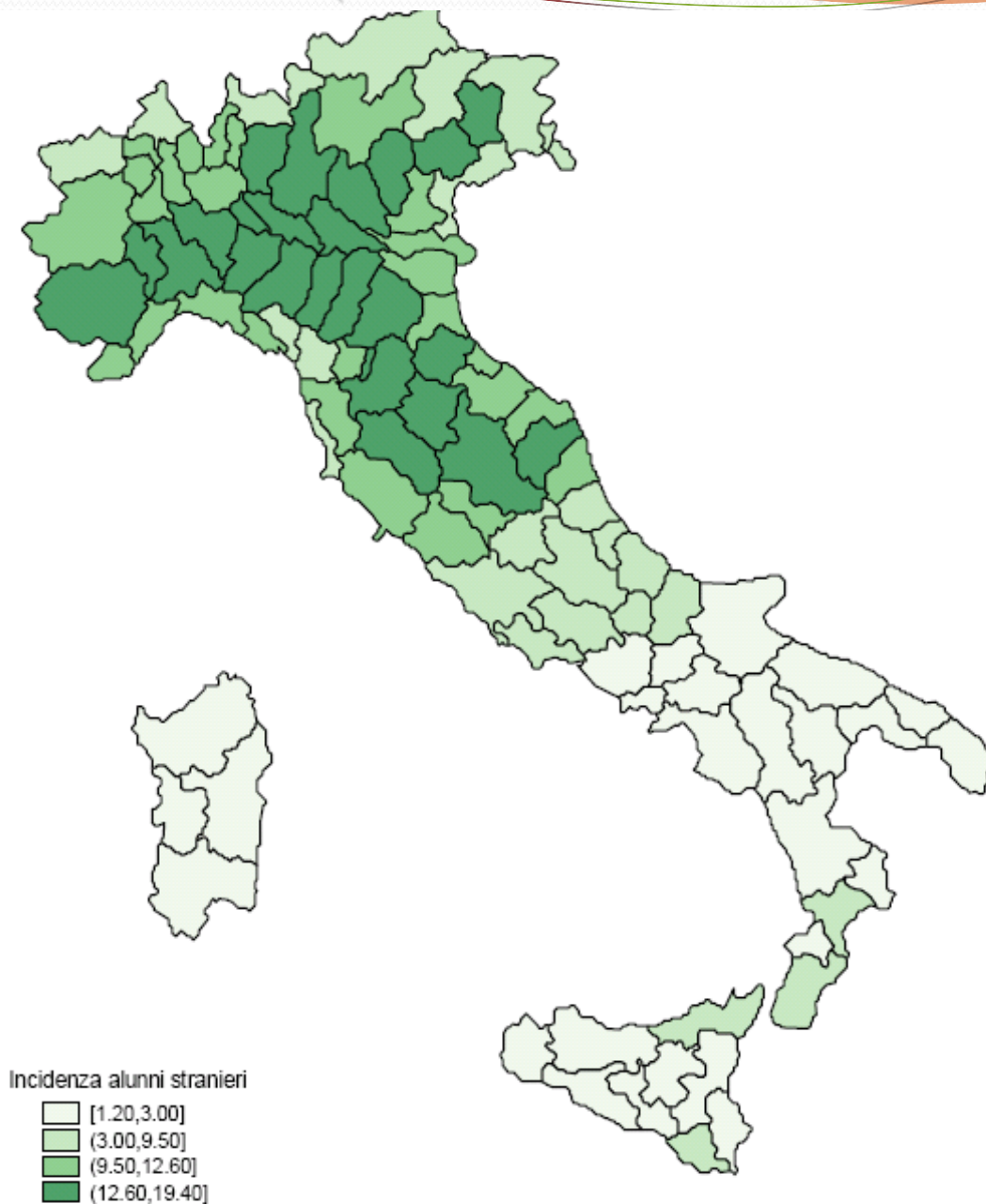
- Around 1 million of minors children of immigrants from 170 different nationalities (60% are born in Italy)
- School: elastic system (no early selection or strong competition)
- Centralized funding **vs.** local solutions (weak welfare state)
- Immigration policy and consequences on 2G : law 1998 **vs.** law 2002
- Articulation school-labor market: insufficient assistance with the school-to-work transition (regional differences)
- What we know about the passage to professional life -> scattered information (CNEL, single local researches)

# Children of immigrants in Italy 1997-2010

Minorenni stranieri residenti in Italia al 1° gennaio.. Serie storica 1997-2010



# Regional distribution (source ISTAT 2010)



# The panel of our research

- Interviews realized in the urban (multicultural) area of Milan  
-> not representative sample or panel
- Mixed national origins -> common generational features (beyond integration vs. multiculturalism) -> different risks and opportunities
- Both genders -> different risks and opportunities (family culture, welfare state)
- Born in Italy or arrived in the early childhood -> possible different school pathways and school-to-work passage
- School pathways: both vocational training and university education

**Life's pathways as combination of mixed factors:  
articulation between structural characteristics and individual agency  
(possible overlapping of vulnerabilities or advantages)**

- **Family resources:** education, salary and profession of parents; stability and number of children; social connections, expectancies on children's social mobility
- Reasons of the eventual contribution to family income (for personal independence or to help parents)
- **School environment:** policies, time and age of arrival, teachers, schoolmates, helps, competition
- **Agency/capacity:** personal autonomy and self-esteem, performances, 'goodwill', aspirations, ambitions
- **Gender** differences (i.e. early marriage or childbearing vs. early independence)
- Legal status and **citizenship**
- Risks of **discrimination** (i.e. high or low social environment)

## **School pathways:** relationships with teachers and schoolmates

- ❖ **Good relations with teachers and schoolmates (especially in primary school) most interviewees got a fundamental (free) help from teachers or other Italian adults**

*I arrived here when I was 11, and I learned quickly Italian, teachers helped me a lot and I'm especially grateful with one of them who spent a lot of her free time to help me... Schoolmates were also curious and kind with me, I don't remember bad situations, just jokes among children.*

Lin, 31 y.o. (F) degree in Economics, Chinese parents, bank manager

*At the primary school during the collective rest, after the lunch break, my teacher helped me to learn Italian, we went in the garden and she stayed with me to help me to overcome my linguistic gap, I'm extremely grateful of this.*

Tey (28 y.o. (F) parents from San Salvador, unemployed

# Self-initiative and passage to professional life

- ✓ **Personal entrepreneurship:** “if you can’t get a job, you have to invent it”.
- ✓ **This attitude is the same for both higher or lower educated.**
- ✓ **Help from Italian friends seems as important as that from ethnic community**

*Nowadays to find a job is difficult, you have to put yourself on the test in different areas and environments. I did different kind of jobs, my attitude was always positive, every time was a new experience, an opportunity to learn new professional skills, I always succeeded, because I know my duties.*

Maria (30 y.o. (F) parents from San Salvador, employee in a local journal

*I got my first important job as engineer thanks to the help of an Italian friend, he introduced me in an Italian firm looking for an engineer able to speak Chinese, so I got immediately the job. Paradoxically when I was in China for this job, Chinese colleagues consider my as an Italian...*

Francesco, 30 y.o., engineer, Chinese parents

# The importance of personal independence (economic)

- ❖ Most of our interviewees started their professional life with small seasonal jobs (in some cases full time).
- ❖ Economic independence is encouraged by parents

*“I like very much my mixed origins, this give me different points of view, it’s certainly a value. This enhances also my independence, my mother always pushed me towards a personal independence, even if school has been always at the first place, she encouraged me to earn my own pocket money to pay – at least partially - extras such as holydays and clothes”*

Anna, 23 y.o. (F) degree in psychology, assistant psychologist  
(Caribbean father , Italian-German mother)

*When I was sixteen my mother said to me: ‘now it’s time to go abroad looking for a job during the summer time’, so I went to Ireland to work for two months, to improve my English*

Ling 23 y.o (F) university student as engineer, Chinese parents

# The importance of personal independence (private life)

- ❖ **Ambivalent relations with family ties and traditions (i.e. for young women) -> resource (roots, pride, self-esteem) vs. bond (obligation)**

*“I decided to live alone when I was 18, the conflict with my parents was too hard, we didn't know each other... after a quarrel they thrown me out from home when I was 16, then I came back (...) As interpreter I got very early my economic independence and now the relationships with my parents are good. (...) Personal freedom is a supreme value and this would be impossible inside the Chinese community or with a Chinese husband”*

Deng, 27 y.o., interpreter Chinese parents, Italian husband

*I knew that education is important and I had a lot of energy so I worked and I studied at the same time, during my university studies I had a full time job but I get my degree in time... I already lived on my own.”*

Lin, 31 y.o. (F) degree in Economics, Chinese parents

# Citizenship

- ❖ **The tiring and complex Italian bureaucracy, the impolite employees, the desire to get equal opportunities to travel**

*Without citizenship bureaucracy can be very painful and this can have consequences also on your professional life... I lost a job because my permit to stay was expired. It's incredible, Italian government is unable to consider us as a resource and its bureaucracy doesn't make any distinction between a man just arrived and someone like me that live here since he was a little child.*

Gianni, 29 y.o., engineer, Chinese parents

*After a long wait I finally got the Italian citizenship, when the employee gave me my passport she said "welcome to Italy!". This is ridiculous, I was born in Italy, this was not a kind granting, it was a right finally recognized! (...) Anyway I don't need a document to know who I am, but this was my right.*

Aline, 29 y.o. (F) Eritrean parents, artist

# Discriminations

- ❖ **Episodes of discrimination during the school (more frequent in poor urban areas), sometimes in the first job experiences (for women sexual harassment)**

*Sometimes my colleagues say to me that I'm a nigger, but it is just a joke, and this doesn't offend me... at the end they respect me because I speak perfectly Italian and I have a degree, a qualification.... However the police stop me frequently to check my identity card, I know they are just doing their job, but they don't stop so often my Italian friends, this makes me feel different.*

*(Zack, 24 years old, electrician, parents from Morocco)*

*In some situation I felt harassed, but I really didn't understand if it was because I'm a woman or because I'm black, or simply a black woman... It happened that men spoke to me making allusions (as if she was a potential prostitute). If I were white perhaps this wouldn't happen...*

*(Anna, 23 years old, student, father from Saint Vincent, Italian mother).*

# Uniqueness, 'adaptability', to be accustomed

- ❖ Adaptation and improvisation as necessary qualities in a individualized, globalized, uncertain society
- ❖ Personal merits and uniqueness are valorized

*I always try 'to modulate' myself according to the situations and according to the typology of people in front of me... this is not a mystification of myself, it is just a capacity to adapt myself, that is a capacity of interaction, of communication... To survive, to be accepted and respected, you must develop such capacity, it is a work, an enduring work that you have to develop during your lifetime.*

Rebecca (38 y.o. Father from Panama, mother from Italy)