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## **THE SILVER ECONOMY: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE ELDERLY IN SOUTHERN ITALY IN THE LAST DECADE**

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***Abstract:** Studies on longevity have opened new frontiers and have redefined the perception of the elderly. They are now seen not only as healthy and well-cared-for individuals but also as valuable resources rather than burdens. This new perspective presents an opportunity for Southern Italy to initiate processes of renewal and economic development. After examining the Italian context, this research analyzes the demographic and socio-economic data from three regions and proposes strategies to transform the elderly from a perceived burden into an opportunity. The analysis reveals that population aging is a significant characteristic of Italy, particularly in Southern Italy. Based on the findings, the research suggests ways to make pension income more productive, turning it into a driving force for economic and professional activities across various sectors, including care, health, collaborative efforts, and part-time jobs. This approach aims to contribute positively to the GDP.*

***Key words:** aging, silver economy, Southern Italy, economic development, elderly*



## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

This paper deals with the topic of the silver economy, clarifying the main demographic and economic aspects of this paradigm, which has received attention in the scientific literature, in relation to the European context (Klimczuk, 2016; Felix, 2016). The aim of the research, however, is not only theoretical, but aims to show how this vision can be a resource for the Southern Italy. If the ageing of the population is already a constant for Italy, the silver economy can trigger processes of renewal and economic development (Conway Lenihan, McGuirk, 2022). For this reason, after a theoretical examination of the silver economy and the Italian context, the research analyses the demographic and socio-economic data of three regions in Southern Italy (Molise, Basilicata, Calabria) and then proposes hypotheses of application to transform the vision of the elderly from a burden into an opportunity. The methodology employed integrates theoretical analyses of the most up-to-date literature (Kyriakou, Belias, 2017; Laperche et Al. 2018; Alvarez-Diez et Al., 2023) and statistical analyses of demographic and economic data in order to provide a comprehensive reading of the subject and a clear vision of the case studies addressed.

## 2. THE PARADIGM OF THE SILVER ECONOMY AND THE ITALIAN SCENARIO

A debated topic, the silver economy is presented as an opportunity. The definition proposed by the European Commission's 2018 Report is as follows: «the sum of all economic activity that caters to the needs of people aged 50 and over, including the products and services they purchase directly and the additional economic activity that this expenditure generates<sup>2</sup>» and cannot fail to be considered a milestone. The report is the culmination of a theoretical and methodological reflection which, taking note of the socio-demographic weight of people aged 50 and over, focuses on their active role in the economy. Several elements contribute to this paradigm: the wide spread of older age groups in the most developed countries, but also an increasingly attentive view of active ageing, as well as the awareness that the over-50s, who have considerable capital, represent a significant percentage of the population (Moreira et Al., 2023). In reality, the shift is about the weakening of the view of old age as a symbol of psychophysical deterioration, of a decline marked by loss and of an increasing cost to societies. The very subdivision of age groups is now being questioned and, in fact, although European Union reports refer to citizens aged 50 and over, in reality the focus of the documents is shifting to the over-65s. In fact, if current studies consider 50 as an extension of youth, old age seems to be the prerogative of those aged 70-75 (Edmonston, 2021). Studies on longevity have opened new frontiers and outlined the recent conception of the older person as a healthy being attentive to his or her own well-being. Theoretical reflection has always found its place in the documentation of the European Union. Indeed, «Europe 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth<sup>3</sup>» has focused on active and healthy

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is the result of a shared reflection, but sections 1, 2 and 3 should be attributed to Emilia Sarno, while paragraphs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 should be attributed to Nicole Nunzi.

<sup>2</sup> [https://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/2dca9276-3ec5-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1.0002.01/DOC\\_1](https://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/2dca9276-3ec5-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1.0002.01/DOC_1)

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/IT/legal-content/summary/europe-2020-the-european-union-strategy-for-growth-and-employment.html>

ageing of the population as a necessary turning point for social cohesion and increased productivity. It is no coincidence that the EU considers home automation as a supportive science for the elderly, as it provides technologies to improve the capacity and functionality of homes and man-made environments in general, through remote domestic appliances. Home automation not only enables and will enable so-called 'Aging in place', i.e. the possibility of ageing in one's own environment without having to move to nursing homes, but also expands employment opportunities for engineers, computer scientists and designers. In addition, the Next Age<sup>4</sup> project is the first European programme to invest in start-ups capable of developing silver age applications. From a legislative point of view, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights has signalled the shift from a so-called care-oriented approach to the recognition of rights such as self-determination, participation in social life and respect for one's beliefs, beyond social change. For its part, the World Health Organisation has stressed that active ageing promotes not only longevity and general psychophysical well-being, but also social and professional opportunities. This challenges the view of old age as marginalisation, giving credence instead to the idea of older people as a resource for society and the family. The Active Ageing Index (Aai) makes it possible to measure and explore the main factors that contribute to active ageing: social and cultural participation, job fulfilment, autonomy. Indeed, demographic data, on a global scale, show that 80% of the over-65s live in the 20 most developed economies which produce 85% of the world's GDP. The over-65s will number around 1 billion in 2030, i.e. more than 1 in 10 of the population. In addition, 50% of the European population is over 45 years old, and the countries at the top of this ranking are Portugal, Spain, Greece, Slovakia and, of course, Italy. Consequently, the presence of pensioners is increasing, which Eurostat identifies with the 'EU old-age dependency ratio', calculated as the ratio between the number of elderly people (aged 65 and over) and the number of people of working age (aged 16 to 64). However, if the paradigm shift has offered many governments the possibility of prolonging working life, this often necessary option has also reinforced the idea that old age is a process that can be postponed. From an economic point of view, the silver economy traditionally consists of the share of public expenditure earmarked for 'old age', but the sector is large and articulated, and represents an important source of potential demand and thus an opportunity for the economic system (Zsarnocky, 2016). First of all, there is a strong demand for home care and nursing services; but there is more, because active older people represent an attractive consumer segment for companies and already many of them have chosen the elderly as a target group. Older people also have assets and income and, on average in advanced societies, they have higher average wealth than other age groups, mainly younger people. The tourism industry is already benefiting and will increasingly benefit from this demographic and social phenomenon; tourist agencies offer trips for the 65+ population at favourable prices, some even reserved for singles who can see in this type of travel an opportunity to meet new people and fight loneliness. Again, some countries have focused on attracting retirees with a kind of semi-structural tourism, such as Bulgaria, Tunisia or the Canary Islands in Spain. In fact, these countries encourage pensioners to move their tax residence from their country of origin by offering them reduced taxation (Klimczuk, 2021). However, it is necessary to point out that the situation of older people is not homogeneous, several studies show inequalities in welfare among older people in Europe and, above all, a gender gap emerges. Both from a health and

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.nextage.io/>

socio-economic point of view, older women receive very low pensions. In Eastern or Southern European countries, women are more dependent on health care systems (Gómez-Costilla et al., 2022). Gender inequality accompanies the life course of women in some geographical areas, but worsens as they grow older. Yet inequalities in quality of life stem not only from the gender gap, but also from social differences between categories of workers. However, although the picture is not homogeneous, the condition of older people is changing and Italy represents this process very well. Italy<sup>5</sup> is the leading Country in the European Union in terms of both the percentage of over-65s (23.8 % compared to a European average of 21.1 %) and the percentage of over-80s (7.6 % of the Italian population compared to a European average of 6.1 %<sup>6</sup>). In 2024 there will be 14.357 million elderly people, representing 24.5% of the total population, a figure that will reach 20 million in 2047 (34% of the total population). In terms of the old-age dependency ratio, Italy is the second country in the European Union with 37.8% (compared to 27.9% in 2002). Interesting, however, is the economic implication. As Censis points out, the share of the wealth of the elderly in the total wealth of Italian families has risen in 20 years from 20.2% to almost 40% of the total (...). The average family income of the elderly in 25 years has increased by 19.6% in real terms and has risen from 19% of the total to 31%, while the income of millennials has registered a -34.3% in the same period. In monetary terms, the over-65s in Italy are 'richer' than the under-35s: they have a higher average income of 20,000 euros (+4,000 compared to the under-35s) and have a real per capita wealth of 232,000 euros, more than double that of the under-35s. Moreover, (...) 62.7% of the elderly claim to be in a sound financial situation<sup>7</sup>. Not to mention the 37% of the elderly who are experiencing financial difficulties, two thirds of the over-65s own assets and/or property and even continue to work after retirement, accumulating even more money<sup>8</sup>. (Polenta, 2022). In the nursing home sector, the expenditure borne by families is estimated to be about 33 billion per year (1.7% of national GDP), providing employment in home care for about 1.6 million people, including carers, domestic staff and nurses. The total demand generated directly by the over 65s is around 200 billion euros, almost one fifth of all consumption by resident households, rising to 30% of the total by 2050. Therefore, the silver age represents a vital universe in social changes and an active subject in economic processes, as we will try to demonstrate. The silver economy, in short, is changing its face; from expenditure or burden, it can be considered a productive resource. Therefore, given that the Italian context is one of the oldest in Europe, it can be the privileged environment to focus on the advantages of the silver economy. In particular, it is the Southern Italy that is ageing the most (Gugliuzzo, Sarno, 2024), and because of that, three regions belonging to it, were chosen as case studies, where the presence of the elderly is high and therefore investing in them could help to overcome the critical economic situation that these regions are experiencing.

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<sup>5</sup> For the Italian data, the demographic surveys of the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), cited in the literature for the period 2020-2024, are used as a reference.

<sup>6</sup> The EU region with the highest average age, 49.5 years, is Liguria, and eight other Italian regions are among the twenty most aged of all European Community regions (Sardinia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Piedmont, Molise, Tuscany, Umbria, Valle d'Aosta and Marche). The 'youngest' region in Italy is Campania, with an average population age of 43.9 years; see ISTAT, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.censis.it/welfare-e-salute/la-silver-economy-e-le-sue-conseguenze/la-nuova-potenza-economica>.

<sup>8</sup> See: [https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/02/Report\\_Condizioni\\_vita\\_pensionati\\_2018\\_2019.pdf](https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/02/Report_Condizioni_vita_pensionati_2018_2019.pdf)

### **2.1. Three case studies**

The research focuses on three case studies - Molise, Calabria and Basilicata - i.e. three regions with critical elements (economic, social and demographic) in common. Calabria and Basilicata are geographically located in the South of the Italian peninsula, while Molise, although situated in the central part of the Country, is, for historical and political reasons, considered part of the Southern Italy.

As anticipated above, the demographic decline characterises above all the Southern Italy, and the regions that have lost most of their resident population in the last two decades are precisely the ones we are dealing with here. Molise is in last place, with a demographic decline of 7.4% in 11 years (2012-2023), followed by Basilicata -7.2% and Calabria -6.2%<sup>9</sup>. Equally worrying are the forecasts for the coming decades: these regions will lose more population than the others. In terms of life expectancy at birth, according to data from the National Statistics Institute (ISTAT) for 2023, the regions examined are, compared with a national average of 83.1 years, in the bottom five: Basilicata (82.5 years), Molise (82.4 years), Calabria (82 years), Sicily (81.8 years) and Campania (81.4 years). These imbalances are the result of the generalised criticalities in these territories and in the South in general, which are dependent on the lack of economic dynamism and an uncompetitive labour market, as well as infrastructure constraints. Among the numerous data, two are particularly significant: in 2023, the incidence of absolute household poverty in Italy is 8.5%, rising to 10.2% in the South. Again, the national average GDP per capita is 38705 euros, but the lowest is in Calabria, with 19400 euros, while Molise is second to last with 22500 euros and Basilicata, with 27800, is still below the Italian average (Gugliuzzo, Sarno, 2024). These conditions produce many negative effects, including youth mobility, depopulation, population ageing which mark the Southern Italy and, in particular, the regions we are examining (Figure 1) and which we will analyse, in detail, one case at a time.

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<sup>9</sup> These data are even more alarming when compared with the same figures for the regions of central and northern Italy, which in many cases even recorded an increase in population: Trentino-Alto Adige (+5.1% in the autonomous province of Bolzano), Lazio (+2.0%), Lombardy (+1.7%) and Emilia-Romagna (+1.1%). The data were provided by the ISTAT annual report 2024.





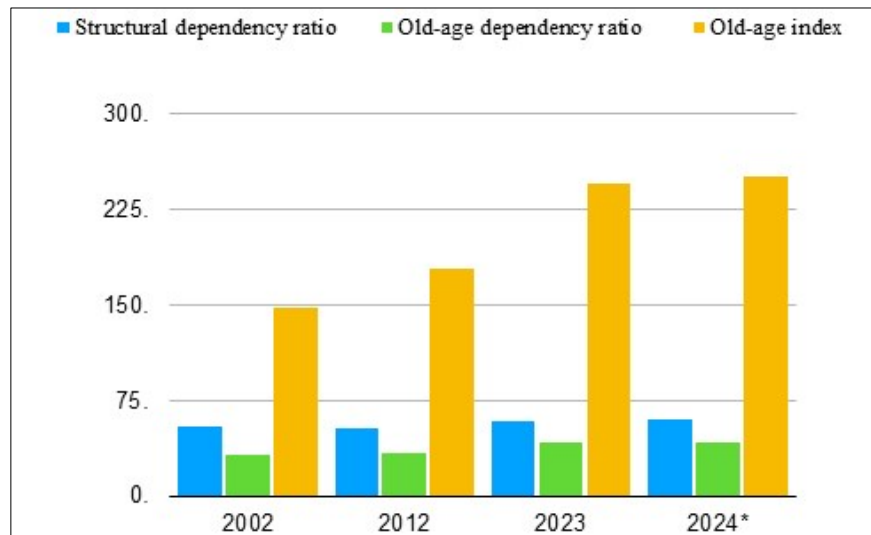
**Figure 1.** Italian Regions  
(Source: Wikimedia Commons. Own elaboration)

## 2.2. Molise Region

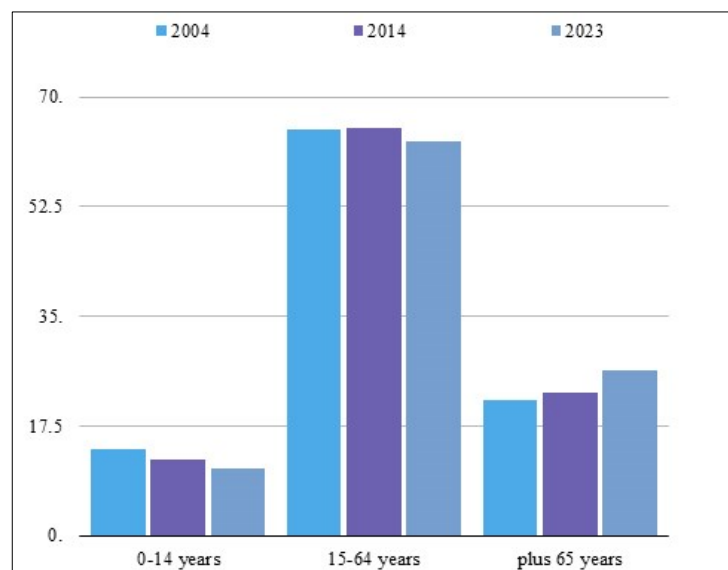
The progressive ageing of the population is an established trend in Molise. According to ISTAT (Italian National Statistics Institute) data, on 1 January 2024, there are 290 636 inhabitants, 270 724 in the province of Campobasso and 79912 in the province of Isernia; the average age of the population is 48 years and the number of people over 65 is 76879. It is as if almost all the residents in the province of Isernia were elderly. Figure 2 stigmatises firstly the progressive increase in the ageing index from 148.5 % in 2002 to 245.3 % in 2023; secondly, the old-age dependency ratio, which measures how many over-64s there are for every 100 working-age adults, increased by almost 10 percentage points from 2002 to 2023, from 32.8 % to 42.1 %. The structural dependency ratio, which measures the ratio of the non-working age population (0-14 and 65+) to the working age population, shows a consistent increase from 55% in 2002 to 59.3% in 2023. On the other hand, Figure 3 shows that in Molise the population is mostly adult and elderly, confirming precisely the increase of the elderly population. If these are the demographic data, the figures on pensions paid are emblematic: with 100,000 employed people, pensions paid amount to 124,000; in the province of Campobasso 87,000 pensions are paid compared to 71,000 employees, while in Isernia, out of 29,000 employees, 36,000 pensions are paid<sup>10</sup>. In short, more pensioners than workers. However, pension

<sup>10</sup> See: [https://www.ansa.it/molise/notizie/2023/09/18/in-molise-piu-pensionati-che-lavoratoricislriscio-poverta\\_f71b1788-f79b-46ec-833d-9f61a8975c2f.html](https://www.ansa.it/molise/notizie/2023/09/18/in-molise-piu-pensionati-che-lavoratoricislriscio-poverta_f71b1788-f79b-46ec-833d-9f61a8975c2f.html)

income in Molise is very low, at around 17310 euros, below the national average<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, 11.1% of elderly people in Molise have a minimum monthly income of less than 500 euros gross (+1.5% compared to the Italian average).



**Figure 2.** Demographic indicators for Molise  
(Source: Own elaboration based on ISTAT data as of 1 January of each year.  
\*Estimated value for 2024)



**Figure 3.** Age structure of the population of Molise  
(Source: Own elaboration based on ISTAT data as of 1 January of each year)

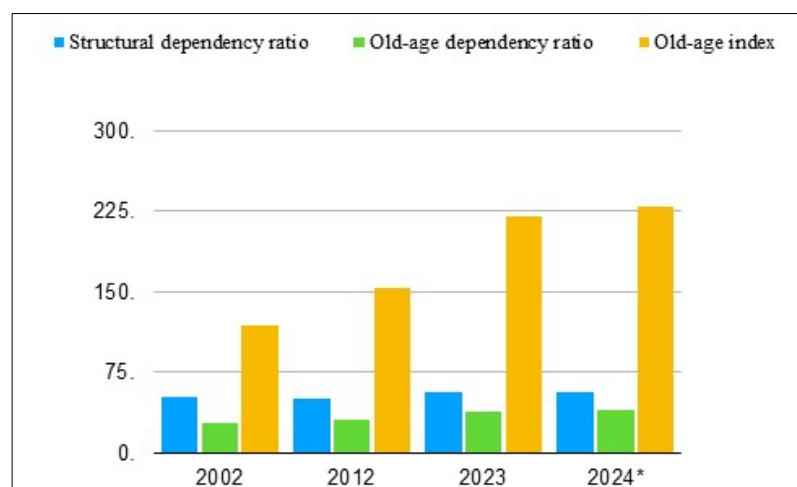
The elderly population in Molise is more dependent on the family than in other Italian regions. In fact, the region ranks second to last in Italy in both hospital care and

<sup>11</sup>Latest BesT Report (Equitable and sustainable well-being of the territories) 2023 of Molise, drafted by ISTAT; see: <https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/BesT-Molise.pdf>

care for non-self-sufficient elderly people, with a value of 11.6 carers per thousand inhabitants, well below the national average of 40.2 inhabitants<sup>12</sup>. Such a low value is mainly due to the low availability of other forms of care such as the integrated home care<sup>13</sup>. The Essential Levels of Care (Livelli Essenziali di Assistenza, acronym LEA) check is not reassuring, as the total score for this region, cumulative of all health care treatments, is only 195.1 points, which is a non-compliance and a far cry from the 283.6 score of the region that is ranked first: Lombardy<sup>14</sup>. In Molise, therefore, there is a significant presence of older people with medium and/or low incomes. However, this is a universe with a certain unexpressed potential. There is no doubt that there is a need for interventions that favour not only health care, but also policies that promote active ageing. The attempt to set up partnerships between local territorial actors and social services, involving public and private actors, has not yet been systematised.

### 2.3. Basilicata Region

In Basilicata, the average age of the population is 47 years (estimated at 47.3 years in 2024), while on 1 January 2002 it was 40.6 years; the percentage of people over 65 has also increased from 18.6% in 2002 to 24.9% in 2023 (estimated at 25.3% in 2024). The old-age index almost doubled from 119.4 in 2002 to 220.6 in 2023; the value of the old-age dependency ratio increased accordingly, from 28.4 in 2002 to 39 in 2023. Finally, the structural dependency ratio increased from 52.1 in 2002 to 56.6 in 2023 (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Demographic indicators for Basilicata

(Source: Own elaboration based on ISTAT data as of 1 January of each year.

\*Estimated value for 2024)

<sup>12</sup> See latest GIMBE Observatory Report 2/2022m for Essential Levels of Care and regional inequalities in healthcare:

[https://www.gimbe.org/osservatorio/Report\\_Osservatorio\\_GIMBE\\_2022.02\\_Adempimenti\\_LEA\\_2010-2019.pdf](https://www.gimbe.org/osservatorio/Report_Osservatorio_GIMBE_2022.02_Adempimenti_LEA_2010-2019.pdf)

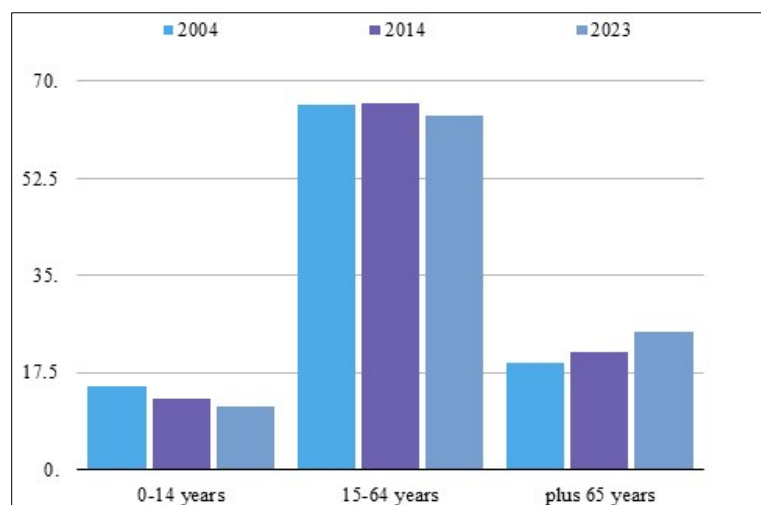
<sup>13</sup> It consists of a combination of medical, nursing and rehabilitation treatments.

<sup>14</sup> See latest GIMBE Observatory Report 2/2022 for Essential Levels of Care and regional inequalities in healthcare:

[https://www.gimbe.org/osservatorio/Report\\_Osservatorio\\_GIMBE\\_2022.02\\_Adempimenti\\_LEA\\_2010-2019.pdf](https://www.gimbe.org/osservatorio/Report_Osservatorio_GIMBE_2022.02_Adempimenti_LEA_2010-2019.pdf)



Figure 5 shows that the elderly population in this region continues to grow; today it represents about a quarter of the total population of Lucania, i.e. 135,107 persons, 60,617 men and 74,490 women<sup>15</sup>. The situation is therefore no different from that of Molise: a small young population, a large number of adults and a growing elderly population<sup>16</sup>. However, the difference is less marked than in Molise and concerns only one province of Basilicata, Potenza. The average annual per capita income of pensioners is about 16881 euros, compared to a national average of about 19782 euros, a difference of almost 3000 euros, and there are many pensioners with average or low incomes. Unlike Molise, in relation to the Essential Levels of Assistance (Livelli Essenziali di Assistenza - LEA), health care in Basilicata<sup>17</sup> meets well the needs of the population, but has a large deficit in terms of socio-health residential services for non-self-sufficient elderly people where the rate of residential care is only 0.5%. There are about 43000 non-self-sufficient elderly people but only 7382 of them benefit from integrated home care, about 17%, compared to a national average of 21%. Funding for social services is decreasing, while the number of people over 65 is increasing, representing 23% of the resident population. As for active ageing policies promoted by the present administration, they are particularly scarce, however, there are interventions and collaborations between different sectors, especially health and social services, which could be systematised through the application of the regional Law 29/2017<sup>18</sup>.



**Figure 5.** Age structure of the population of Basilicata  
(Source: Own elaboration based on ISTAT data as of 1 January of each year)

<sup>15</sup> See: <https://demo.istat.it/app/?i=POS&l=it>

<sup>16</sup> See: [https://www.ansa.it/basilicata/notizie/2024/01/25/allarme-spi-cgil-in-basilicata-piu-pensionati-che-occupati\\_e54d076e-ef7a-4f1f-b9bf-efc05168aaa3.html](https://www.ansa.it/basilicata/notizie/2024/01/25/allarme-spi-cgil-in-basilicata-piu-pensionati-che-occupati_e54d076e-ef7a-4f1f-b9bf-efc05168aaa3.html)

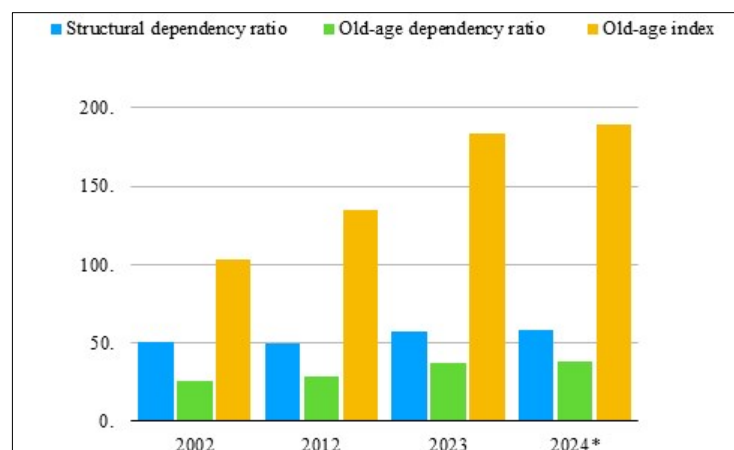
<sup>17</sup> See latest GIMBE Observatory Report 2/2022 for Essential Levels of Care and regional inequalities in healthcare:

[https://www.gimbe.org/osservatorio/Report\\_Osservatorio\\_GIMBE\\_2022.02\\_Adempimenti\\_LEA\\_2010-2019.pdf](https://www.gimbe.org/osservatorio/Report_Osservatorio_GIMBE_2022.02_Adempimenti_LEA_2010-2019.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Regional law of 2017 that aims to promote the participation of older people in social, civil, economic and cultural life, favouring the construction of itineraries of autonomy and well-being in the usual contexts of life.

## 2.4. Calabria Region

Despite being the least 'aged' of the three regions examined here, Calabria's trends confirm the Italian demographic pattern. Here too, the median age of the population remains high and rising: from 2002 to 2023 it increased from 39.6 to 45.7 years, with an estimated value for 2024 of 45.9<sup>19</sup>. As shown in Figure 6, again considering the period 2002-2023, the ageing rate increased from 103% to 183.7%, the old-age dependency ratio from 25.8% to 37.1% and finally the structural dependency ratio from 50.9% to 57.2%. This means that more than one out of two Calabrian residents is of non-working age.



**Figure 6.** Demographic indicators of Calabria

(Source: Own elaboration based on ISTAT data as of 1 January of each year.  
\*Estimated value for 2024)

Figure 7 suggests a demographic structure not very different from that of Molise and Basilicata: a growing universe of adults and elderly people. In terms of pension income, 755,000 pensions are paid in Calabria out of about two million residents. «The phenomenon is widespread in the five provinces of the region: Reggio Calabria with 225,000 pensioners and 140,000 employed, Cosenza with 270,000 and 197,000, Catanzaro with 137,000 pensioners and 107,000 employed, Crotona with 60,000 and 40,000 and, finally, Vibo Valentia, the province with the lowest negative balance, 18,000 pensioners and 45,000 employed<sup>20</sup>». In terms of Essential Levels of Assistance (Livelli Essenziali di Assistenza - LEA), Calabria ranks last<sup>21</sup>, with a cumulative score for the three areas considered (prevention, district and hospital) of only 162.8 points, thus falling below the score of 283.6 of the first Italian region in the ranking, Lombardy. The percentage of elderly people, aged 75 and over and not self-sufficient, receiving

<sup>19</sup> See:

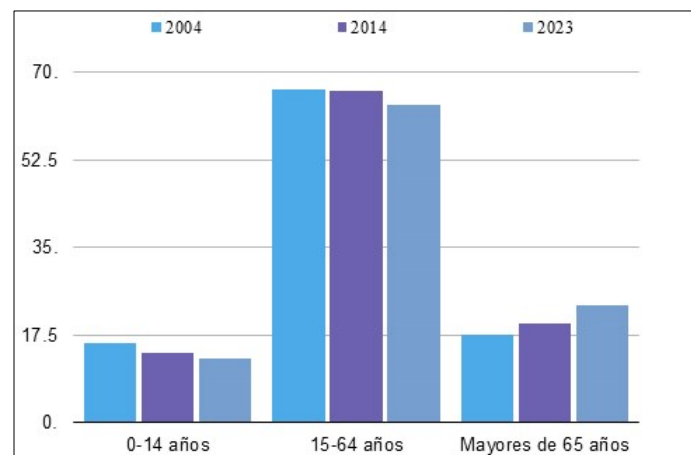
[https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1,POP,1.0/POP\\_POPULATION/DCIS\\_INDDEMOG1/IT1,22\\_293\\_DF\\_DCIS\\_INDDEMOG1\\_1,1.0](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1,POP,1.0/POP_POPULATION/DCIS_INDDEMOG1/IT1,22_293_DF_DCIS_INDDEMOG1_1,1.0)

<sup>20</sup> See: <https://www.lavocecosentina.it/site/index.php/primo-piano/2082>

<sup>21</sup> See latest GIMBE Observatory Report 2/2022 for Essential Levels of Care and regional inequalities in healthcare:

[https://www.gimbe.org/osservatorio/Report\\_Osservatorio\\_GIMBE\\_2022.02\\_Adempimenti\\_LEA\\_2010-2019.pdf](https://www.gimbe.org/osservatorio/Report_Osservatorio_GIMBE_2022.02_Adempimenti_LEA_2010-2019.pdf)

residential health and social care treatment is only 16.52 per thousand inhabitants, while in some regions such as Lombardy the score is around 81.97 per thousand inhabitants.



**Figure 7.** Age structure of the population of Calabria  
(Source: Own elaboration based on ISTAT data as of 1 January of each year)

In terms of active ageing, Calabria has a law that protects, improves and promotes active ageing policies in various sectors. However, to date it has not been funded, mainly due to lack of funds. This is because the funds foreseen within the National Action Plan for Cohesion, the so-called PAC, foresee the advance of expenses by the local authorities and the subsequent reimbursement by the State. The local authorities are unable to meet these expenses due not only to economic difficulties but also to organisational problems. Thus, the three regions have a demographic burden of ‘elderly’ that will increase in the coming years and a significant presence of retirement incomes. Certainly, the presence of the over-65s weighs on the health system, but, as expected, it can represent a resource, as we will try to show below.

### **3.DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND IMPLEMENTATION HYPOTHESES**

Population is posing new challenges. In the regions examined, demographic structures show unbalanced situations between age groups: the elderly far outnumber the very young and the presence of older people is expected to increase in the coming years. Pensions are a major burden and can no longer be seen as an individual good; they must be seen as a circular good to support economic processes. The needs of the elderly themselves should not be solved within the family, but be a common issue to create opportunities. If the over 65s represent a decisive demographic group for improving the economy of a state, they can certainly also become so at the local level and thus also in our target regions. However, in the cases examined there is no innovative vision of ageing, but this is not an insurmountable constraint: such a vision must take root if the members of this group are to age ‘well’. It is therefore necessary to create the right conditions for the over-65s to face old age in good health, so that they can manage all aspects of life independently for as long and as well as possible. To this end, the first step is undoubtedly to invest, from a health point of view, in prevention and, from a social point of view, to combat isolation through the integration and participation of the over-65s in all spheres

of society, making the most of each individual's abilities. From this perspective, ageing would be lived with greater resources and motivation, the spectre of loneliness and depression would be banished and the costs of social services and health care would be reduced. In Italy, however, the need arises to create a law on active ageing that is able to provide a regulatory framework and minimum parameters that each region should apply to some fundamental aspects: health and care services for the elderly, voluntary activities, reintegration into the world of work, lifelong learning, tourism and leisure (Lucantoni, Principi, 2022). On the basis of national guidelines, the researched regions could involve all actors in the territory: stakeholders, institutional actors, local administrations and policy makers. With clear regulations, there would be a systematic approach to the issue of active ageing, through the creation of a coordination network between regions, territorial areas and national institutions, as well as through the investment of specific funds. From this perspective, a law on active ageing should also take into account gender differences. While a higher level of research is desirable to clarify income differences between retired women and men, legislation could further establish ways to reduce gender inequalities. Healthcare is undoubtedly the sector in which to invest in order to generate wealth, both for the ADI (integrated home care) and for the RSA (acronym for *Residenza Sanitaria Assistenziale*, i.e. care homes for the elderly). According to data from ISTAT and the Italian Ministry of Health, in 2022 the number of elderly people over 65, who needs ADI, covers 63% in Molise, 17% in Basilicata and only 4% in Calabria. In Molise and Calabria, the elderly over 75 not self-sufficient living in nursing homes are only 3% of those who would need this service and in Basilicata only 1%. It is clear that it is essential to invest in home care, first of all to guarantee people in difficulty a more dignified lifestyle, but it would also open up new employment opportunities for carers, social and health workers, nurses, physiotherapists, etc. Investing in the care sector is more necessary than ever and the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience (PNRR) has earmarked funds for measures aimed at the elderly with an investment of more than 500 million euros to prevent hospitalisation and promote integrated home care, demotic services, telecare and telemonitoring.

In addition, the PNRR has allocated funds for the creation of “Case della Comunità”<sup>22</sup> for the over 65s in each Italian region; in Calabria, Basilicata and Molise the funds will be 198.95, 190.8 and 129.17 euro per capita respectively<sup>23</sup>. The above-mentioned ‘Case della Comunità’ will be organised in Hubs, which will provide primary care and basic diagnostic services as well as specialised activities, and Spokes, which will provide only primary care services. According to the OFFICIAL BULLETIN OF THE REGION OF MOLISE of May 2024<sup>24</sup>, each Hub and Spoke will involve the recruitment of about 200 units, including administrative staff, social workers, nurses and paramedics. As far as Calabria and Basilicata are concerned, it has not been possible to determine the specific number of employees to be recruited, but each ‘Casa della Comunità’ should be sufficiently staffed. In this context, the elderly person becomes a stimulus for the creation of dedicated facilities requiring multiple professional skills. In this way, retirement income can become the driving force of economic and professional activities, giving also new goals to university education, which will have to create specific careers that provide

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<sup>22</sup> “Case della Comunità”: new social and health facilities that will be part of the National Health Service. The Community House offers a multidisciplinary intervention model and will house teams composed of doctors, nurses, social and health care assistants.

<sup>23</sup> See: <https://www.openpolis.it/esercizi/le-case-della-comunita-finanziate-dal-pnrr/>

<sup>24</sup> See: <https://bollettino.regione.molise.it/>

adequate competences for the care of the elderly. But it is not only the health sector that needs to be invested in in order to age 'well' and generate benefits. Older people can play collaborative roles, part-time jobs and thus contribute to GDP. Among the collaborative activities is certainly volunteering; in fact, between 2003 and 2023, the proportion of over-65s engaged in this type of activity grew from 5.4% to 7.1%. However, according to the latest ISTAT report on volunteering, the highest percentages of volunteers over 65 are recorded in Northern Italy: in Lombardy alone the figure amounts to 811 555, while in our target regions it stops at 23706 in Molise, 49374 in Basilicata and 72203 in Calabria. Investing in volunteering is fundamental from a win-win perspective, because if on the one hand it allows the elderly to feel part of society and improve their psychophysical health, on the other hand it allows them to carry out useful activities for the community. Moreover, it allows intergenerational collaboration, the exchange of knowledge and develops a greater sensitivity of young people to the needs and requirements of the elderly (Albanese, Bocci, 2019).

The sector that has benefited most from this exchange is the craft sector, which is currently in crisis. In Calabria, in the last ten years there has been a real reduction from 40,310 craft entrepreneurs to 35007 (-13.2%), in Basilicata from 14061 to 11820 (-15.9%), in Molise from 9290 to 7391 (-20%). One of the applicable solutions could be the creation of a national fund for crafts that would encourage workshops run by workers close to retirement to hire young apprentices, who would be paid an adequate salary to be able to become independent and not lose motivation. During this apprenticeship period, the owners should be able to pass on to the apprentices not only all the skills that are indispensable for a trade, but also the passion needed to decide to continue working in it over the years. If this synergy were to become systematic, the veteran craftsman, even in retirement, could continue to make an educational contribution to young entrepreneurs. Intergenerational teamwork would encourage the revival of old crafts and historical knowledge, increasing craft productivity (Greco et al., 2022). Crafts are mainly present in small inland villages, which make up the predominant part of our target regions, so reviving these activities would make pensioners active again, give opportunities to young people and ensure the resilience of the social fabric of depopulated territories. In addition, the intergenerational team model could be used in different contexts involving older people, such as social inclusion workshops or information tables.

Finally, there is another sector that can benefit from older people: tourism. As the first paragraph makes clear, there are not only disabled or not self-sufficient elderly people; a part, even a large part, of them is in good health and is an interesting target for ad hoc tourism packages. Well, the three regions examined present some attractions for those looking for slow tourism, in contact with nature and the rediscovery of rituals and traditions of the past. Here too, NRNP funds could be invested in the organisation of tourist facilities, adapted to the elderly, and in the creation of tailor-made itineraries. In addition, the agri-food sector would also benefit by specialising in products appreciated by the elderly.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The research presented here has highlighted, firstly, the cultural changes related to ageing; an active view of older people, facilitated by scientific, medical and technological advances, makes it possible to consider long life after 65 as a period of well-being and social experiences. This paradigm also makes it possible to rethink the

silver economy, in the sense that the elderly person is no longer an economic burden, but a resource that produces wealth or drives the economy. The same needs, linked to health care, represent professional opportunities and give the possibility to use funds and financing. The theme was not only dealt with in general terms, but was linked to three Italian territorial areas, three regions where the presence of elderly people is numerous, but where it is still necessary to intervene with an innovative vision of the silver economy. The demographic structures of the three regions showed that the ageing of the population is already a feature of Italy, especially in the Southern Italy, for which it seems necessary to propose hypotheses that make retirement incomes more productive. They should be better geared to health care needs, but this is not enough. It is worth remembering that while some older people have health problems to the extent that they are no longer self-sufficient, others are active and can make knowledge and skills available. A number of scenarios have therefore been identified to transform the elderly from a social burden into an economically productive and socially attractive resource. Paradoxically, putting or recirculating the knowledge of the elderly can be an asset for society as a whole. Certainly, the present research needs further investigation, but the elements now proposed show how we need to develop a different conception of older people and their social and economic role.

In fact, further investigations are needed to focus on the changes that are affecting the elderly population and to clarify the new economic and social possibilities they may experience. In addition, specific ways of monitoring the ongoing transformations will have to be identified. Longevity, therefore, represents a period of existence yet to be explored.

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