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M.A.R.I.O PROJECT

INTERREG ITALY-CROATIA 2021/2027

D.1.3.2 - ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL GAPS IN REGIONAL POLICIES ON
OUTMIGRATION
Final version



1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, outmigration has emerged as a significant challenge for many regions, prompting the need for strategic interventions to mitigate its socio-economic impacts.

The M.A.R.I.O Project, has been designed to tackle the issue of outward migration in Italy and Croatia area of young educated people as an integrated territorial governance strategy, by improving the knowledge of all decision makers on the multidimensional phenomenon, involving the target groups and stakeholders in identifying the problem and co-design and implement measures and to reduce or revert the outflow and make the area involved more attractive for young people to settle. M.A.R.I.O project is dedicated to addressing this issue, has initiated a comprehensive effort to identify and evaluate existing measures, policies, and projects that aim to curtail the movement of populations from their native regions to more prosperous areas.

This joint report is based on the results of deliverable 1.3.1 (related to the activity 1.3: “Joint assessment of the integrated measures in place counteracting depopulation”) which collect the data from Surveys of integrated measures to address outward migration of each project partner. The purpose of these surveys is twofold: firstly, to facilitate a uniform approach in collecting data on various anti-outmigration strategies across different territorial levels, and secondly, to analyze the effectiveness of these strategies in achieving their intended outcomes. By compiling and scrutinizing a wide array of initiatives, the purpose is to understand the strengths and weaknesses inherent in current practices and to foster improvements through stakeholder engagement and policy refinement.

The methodology includes eleven sections:

1. Description and purpose of the policy/strategy
2. Start and End date
3. Territorial Level
4. Target recipients of the measure
5. Stakeholders Involved
6. Description of Policy/Project

7. Expected Results
8. Results Achieved
9. Weak Points of the Policy/Strategy/Project
10. Improvement Proposals Description

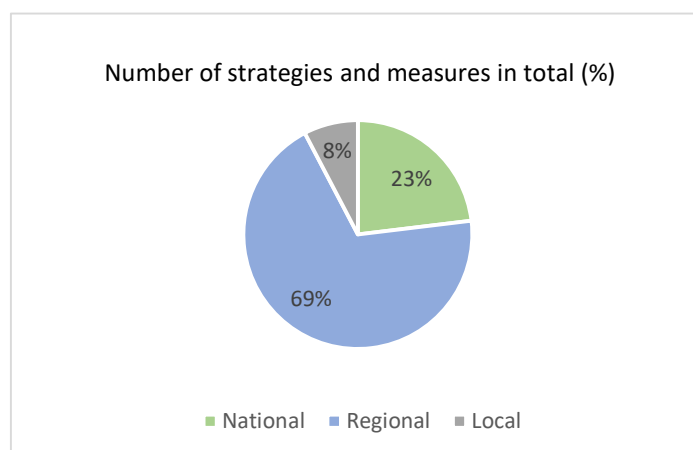
The municipalities involved, Castelbottaccio, San Michele Salentino and Orebic, present distinct policies and approaches aimed at mitigating depopulation, enhancing economic opportunities, and improving living conditions for residents. Given the small size of the municipalities involved, the analysis considered strategies adopted at the regional and national levels, especially Castelbottaccio and San Michele



Salentino, emphasizing the need for tailored, local interventions to address challenges and opportunities faced by these communities.

2. STRATEGIES AND RESULTS ACHIEVED

The lead partner is from Molise and is involved in 2 national strategies and one regional strategy. The partner from Apulia is involved in 8 regional strategies and one national strategy. Finally, the Croatian partner has implemented a measure at the local level. In total, there are 3 national strategies, 9 regional strategies and one local measure.



2.1 Municipality of Castelbottaccio (LP)

Regarding the Municipality of Castelbottaccio, no specific local measures have been implemented but only regional and national strategies as follow:

- **National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI)** (2014 - ongoing)
- **National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)** (2023-ongoing)
- one regional strategy “**Active residence income for access to the Fund in favor of individuals who go to reside in municipalities with populations up to 2,000**” (2019-2023)

Specifically, Castelbottaccio is directly involved in SNAI strategy since its part of the internal areas of Molise.

The strategies are focusing on revitalizing small towns through these key measures:

- **Improved Services:** Strengthening local health services, including community nursing and telemonitoring.
- **Cultural and Tourism Development:** tourism and promoting the local identity through initiatives like the "Borgo del Benessere" project
- **Infrastructure and Environment:** Investments in sustainable development and infrastructure improvements, especially in internal areas.

The most strategies are still ongoing, and the results are not still available. As of now, the results achieved coming especially from SNAI strategy which are:

- **Health Services:** A reduction in hospitalizations through enhanced community health services, alongside the continuation of the extensive pharmacy network, which will offer a range of primary care services across the entire region. Additionally, the implementation of a 'community nurse' service, the establishment of a territorial healthcare facility to support the elderly and those who are not self-sufficient, the creation of a maternal and child clinic dedicated to single mothers and the most vulnerable populations.
- **Cultural Regeneration:** Successful initiatives, such as 'Borgo del Benessere' project, have been implemented with the goal of revitalizing cultural heritage and stimulating the local economy. In the municipality of Riccia, a major intervention was undertaken to restore buildings, housing, and cultural assets through the creation of the Fortore Valley Ecomuseum. Additionally, efforts have been made to foster innovation in the hospitality sector, including 'Business Workshops,' aimed at transforming the values of the local area into viable business ideas for both young entrepreneurs and new residents.



2.1.1 Strength and weak points of the strategies

- **Strength points:** Healthcare improvements have been one of the most tangible results, with the introduction of community nursing and telemonitoring, which have already led to a reduction in hospitalizations. The expansion of primary care services through the pharmacy network, alongside the establishment of facilities to support vulnerable populations such as the elderly and single mothers, demonstrates a strong focus on addressing healthcare accessibility in remote areas. Cultural and tourism development has also been a key focus, helping to promote the local identity and stimulate tourism. This focus on cultural heritage and well-being creates a unique value proposition for small towns like Castelbottaccio, potentially positioning them as attractive destinations for wellness and slow tourism.
- **Weak points:** it was underlined a progressive reduction in resources and insufficient training of technical staff involved experienced in SNAI projects. Moreover, since no specific local measures have been implemented, the reliance on national and regional programs like SNAI and PNRR means that Castelbottaccio's specific needs may not be adequately prioritized. A more localized approach could be more responsive to the unique challenges of this municipality.



2.2 Municipality of San Michele Salentino (PP2)

As for the Municipality of Castelbottaccio, similarly in San Michele Salentino, there are no specific local measures. Below the list of measures and strategies implemented at the regional and national level:

- **MareAsinistra - "Strategy for Attraction and Valorization of Talents in Puglia** (2023-ongoing)
- **Youth guarantee** (2014-Ongoing)
- **Stay in the South** (2018-Ongoing)
- **New Enterprises initiatives -NIDI"** (2014-ongoing)
- **Smart Specialization Strategy Puglia – Tecnonidi** (2014-ongoing)
- **Brains to South** (2011-2018)
- **Galattica – Youth Network in Puglia** (2023-ongoing)
- **Botteghe High – Tech: "itinerant paths of digital craftsmanship and self-entrepreneurship education** (2024-ongoing)

Moreover, has implemented one national strategy:

- **National Strategy for internal areas 2014-2020** (Gargano and Monti Dauni areas)

In general, strategies focus on enhancing brain retention, establishing a regional identity, and fostering cooperation among key stakeholders. The primary goal is to attract and retain talented individuals, such as young professionals, digital nomads, and researchers, through the implementation of a regional talent attraction law. This law will define specific objectives and provide tools for monitoring progress to ensure these targets are met.

Additionally, the strategies emphasize collaboration between public and private sectors, including universities, research institutes, businesses, and government agencies, to cultivate an environment that supports talent development. These initiatives are structured around five key features:

- **People:** Boosting talent retention by promoting participation in training programs and raising employment rates, especially among skilled workers and students.
- **Enterprises:** Encouraging the growth of innovative startups, increasing investments, and fostering partnerships between businesses and research organizations.
- **Brand:** Enhancing the region's brand to increase international visibility and linking it to innovation and excellence.
- **Networking:** Strengthening networks by encouraging more participation in national and international projects through strategic alliances.

Some strategies are still in the early stages of implementation, and no detailed impact studies or results are yet available. However, the strategies started earlier are reached relevant results.



The “Youth Guarantee” strategy aimed to address youth unemployment and promote entrepreneurship has shown several key achievements. The program, designed to engage NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth aged 15-29, registered over 92,000 participants between 2014 and 2018. Of these, 43.8% benefited from at least one active policy, with females slightly more represented than males. Employment outcomes indicate that 37% of participants secured jobs, and over one-third of the contracts activated were permanent positions. This demonstrates the program’s positive impact on stabilizing youth employment in the region preventing the outmigration.

Furthermore, “Stay in the South” strategy data from 2021 shows that public contributions amounting to €390.5 million led to investments of over €525 million, funding 7,589 businesses. Young entrepreneurs, particularly those under 35, represented a significant portion of these initiatives, comprising 68% of the beneficiaries. Additionally, 40% of the funded businesses were led by women, reflecting efforts to support female entrepreneurship. Overall, the strategy resulted in the creation of more than 28,000 jobs, with an economic impact nearing €1 billion.

“New Enterprises initiatives -NIDI”, in 2022, revealed that 919 applications for funding were submitted, of which 289 were approved, providing self-employment opportunities to 359 individuals. The strategy particularly benefited people in disadvantaged employment conditions, reflecting its success in fostering entrepreneurship and supporting those with fewer job opportunities.

2.2.1 Strengths and weak points of the strategies

- **Strength points:** The strategies implemented in Puglia focus heavily on talent retention, youth employment, and entrepreneurship. A notable strength of these strategies is their comprehensive approach, targeting multiple of regional development such as talent attraction, enterprise growth, and international visibility. The regional talent attraction law aims to provide a structured framework for monitoring progress, which is a strong point in terms of accountability and long-term sustainability.
- **Weak points:** While the strategies appear comprehensive, many are still in the early stages of implementation, with no detailed results available yet for several initiatives. This limits the ability to fully assess their effectiveness. For instance, while the “New Enterprises initiatives - NIDI” strategy has had success in supporting entrepreneurship, only a small percentage of applications were approved, which may indicate either a high level of competition or barriers to access. Additionally, despite positive outcomes in terms of job creation and entrepreneurship, the challenge of long-term sustainability remains. The strategies may create short-term employment or startup opportunities, but it is unclear how well they are fostering stable, long-term economic growth and preventing further outmigration in the future. Moreover, since no specific local measures have been implemented, the reliance on national and regional programs means that Municipality of San Michele Salentino needs may not be adequately prioritized. As



Castelbottaccio, more localized approach could be more responsive to the unique challenges of this municipality.

2.3 Municipality of Orebić (PP3)

The Municipality of Orebić, located in Croatia, has directly implemented a **set of demographic measures** (2000-ongoing) focused on incentivizing young families and students to remain or return after completing their education. Key measures include:

- **Baby Bonuses:** Financial support for newborns, with increased bonuses for larger families.
- **Kindergarten Support:** Co-financing of kindergarten costs based on family size, promoting affordability for large families.
- **Transportation Assistance:** Covering transport costs for students studying outside the region to maintain strong ties with their community.
- **Housing and Marriage Bonuses:** Financial support for newly married couples and assistance with housing

There is a visible result in last census period 2011-2021. Rate of highly educated persons increased from 4.2 % in 2011 to 21.6 % in 2021, which is very positive trend. Another important visible result is the decrease of outmigration. For example, in 2011, the migration index was +126.1 %, while in 2022, the migration index was +163.0 %. This trend indicates that the rate of immigration to Municipality of Orebić increased in last census period, while parallelly the rate of outmigration decreased.

2.3.1 Strength and weak points of the strategies

Strengths points: The baby bonuses and kindergarten support directly address the financial burdens faced by young families, making it more affordable to raise children in the municipality. This helps improve quality of life and makes Orebić an attractive place for young families to settle or return to after their studies. Moreover, the financial support for housing and newly married couples further incentivizes the establishment of long-term roots in the community, addressing a key challenge in preventing outmigration. The transportation assistance for students studying outside the region ensures that they maintain strong ties with their community, reducing the likelihood that they will permanently relocate elsewhere.

Weak points: Financial incentives like baby bonuses and housing support may work well initially, but they can become financially burdensome for the municipality if the demand for such incentives grows. Additionally, while the migration index shows a positive trend, it is unclear whether the increase in immigration is due to permanent relocation or temporary migration patterns. The strategies may not be fully addressing the underlying causes of outmigration, such as economic opportunities and employment stability, which could affect the long-term retention of residents. Moreover, the emphasis on financial support may not be enough to fully reverse outmigration or attract new residents if broader



infrastructure and employment opportunities are not sufficiently developed. Without addressing these areas, the demographic measures could face limitations in sustaining population growth and retaining educated individuals in the future.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The comprehensive strategies implemented by regions and municipalities involved, reflect a concerted effort to tackle the challenges of depopulation and outward migration through tailored, place-based interventions. Each area has adopted distinct measures, rooted in local needs and regional opportunities, to create sustainable socio-economic conditions and reverse negative migration trends.

Although some strategies are still in their early stages, initial results indicate that these strategies are having a meaningful impact on contrasting depopulation and promoting socio-economic development.

In Molise, a strong focus on enhancing health services and promoting cultural regeneration has resulted in measurable improvements in community healthcare access and the revitalization of local cultural assets. However, the long-term outcomes of these interventions are still to be fully realized as many of the strategies are ongoing.

In Puglia, strategies aim to address brain drain and youth unemployment, respectively. Strategies supporting entrepreneurship, such as "Stay in the South" and "New Enterprises initiatives -NIDI," have shown significant success, especially in creating jobs and fostering female entrepreneurship. The region's strategies not only attract talent but also foster an environment conducive to innovation and collaboration between public and private sectors. The positive economic impact, job creation, and business funding figures indicate the strategy's effectiveness in combating outmigration.

In Croatia, a comprehensive demographic strategy has been successful in retaining and attracting families. This is reflected in the sharp rise in the proportion of highly educated individuals and a reduction in outward migration. The data points to a steady growth in the municipality's population due to both immigration and local retention initiatives.

The common trend is the emphasis on supporting young people, families, providing financial incentives, and improving essential services like education, healthcare, and housing. However, addressing challenges such as local job creation, administrative efficiency, and sustainable resource allocation will be crucial to ensure the long-term success of these strategies.

To ensure lasting success, ongoing monitoring and adjustments are essential. By learning from each other's experiences, the areas involved in M.A.R.I.O project are well-positioned to enhance their anti-outmigration measures and build more resilient communities for the future.



4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of current strategies implemented in the municipalities involved in the M.A.R.I.O project, several recommendations can be drawn to further improve the efforts to combat depopulation and outward migration. These recommendations focus on addressing key challenges and leveraging the strengths of existing initiatives to foster sustainable socio-economic development in internal areas.

1. Develop Tailored Local Measures

Context-Specific Approaches: Each municipality should implement measures that are specifically tailored to its unique needs, population dynamics, and economic conditions. Relying solely on national or regional programs might not address the specific challenges faced by individual municipalities. Local authorities should work closely with community members to identify priority areas such as housing, employment, and social services.

Flexible Strategies: Introduce adaptive measures that can evolve based on changing local needs and emerging challenges. This would ensure that policies remain effective over the long term.

2. Strengthen Public-Private Partnerships

Collaboration Across Sectors: Encouraging collaboration between the public sector, private enterprises, educational institutions, and local NGOs can help drive innovation and create employment opportunities. Public-private partnerships can play a significant role in fostering entrepreneurship and providing necessary support systems for startups and small businesses.

Investment in Innovation Hubs: Municipalities should explore the creation of innovation hubs or business incubators that leverage local talent and resources, encouraging entrepreneurship and the development of new businesses, especially those that align with the region's cultural and economic strengths.

3. Create Sustainable Job Opportunities

Diversify Local Economies: Municipalities should focus on diversifying their economic base to reduce dependency on a single sector. Tourism and agriculture can be supported by developing complementary industries such as tech services, cultural industries, and eco-tourism. Sustainable job opportunities should be the focal point of these efforts to create lasting economic stability.

Skills Training Programs: Introduce vocational and skills training programs that align with the future job market needs, especially in digital technology, green industries, and healthcare services.

By adopting these recommendations, municipalities can enhance their efforts to combat depopulation, retain residents, and foster sustainable development. Continued collaboration between local, regional, and national stakeholders will be essential in ensuring the long-term success of these strategies.

