ASYMMETRIC GLOBALIZATION
AND NATIVE INTERNAL MOBILITY.
THE CASE OF THE ITALIAN
MEZZOGIORNO

1. Introduction

In recent years, studies and economic reports from the main Italian research institutions – such as, inter alia, Bank of Italy and Svimez\(^1\) – have drawn attention to migration flows which are coming both from abroad to Italy and, internally, from native Italians to different regions of the country. At the same time, the reports have raised the alarm over the widening economic gap between the Italian Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy) and the rest of the country.

The purpose of this article is to provide an interpretative framework in which the nexus between the intensification of internal migration flows and the growing economic distance that separates the Mezzogiorno from Central and Northern Italy can be discerned by examining the processes of international economic integration and their impact on labour markets. As will be shown, globalization has had regionally differentiated effects on Italy’s productive system and, therefore, on its labour market. Specifically, the

\(^1\) Association for industrial development in the Italian Mezzogiorno.
process of internationalization which has occurred over the past few decades has stimulated an upgrading in the skill composition of employment in Northern and Central Italy compared to the Mezzogiorno. This asymmetric impact of globalization can be interpreted as one of the main causes responsible for the re-emergence of internal migration flows from the Mezzogiorno to Central and Northern Italy in recent years.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a descriptive overview of the macroeconomic performance of the Mezzogiorno compared to the other areas of the country. Section 3 focuses on some characteristics of foreign immigration in Italy and explores the evolution of the internal mobility of native Italians from the Mezzogiorno to Central and Northern Italy over the last two decades. Section 4 looks at the factor content of trade flows calculated at the regional level in order to provide evidence of the different position of the Mezzogiorno in the international division of labour with respect to the Centre-North. Section 5 offers concluding remarks and suggestions in terms of policy recommendations.

2. Macroeconomic overview

The last two reports of Svimez (2009 and 2010) have offered a not particularly encouraging image of the Mezzogiorno economy, as shown by macroeconomic performance

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2 It is opportune to refer to both reports to make a comparison between data reported in 2008, that only partially capture the effects of the recession triggered by the U.S. financial crisis in September 2008, and data for 2009 that fully capture such effects.