



Motivation “Ezio Tarantelli” Prize 2025

“Migration, Social Change, and the Early Decline in the United States Fertility”

Stefania Marcassa

The AIEL Executive Board has unanimously decided to award the Ezio Tarantelli Annual Prize to Stefania Marcassa for her paper “Migration, Social Change, and the Early Decline in the United States Fertility”, presented at the 2024 Conference.

Marcassa’s paper investigates the demographic transition in 19th-century United States, focusing on the role of internal migration in shaping the early decline in fertility. Using newly constructed county-level data and an instrumental-variables strategy based on land grants to war veterans, the paper provides compelling evidence that migration toward the western frontier contributed significantly to fertility reduction. Outward migration disrupted intergenerational family structures and, in the absence of remittance technologies, encouraged parents to rely more on precautionary savings, thereby reinforcing the emergence of smaller family norms.

The study combines rich historical census data with an innovative identification design, producing robust results on how demographic behavior interacts with migration patterns, social norms, and financial development. Its contribution goes beyond the historical context, offering new insights into the mechanisms that connect mobility, family structures, and demographic change.

The Prize Committee has unanimously concluded that Marcassa’s paper deserves the Tarantelli Prize for its originality, rigorous empirical approach, and its contribution to understanding how migration and social change can trigger profound demographic transformations.