



MIGRANTS REFUGEES

Migration Profile

ITALY

A. Executive Summary

Stretching into the Mediterranean sea, as a bridge between Europe and Africa, Italy has always been a land of migration, due to its peculiar geographical position. In the last decades, it experienced strong immigration and emigration flows, resulting in more than 6 million foreigners living in the country and about 5.5 million Italians living abroad. Romanians, with more than 1 million residents, represent the largest immigrant community, followed by Albanians, while Moroccans are the main group of non-European residents, followed by the Chinese. Most of the immigrants are female, however recent flows see the arrival of more male individuals, mostly coming from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

In addition, thousands of irregular migrants and refugees have been landing on Italian shores, or are rescued in the Sicily Channel. They come mainly from Tunisia, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sudan and Eritrea, and about 15% of them are unaccompanied minors.

Immigrants and refugees, especially the younger ones or females, and the irregulars in particular, have higher chances to suffer from poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. Irregular migrants are at high risk to be subject to trafficking and exploitation: unemployed males in forced labour, while women and children, especially Nigerian, in sexual exploitation. Roma children are also employed in street begging and forced to do little crimes.

To address these issues the Italian legislative system has incorporated many European directives and most of the international conventions related to these matters.

The Catholic Church, along with several international and social organizations, provide for migrants many services, such as accommodation, legal assistance, pastoral, medical and psychological care, focusing particularly on integration.

Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Officially proclaimed a Parliamentary Republic in 1946, Italy (302,068 km²)¹ stretches from the Alps to the Mediterranean Sea in front of the African shores, and consists mainly of a Peninsula and many islands, and the larger ones are Sicily and Sardinia.

A relevant percentage of its 59,257,566 people² (Jan. 2021 est.) is Catholic, between 70 and 80%, Orthodox about 3 or 4%, Muslim 3.7%, and unaffiliated about 13% of the total population.^{3 4}

Despite strong regional cultural differences, Italians are ethnically rather homogeneous, with small clusters of German, French, Slovenian and Ladini descent in the Northern border regions, Greek and Albanian in the South-East, and a widespread Roma community. The Italian Republic acknowledges twelve language minorities, accounting for less than 4% of the entire population.⁵

Despite being at the forefront of the EU economic and political unification, and a G8 country, Italy is still experiencing a sluggish financial growth, only 0.3% in 2019 and -8.9% in 2020.⁶ In addition there is a high percentage (around 11%) of young and female unemployment, with a poverty rate of 6.4% and a decrease in resident population (0.7%), due to a low birth rate.⁷ Financial disparities between the wealthier North and the South of Italy remain relevant, as does the presence of criminal organizations throughout the peninsula, especially where the wide regional differences in poverty and social exclusion are among the biggest registered across Europe.⁸

II. International and Internal Migrants

At the beginning of 2021, regular foreign residents were 5,013,215⁹ of whom 3,373,876 were from non-European countries.¹⁰ Including irregular and naturalized, however, as of mid 2020 UNDESA estimated about 6,387,000 migrants living in Italy, making up about 10% of the whole population.¹¹

Their main countries of origin are Romania 16%, Albania 7.6%, Morocco 7.1%, Ukraine 4% and China 3.7%.¹² However, these consolidated older flows have decreased in recent years.¹³

Among migrants coming from Western Europe there is a higher female percentage (60% Romanians and 78% Ukrainians), employed especially as domestic workers. Irregular migrants, in particular from Africa and Asia, are mostly male. Older communities, such as the Albanian, Moroccan and Chinese ones, are more balanced, due to reunifications and family migration. In 2020, most foreigners residing in Italy were women (53.6%).¹⁴

Regarding recent flows of non-EU citizens, in 2020 about 106,500 residence permits were issued compared to the 177,254 allotted in 2019 and the 242,009 in 2018. Most of them were granted to migrants from Asia 32.2%, Africa 29.1% and Central and Eastern Europe 22.5%. Albania 12.4%, Morocco 9.6%, Pakistan 7.4% and Bangladesh 6.1% were their main countries of origin.¹⁵ This time, the immigration trends attested that women were less represented (48.6%), and about 35.7% of newcomers were less than 18 years old.¹⁶

About 63% of all permits are long-term, allowing people to stay for more than 2 years, mainly for family-related reasons (48.6%), followed by work permits (41.6%).¹⁷

Generally speaking immigrants are mostly Christian, 56.7% (of whom 58% are Orthodox and less than one third Catholic), while Muslims, 27.1%, are slightly decreasing. 2.8% are Buddhist, 2% Hinduist, and 2.4% follow other religions, while atheists and agnostics represent 9%.¹⁸

Irregular border crossing (IBC) plunged between 2018 and 2020, mostly due to government restrictions, but is now increasing again. They were 119,310 in 2017, barely a fifth, 23,370 in 2018 and even less, 11,471 in 2019. In 2020, however, registered landings were 34,154, and as of October 2021 there were already 53,275 new arrivals.¹⁹ Moreover, about 4,100 irregulars crossed the border from Slovenia.²⁰ Unaccompanied minors (age 0-17) represent a stable portion of newcomers, just about 15% throughout the years. In the last four years, among the different nationalities declared

on arrival, Tunisian, Nigerian, Bangladeshi, Ivorian, Guinean, Sudanese and Eritrean have been the most common ones.²¹

According to IOM surveys in 2019²² and 2020²³, economic reasons along with persecution and violence seem to be among the most attested push factors, always appearing as the respondents' first two choices

Over 58% of immigrants live in the Northern Italian regions, especially Lombardy (22.8%), followed by the Southern region of Lazio (12.5%), of whom 80% live in Rome, and Emilia Romagna, in the Po valley, with 10.7%.²⁴

Immigrants, especially irregulars, often low-skilled or from non-EU countries, are more likely to be precarious workers, earning less than Italians, and have a higher unemployment rate (13% against 8.7%)²⁵ and a higher proportion of NEET, in particular among the youth and women.²⁶ More than one in four foreign families is in absolute poverty, compared to 6% of Italian families.²⁷ Ethnic children are particularly at risk of poverty or social exclusion. They are also more likely to fall back on school education. On average 30% of foreigner students repeat at least a year of school, and above 56% of them are in high school.²⁸ Migrants and ethnic minorities are the most affected by the low efficiency of public employment services, as well as by poor welfare and public housing services. Language and cultural barriers add on to the list of hurdles migrants suffer the most.²⁹ Despite the pandemic, however, the number of foreign entrepreneurs continues to rise. Foreign run businesses represented about 12% of total enterprises in 2020, mainly in wholesale and retail (42.2%), and in the construction sector (21.7%).³⁰

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

A constant flow of emigrants has been registered as Italians Resident Abroad (AIRE). As a matter of fact, over the last 15 years the mobility of Italians abroad has increased by over 82%, from around 3 million in 2006 to more than 5.6 million regularly registered in 2020, a trend that has increased despite the pandemic outbreak. In 2020, 109,528 Italians left, particularly from Lombardy 17.7%, Veneto 11.3%, Sicily 9.6%, Lazio and Emilia Romagna 8% each, towards 186 countries, mainly UK 30.4%, Germany 12.8%, France 9.6%, and Brazil 6.5%.³¹

Among those who left, 35.9% are married and 48% are female, with the gender difference becoming increasingly narrower. Most of them leave unmarried, because they are mainly young: 37.3% are less than 35 years old, and a high percentage amounting to 23.3% is between the age 35 and 49.³²

Italy keeps on losing youngest and most vital strengths, skills and competences.³³ About 53% of emigrants hold a secondary education diploma or higher.³⁴

Many of those who migrate are available to work in less rewarding positions, as they know that once in a new country they will be able to enhance their status. It is interesting to note that, if the Italian demographic trend is lagging behind, the birth rate of Italians abroad is growing exponentially (+150% according to the historical data of Fondazione Migrantes).³⁵

IV. Forced Migration (internally displaced, asylum seekers, refugees, and climate-displaced people)

Stretching into the Central Mediterranean sea, Italy is a natural corridor to enter Europe, receiving yearly thousands of refugees and irregular migrants from Africa and Asia. Many of them are not planning to stay in Italy, aiming instead at reaching other European countries.³⁶ Therefore, as soon as they can, they try to irregularly cross the border getting into France, Switzerland and Austria.

The Central Mediterranean route has been the most used by irregulars, coming from Libya, Tunisia and Algeria towards Sicily and the Italian islands, mainly Lampedusa,. In 2020 arrivals from Tunisia showed the highest increase, mostly Tunisians (87%), followed by Ivorians and Guineans.³⁷ Secondary but relevant routes are the Balcan route, arriving by land from Greece and Turkey, and the East Mediterranean route, from Egypt, Greece and Turkey, to the Apulia shores, often using stolen boats.³⁸ Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are commonly following this route.

In 2020 the number of refugees in the country dropped from about 207,000 in 2019 to 128,000, but the number of asylum seekers rose from 47,000 to 53,900. As of June 2021, UNHCR reported 134,500 refugees and 53,686 asylum seekers.³⁹ In the first half of 2021, Italy received about 20,600 new asylum requests, doubling the same period in 2020; however just about 57% of them were rejected.⁴⁰ As of February 2021, UNHCR also estimated the arrival of 3,000 to 15,000 stateless people, mostly Roma from the former Yugoslavia, in the country.⁴¹

Irregular entries peaked in 2016, when 181,436 people landed in Italy; but the number of arrivals dropped in 2018 and 2019. In 2020 it increased again, reaching 34,154 individuals and already 53,275 in October 2021.⁴² In the last five years the majority came from Nigeria, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Eritrea, with a growing portion of Tunisians, Algerians and Pakistanis.⁴³

Cross-checking results of several surveys conducted by IOM^{44,45} and UNDP,⁴⁶ economic reasons appear to be the main driving factor for irregular migration, followed by reaching friends or relatives, especially for women, and fleeing violence. Irregular migrants are more likely to be male, single and young, coming from middle class families and having an average level of education and often already had an occupation in their own country.⁴⁷ Most of them travel alone, supported by family or friends.⁴⁸

Rescued or apprehended irregular migrants are transferred to one of the four currently active *hotspots* in the Italian territory, for medical examination and pre-identification, receiving first assistance and information regarding their status, immigration and asylum legislation. Afterwards, they are moved to the first-level reception facilities, dislocated in the country, where they are able to stay while it is still pending the definition of their application for international protection. Those who decide not to apply for it, or do not meet the requirements, are held in Repatriation Centers (CPR), waiting for repatriation.⁴⁹ Those who apply for asylum are hosted by the Integrated Reception System (SAI), a widespread network of diffused hospitality, managed by local institutions in partnership with social organizations.⁵⁰ As of April 2021, there were about 76,000 irregular migrants and refugees hosted in Reception Centers across Italy.⁵¹

Italy experiences frequent natural calamities, including earthquakes, floods, heat and cold waves, which have become more frequent in the last decade, affecting both locals and migrants.

Sometimes they result in a high number of internally displaced people (IDPs), as it occurred after the 2009, 2012 and 2016 earthquakes, but usually their number is rather low.⁵²

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Estimated victims of sex trafficking in Italy are tens of thousand, and between 5% to 8% of them are children. About 180,000 seasonal and migrant workers are at risk of forced labour, as well as approximately 517,000 irregular migrants residing in Italy may be at risk for trafficking. In addition, authorities estimated that in 2019 up to 30% of about 31,000 asylum applicants were at risk of sex trafficking or forced labour, while waiting for a final decision on their applications.⁵³

Victims of trafficking often have the same nationality as their abusers.⁵⁴ Nigerians, followed by Romanians, Italians and Albanians are the most common traffickers. Definitely less frequent, but not negligible are the allegations against Bulgarians, Ghanaians, Serbian-Montenegrins, Pakistanis, Moroccans, Bangladeshis and Chinese.⁵⁵ Most victims come from Nigeria and other African countries, China, Romania, and other Eastern European countries, including ethnic Roma.⁵⁶

Sex trafficking victims are mainly Nigerian, and though recently their number seems to have decreased, Nigerian women and unaccompanied children remain extremely vulnerable to trafficking.⁵⁷ Nigerian trafficking networks have expanded across Italy and show a well experienced operational system, by avoiding any confrontation with other criminal organizations. They subject victims through debt-based coercion, physical treats, often involving their families back home, and voodoo rituals.⁵⁸ Among Nigerian traffickers, women, often former victims, play an active role as protectors (or pimps) in both the recruitment and exploitation of their victims.⁵⁹

Unaccompanied migrant children, together with ethnic Roma, are peculiarly vulnerable and at risk for trafficking. They are exploited in child sex trafficking, forced labour, little crimes or street begging.⁶⁰

Victims of trafficking face countless problems starting from dire living and working conditions, poor physical and psychological health and social exclusion. The bulk of administrative procedures to obtain residence permits together with the difficulty to obtain a work contract renewed can push migrants towards irregular channels and increase their vulnerability to exploitation. The phenomenon of illegal gangmaster trade (*Caporalato*) involves hundreds of thousands of irregular and unemployed migrants, who are recruited by intermediaries (*caporali*), often connected with criminal organizations, to work underpaid and in extremely severe conditions⁶¹, mainly in agriculture, some in construction or other sectors.⁶²

Isolation and discrimination, as well as lack of integration services, especially in the South, and for women with children in particular, make it difficult for victims to recover and return to a normal life.⁶³

The overlap of refugees' reception and trafficking victims' care systems makes it harder to properly care for the latter, who need additional protection compared to refugees. The COVID19 crisis worsened victims' vulnerabilities, increasing their isolation and therefore making their identification by officials and NGOs more difficult.⁶⁴

VI. National Legal Framework

The primary source of law, concerning immigration and asylum, is art. 10 of the Italian Constitution, stating that laws regarding foreigners must conform to international law and the right of asylum must be granted to whomever, even if in his home country the actual exercise of the democratic freedoms as guaranteed by the Italian constitution is denied, also preventing extradition for a political offence.⁶⁵

The *Consolidated Act on Immigration* (Decree-Law 286/1998) is the main law on immigration, addressing matters such as the release of residence permits and visa, expulsions and rights, duties and protection of immigrants.⁶⁶ Immigration quotas for non-European workers are defined each year by the Government through specific decrees (Decreto Flussi).⁶⁷ The legal framework was recently modified by Decree-Law 113/2018 (Decreto Sicurezza) and again by Decree-Law 130/2020, introducing several amendments to the regulation of both immigration and the right to asylum.

Since 2005, several Decrees have been issued implementing the Directives of the European Union on international protection.⁶⁸ The more recent integrations of EU Directives on international protection were the Decree-Law 24/2014, about prevention and repression of trafficking in persons and protection of the victims, implementing the EU Directive 2011/36,⁶⁹ and the Decree-Law 142/2015, implementing the EU Directive 2013/33⁷⁰ on standards for the reception of asylum applicants and the EU Directive 2013/32⁷¹ on common procedures for the recognition and revocation of the status of international protection. The latter, in particular, establishes that the certificate of presentation of the asylum request constitutes a temporary residence permit, renewable until a decision is made on the application. Finally, Decree-Law 46/2017 introduced a comprehensive regulation concerning the protection and treatment of unaccompanied minors, focused on the best interest of the child. Moreover, articles from 600 to 602 of the Penal Code address human trafficking and several related crimes, such as child forced begging and organ trafficking.

Italy is a State Party in almost all of the UN Human Rights treaties, except for the 1990 *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*. It also signed all of the Fundamental and Governmental Conventions promoted by the International Labour Organization (ILO).⁷² Being part of the European Union, it is subjected to communitarian policies and regulations, such as the Dublin III (Regulation 604/2013).⁷³ Moreover, it is a member of the Schengen Agreement.⁷⁴

VII. Main Actors

The State

Handling migration and asylum matters pertains to institutional cooperation and multilevel governance. The Presidency of the Council of Ministries deals with migration and integration policies, while the Ministry of the Interior enforces migration laws.

The Department of Public Safety, with its Central Directorate for Immigration and Border Police, is specifically responsible for all activities connected to public order and safety, such as checking and tackling irregular migration, border control, implementation of expulsions, coordination of enforcement actions at sea, coordination of police immigration offices, release or renewal of

permits of stay. Other Ministries relevant in the migration and asylum policy are: the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy coordinating integration efforts, such as access to labour market and social services, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, responsible for issuing visas to foreign workers and travelers.

The Department of Equal Opportunities, connected to the Presidency of the Council of Ministries, is in charge of developing policies and promoting actions to counteract human trafficking.⁷⁵

International Organizations

Among many UN agencies working in Italy, UNHCR, IOM and ILO are particularly involved in supporting the reception and protection programs on behalf of refugees and migrants. FRONTEX is the EU agency responsible to oversee European borders and to counteract human smuggling and trafficking, as well as to pursue repatriations and rescues. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) is the EU agency trying to enhance cooperation among member states on asylum, and improve the implementation of the Common European Asylum System. In addition, the European Commission develops strategies to eliminate human trafficking and coordinates programmes involving other EU Agencies.

The Catholic Church

The Italian Bishops Conference (CEI) is at the forefront in addressing migrant and refugee issues, as well as fighting human trafficking. It includes 227 Dioceses and 25,573 parishes staffed by more than 44,000 priests and deacons.⁷⁶ CEI has also an Episcopal Commission for Migration and several other Commissions dealing with matters concerning immigration, trafficking in persons and displaced people. Fondazione Migrantes and Caritas Italiana are the most prominent actors in this area.

Fondazione Migrantes was established by CEI (when?), to coordinate and support local Churches, in the evangelization and pastoral care of Italian and foreign migrants. Its main goal is to promote, in Christian communities, activities to welcome them and to stimulate in society the understanding and enhancement of their identity, thus fostering a climate of peaceful coexistence. This is achieved through research, training and communication programs on migration, paying attention to the protection of the rights of migrants and the promotion of a responsible citizenship.

Caritas Italiana is CEI operative branch and among the main actors carrying out support and information activities on migration, thanks to its presence in 220 Italian dioceses. In 2019 Caritas welcomed and assisted 21,000 migrants. Being in partnership with Caritas Europe and Caritas Internationalis, it joins and cooperates with other organizations in several programs: the Christian Organization Against Trafficking Network (COAT-NET), the Italian Coordination of Care Communities (CNCA), *Human Corridors* for refugee projects and, together with the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) and Consorzio Communitas, the *SHARE* programme for community sponsorships of refugee resettlement.

Talitha Kum is an International Network of Consecrated Life Against Trafficking in Persons, funded by the Italian Union of Superiors General (UISG), to coordinate the anti-trafficking efforts of Religious Sisters, facilitating networking, communication and formation, in order to eradicate human trafficking through joint initiatives focused on the prevention, protection, social

reintegration and rehabilitation of survivors and advocacy, and to promote actions that will affect the systemic causes.

The Sant'Egidio Community, in collaboration with CEI and the Italian Protestant Churches, sponsors *Humanitarian Corridors* towards Italy. Sant'Egidio runs schools of Italian language and culture, aiming at fostering migrants' integration. It also runs soup kitchens and welcoming centers throughout Italy, where services provided to migrants and people in need include information and advising, help with bureaucratic procedures, food and clothes distribution and healthcare. To address poor housing issues and provide accommodation, the Community created an extended hospitality network, including family houses, sheltered apartments and night centers.

The Jesuit Refugees Services (JRS) in Italy, through its *Astalli Center*, in 2019 served more than 30,000 people, providing a wide range of services to refugees and asylum seekers including job orientation, daily hot meals, medical services, legal support, language classes and accommodation. Additionally, JRS has launched the projects "*Windows - Stories of Refugees*" and "*Meetings*", giving thousands of students the opportunity to hear direct testimonies of men and women who have lived the experience of exile or belong to religions other than Catholicism.

Having the care of migrants and refugees as their main mission, the Scalabrinian Family reaches out to them with several projects and initiatives. The Scalabrinian Agency for Cooperation and Development (ASCS) is the operational organization of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo (Scalabrinians) and is part of the Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN), a network encompassing and coordinating the various Scalabrinian entities in Italy and in the world. ASCS provides first aid to migrants and refugees, along with housing, training and job creation, psychological and social support, healthcare and legal assistance, mainly through its centers and the programs, like *Humilitas* in support of the Latino community in Rome, *Casa Scalabrini 634* also in Rome, *Via Scalabrini 3* in the city of Bassano del Grappa, and other programs in Rome, Brescia and Reggio Calabria. Scalabrinian *welcoming centers* and the *Casas del Migrante* network provide migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people services and advocacy programs to facilitate their integration in Italy and their reintegration when they return to their own countries. The Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters run a Migrant Center in Piacenza. The Scalabrinian Secular Missionaries, another female order, instead runs three *International Scalabrini Centers*, in Rome, Milan and Agrigento, Sicily. They support the training programs already taking place in different local parishes and foster awareness on issues related to migration and coexistence among people of different languages, cultures and religions.

In 2019 the Salesians supported more than 3,000 migrants through their information and care services. Any specific locations???

The Pope John XXIII Community Association (APG23) runs 47 reception houses, and the *Miriam* project to counteract gender violence and human trafficking, focusing primarily on migrant women.

Since 2008 the doctors and rescuers of the Order of Malta Italian Relief Corps (CISOM) have been present on Italian vessels operating in the Mediterranean Sea, assisting some 200,000 migrants. The Italian National Association of the Order of Malta and local groups of CISOM run several initiatives involving migrants and persons in need, especially homeless and poor families, such as soup kitchens, showers, free medical services, psychological assistance and food and clothes

distribution. Being part of the Italian Voluntary Civil Protection System, it collaborates with the Civil Protection Department providing help and support in every national emergency.

Other Organizations

Several other NGOs and social organizations work on behalf of migrants, carrying out rescue operations in the Mediterranean sea, providing accommodation, medical care and integration services. Hundreds of associations and local institutions run accommodation and integration projects within the network Rete SAI (Integration and Accommodation System). The Italian Coordination of Care Communities (CNCA) is a Federation of about 250 organisations, including social cooperatives, support centers, and other stakeholders, active in all fields of disadvantage and marginalisation. The International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe (IMISCOE) and the International Metropolis Project are among the main research networks focusing on migrations, migrants' integration and related issues.

The European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) is a network of 105 NGOs across 39 European countries, protecting and promoting the rights of refugees, asylum-seekers and other forcibly displaced persons in Europe. Among its members in Italy is the Italian Council for Refugees (CIR).

Humanitarian corridors are the result of a Memorandum of Understanding among different partners: the Sant'Egidio Community, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy, the Waldensian Board and the Italian Government. Organizations provide volunteers on site, who have direct contact with refugees in specific countries. A list of potential beneficiaries is forwarded to the Italian authorities that will issue humanitarian visas, valid only for the Italian country. Once they safely arrive in Italy, refugees can apply for asylum.

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Endnotes

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