



CARITAS E MIGRANTES

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Liberi di scegliere se
migrare o restare

[Summary \(EN\)](#)



International context

Movement across borders is becoming increasingly complicated, especially as war returns to Europe.

In 2021, there were an estimated **281 million international** migrants, or **3.6% of the global population** (compared to 272 million in 2019). Nearly two-thirds moved for **reasons related to work**. This phenomenon is seen in Europe, where 2021 saw a steep rise in the number of work-related residence permits issued, from 39% of all permits issued in 2020 to 45% in 2021. Overall, from a population of 447 million in the European Union about **23.7 million are citizens of non-EU countries (5.3%)**. In 2021, 2.95 million first-time residence permits were issued (compared to 2.3 million in 2020), almost as many in pre-Covid-19 levels. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine also created another wave of forced migration in Europe, raising the **total number of refugees and displaced persons in Europe to 108.4 million (40% of which are minors)**. By the end of May 2023, 8.3 million Ukrainians had fled into Europe, of which just more than 5 million were given temporary protection – a form of legal status that had not been used since the Balkan Wars. Nearly one third of Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection status received it in Poland (1.6 million, or 31% of the total). **175,000 Ukrainian refugees are in Italy** and many have been welcomed through a widespread reception system and due to the network of other Ukrainians already in the country. In fact, Ukrainians are the fourth largest non-EU community in Italy, with about 225,000 legal residents, 79% of which are women. The war in Ukraine has also had an impact on the **total number of internally displaced persons due to conflict worldwide: 28.3 million**, the highest number recorded in the last 10 years, of which Ukrainians represent 60%. For this reason, the perspectives of migrants' countries of origin must also be taken in consideration, whether from Senegal, Bangladesh, Venezuela or Guinea-Bissau.

Context in Italy

Migrants from new places, but aging and falling birth-rates will determine the future.

As of January 1, 2023, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) estimated there are **5,050,257 foreign citizens living in Italy**, a slight increase from the final data from the year prior (5,030,716). Geographically, foreign citizens continue to reside predominantly in **northern Italy** (59.1% of all foreign citizens in Italy): 34.3% live in the northwestern regions and 24.8% in the northeastern regions; followed by central Italy (24.5%), the south (11.7%) and the islands (4.6%). **Lombardy** is the most attractive region for foreign nationals, as it alone accounts for 23.1% of the foreign population residing in Italy; behind it is Latium (12.2%), followed by Emilia-Romagna (10.9%), Veneto (9.8%) and Piedmont (8.2%). In terms of nationalities, most of the foreign citizens in Italy are **Romanian**, who account for one in five foreign citizens in the country, while **Moroccan and Albanian** citizens represent the second and third largest groups of foreign citizens in Italy (8.4% and 8.3% respectively). A shift is seen toward greater numbers of people from **Asian countries** (particularly southeastern Asia) in Italy versus those from African countries – such as Tunisia, Senegal, Nigeria – which are no longer among the top ten countries of origin for foreign residents in Italy. Among those with Asian origins, the number of foreign residents from countries that had a historically strong presence in Italy (China and the Philippines, for example) is decreasing, while those that have arrived in Italy more recently (such as from **Bangladesh and Pakistan**) are strengthening their migration paths into Italy. **Births of foreign citizens in Italy decreased by 28.7% from 2012 to 2021, from nearly 80,000 to less than 57,000**. After peaks of growth recorded in the first decade of the 2000s (+45.2% between 2003 and 2004, +22.3% between 1999 and 2000), a decade has passed with the birthrate of foreign citizens in Italy steadily and sharply decreasing (-5% in the last two years). The largest nationality groups of newborn foreign citizens in Italy are from Romania (19.4%), Morocco (13.3%) and Albania (11.8%). **Italian citizenship**, despite being acquired

by 1 million people in the last six years, has been in gradual decline, falling by 7.5% between 2020 and 2021 alone. One in five new naturalized citizenships are acquired by Albanians, followed by Moroccans. Bangladeshi citizens are the third largest group of people receiving naturalized citizenship, representing 4.7% of total citizenship acquisitions while Indian and Pakistani citizens are the fourth and fifth largest groups respectively, showing new trends that are often overlooked.

Employment: The occupational dynamics of foreign workers

The latest employment market trends in Italy (Q1 2023) show a recovery phase that has been underway for the last 8 quarters. Between 2021 and 2022, overall employment grew by 2.4% and there have been decreases in both the unemployment rate (-14.3%) and inactivity rate (-3.6%). In the same period, **for non-EU citizens in Italy the employment rate was slightly lower than average (59.2% vs. 60.1%)**, the rate of people in the workforce increased slightly (0.6%) and the unemployment rate followed the same rate of decline. The most pronounced employment increase was in the tourism and food services sectors (+16.8% overall, and +35.7% for non-EU workers) and in the construction industry (+8.4% overall, +13.8% for non-EU workers). Yet the agricultural sector had the greatest bearing on foreign workers in 2022 (accounting for 39.2% of total foreign workers), followed by construction (30.1% of the total) and the industrial sector (22.1%). As for the **types of contracts** they have, 87% of foreign workers are employees while 12.9% are self-employed. The nationalities that experienced the largest employment increase between 2021 and 2022 were Albanian, Moroccan and Chinese (between +17.7% and +7.1%). Beyond the annual increase, some nationalities maintain a higher employment rate than average for non-EU workers (59.2%): Filipino, Peruvian, Chinese and Ukrainian workers all have employment rates around 65%; Moroccan, Nigerian and Pakistani citizens, on the other hand, have lower employment rates than the non-EU average. Among non-EU workers 75.2% are **blue-collar** workers (compared to 31.6% of Italians); only one in 10 works in an office and just 0.1% are managers. In terms of **education level**, the foreign labor force is on average less educated than native-born Italian workers with most only reaching middle school. College graduates make up only 10.6% of the total for foreign workers (compared to 25.8% for Italians). Contributing to this figure is the effect of over qualification – the gap between one's education and the job they hold. Among the main difficulties foreign workers report in finding a job in Italy are "poor knowledge of the Italian language," "discrimination due to foreign origin," "lack of residence permit or citizenship," and "lack of recognition for a qualification obtained abroad." The number of non-EU business owners in 2022, 390,511 or 12.8% of the total, decreased by about 3,000 or about -0.8% since 2021. Employment for Ukrainian nationals linked to a temporary protection permit amounted to 22,000, while a total of 113,169 Ukrainian nationals were employed in Italy, a +38.7% increase from 2021.

Poverty: foreign nationals are predominantly the beneficiaries of charitable listening centers

ISTAT estimates that **1.6 million foreign nationals live in a state of absolute poverty in Italy**, totaling more than **614,000 households**. Immigrant families make up about one-third of poor families in Italy, despite only representing 9% of families residing in Italy. The percentage of people without access to a decent living standard is five times higher among foreigners than among Italian families. Such a disadvantage, which has been reinforced since 2008 (when the global financial crisis struck), has become further solidified and has reached even more concerning levels following the COVID-19 pandemic. From one year to the next, the conditions for **unemployed** people worsened greatly.

Among the unemployed, nearly one in two people are in poverty; only one year ago only one in four unemployed people were poor. In addition to the precarious situations of those without employment are those who do have a job. The phenomenon of **in-work poverty**, now well known in Italy, has seen a strong resurgence in recent years among foreigners and non-foreigners alike. According to the latest data from ISTAT, **7% of those employed in Italy live in absolute poverty, a figure that rises to 13.3% for less-skilled workers**, such as blue-collar workers or contractors; and for foreign nationals in such occupations, the poverty rate jumps to 31.1% (for Italians it is 7.9%). A final, critical, element is related to children: **there are 1.4 million poor children in Italy** and one in four people in destitute poverty is a child. The data is truly shocking for the families of foreigners with minors, where the poverty rate reaches 36.2%, more than four times the average of Italian families with minors (8.3%). Data collected by volunteers and professionals confirms in 2022 a **continued material need** among people in poverty in line with previous years.

Education: stable rates of "foreign" students, including in universities, more and more of which are born in Italy

The total number of **students with non-Italian citizenship** in the 2021/2022 school year was **872,360**, an increase of just under 7,000 (+0.8%) from the previous year – which had seen a significant drop in the total number partly due to reasons related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The regions with the largest presence of these foreign students are **Lombardy** (222,364), Emilia-Romagna (106,280) and Veneto (96,856). **Most are from Europe**, totaling 384,333 or 44.1% of all foreign students in Italy. Among them, most students in Italian schools across age groups are from Romania and Albania. After Europe, students originating from Africa, Asia and the Americas are the most represented. Italian schools must reflect on how to incorporate the presence of students with foreign citizenship into their curriculums, particularly on the **outskirts of cities** where the plurality of different nationalities must not necessarily present problems but could be a dynamic contribution to the class. At the **university** level, the total number of **students with foreign citizenship enrolled in Italian universities in the 2021/2022 academic year amounted to 6%**, and the number of students who received high school diplomas abroad (international students) make up 3.4% of all students in Italian universities. In the last 10 years, the number of international students has grown by +65.5%, while the number of foreign students (university students with foreign citizenship that earned their high school diploma in Italy) rose by +67.5%.

Health: inequality in protection, especially among new mothers

Out of 6,687,015 hospital discharges recorded in 2021, 6,252,763 are related to Italian citizens and 426,740 to non-Italian citizens, accounting for 6.4% of the total. The most significant share of hospitalizations involved **complications related to pregnancy**, childbirth and the postpartum period (25.6%); followed by **respiratory illnesses** as a distant second (8.7%). The prevalence of new mothers aged 30 and older is evident among foreign nationals just as it is for Italians, although overall foreign mothers tend to be younger than new Italian mothers (29.2 years is the average age of foreign women having their first child, compared to 32.1 years for Italian women). While there remains a significant difference in the average number of children per woman (in 2021 the fertility rate for Italians was 1.18 and that of foreign nationals residing in Italy was 1.87), general changes in **the fertility rate for foreigners appear to be progressively conforming to the Italian context**, which

in many ways stifles birth rates. The abortion rate for foreign women shows a downward trend, decreasing from 17.2 per 1,000 women in 2014 to 12.0 per 1,000 women in 2020. Yet this rate is 2.4 times higher than that of Italians. In healthcare, **the number of foreign-born healthcare professionals in 2022 was 77,500**, 65% of whom did not have Italian citizenship. Among them, 22,000 are doctors, the majority of which graduated in Italy, while 38,000 are nurses, and the rest are composed of dentists, physical therapists, psychologists and pharmacists. Although they work in various contexts, foreign healthcare professionals cannot be hired on a permanent basis in the Italian national healthcare system. Not surprisingly, in the last 6 years, about 30% of foreign healthcare professionals have returned to their country of origin, particularly to Eastern European and Arab countries.

Crime and discrimination

Public debate pinning immigration and security against one another remain prevalent, creating a widespread climate of fear and intolerance against migrants. In 2022, the proportion of foreign nationals incarcerated in Italy largely remained in line with the previous year's figure: **of 56,196 incarcerated persons in Italy, 17,683 or 31.4% were foreign nationals**. Of these, **16,961 are men and 722 are women**. Incarcerated foreign nationals are decidedly young, with a large portion between 30 and 39. More than half (53%) of foreign nationals incarcerated in Italy are from Africa, totaling 9,510 of foreign incarcerated persons. Those from **northern Africa** make up the largest proportion of all Africans incarcerated in Italy, with **Morocco (3,577)** and **Tunisia (1,797)** accounting for 56% of all foreigners incarcerated in Italy. After Africa, most incarcerated foreign nationals in Italy come from Europe: 5,801, representing 32% of all incarcerated foreigners. In line with general figures, **property crimes (8,951)** and **personal crimes (7,609)** are the main reasons for detention of foreign incarcerated persons. This is followed by **drug offenses (5,811)** and **crimes against public administration (3,466)**. Next, the most frequently charged crimes against foreigners include immigration offenses (1,428). The crime of mafia association, on the other hand, while sixth in number of charges among Italian prisoners, still modestly affects foreigners (277). Compared to the previous year, however, there has been a **consistent increase in juvenile prison admissions for both Italians and foreign nationals**, although foreign juvenile prison admissions numerically outnumber Italians. In 2022 new prison entry data showed a total of 1,016 prison admissions, of which 496 were Italian and 520 were foreigners: a phenomenon, at least in part, related to youth gangs in Italy. Yet completely absent from public discourse is conversation about the victim status of those who, suffering conditions of fragility and precariousness particular to migrants, are also the **victims of crime**. Foreigners, for example, account for a significant portion of victims of property crimes. Specifically, in 2021, foreigners reported having been victims of theft (60,417 robberies, 11,789 pickpockets, and 1,455 "snatch thefts"), damages (11,199), as well as having been victims of fraud and computer fraud (16,431). This is followed, among crimes against their person, by complaints of malicious injury (10,471) and threats (7,633), as well as 967 complaints filed by foreign women for **sexual assault**. Being the victim of a crime is compounded by **various forms of discrimination** that foreigners are subjected to daily, which is sometimes even institutional: from accessing various social benefits to obtaining public housing, the range of discrimination is very broad and multifaceted.

Communication: the "emergency" narrative needs to change

Much has changed around the narrative surrounding mobility in Italy since the tragedy at Lampedusa in 2013. The wreckage of migrant ships that reached the beach at Steccato di Cutro on Italy's southern coast in February 2023 was met with more indifference than empathy than when an Italian island (Lampedusa) experienced a humanitarian disaster caused by an influx of migrants on its shores 10 years earlier. Italian news widely covered both incidents but did so differently in terms of intensity and duration: 61 new stories reported on the October 3, 2013, incident involving a surge of migrants on Lampedusa's shores, with coverage spanning at least 3 months. On the February 27, 2023, 37 news stories reported on the crisis at Cutro with coverage lasting just over 2 months. The differences in coverage cannot solely be measured in quantitative terms, but deeply involve the content of the coverage as well. The crisis at Lampedusa was primarily characterized through a human lens and highlighted humanitarian concerns, while the coverage at Cutro was more focused on matters of security – included in the broader discourse on arrivals by sea, the risks of crossing the Mediterranean and the responsibility of the governments in making rescues at sea. Yet the narrative principally revolved around security and international law. Though the aftermath from the invasion of Ukraine has given a greater voice to migrants in Italian news, not all migrants in Italy are given equal opportunity to express themselves. A comparison between the type of information reported on at Lampedusa and Cutro shows how the social and political climate in Italy has changed over the past decade and particularly how media attention on immigration has become increasingly alarmist.

Culture: the narrative of immigration is also shaped by cinema, but with little representation of women

Migrant culture is significant for understanding Italian society, as wide and varied as it is. Keeping the label "migrant" alongside "culture" also adds value to its production, giving it a space within the vast cultural offerings of Italy, both in terms of enriching the culture by fostering greater engagement with cultural diversity and by raising public awareness about the realities of migration in Italy. A separate conversation must be had about newer generations of Italians: their increasingly rich cultural output cannot be strictly categorized to migrant culture, except for when they consciously "use" cultural tools to make themselves bridges between migrant communities and larger society. As new generations are more integrated into Italian society than their foreign parents, their artistic work uses shows different sensibilities. Among them is the subject of language, which must be given attention as it gives form to the human experience and to the effective use of reason. If environmental ecology has become a pillar of modern politics, we must also consider how to care for the ecology of language. Due to its ability to shed a light on global migration crises that have also affected Europe, movies on migration have provoked unprecedented interest in the minds of politically and socially engaged filmmakers from international backgrounds. Yet in terms of equal opportunity, Italian cinema must further include the authoritative voice of women in order to produce a holistic image of migration with an equal representation of experiences.

Religious affiliation and the forced migration of Christians from the Middle East

Christians continue to strengthen their position as the absolute majority among foreign nationals residing in Italy: as of January 1, 2023, 53.5% of foreigners living in the country were Christian, compared to 53% as of January 1, 2022. Such an increase is largely attributable to the increase in Orthodox Christians, which at the start of 2023 alone accounted for 29.9% of migration into Italy (compared to 28.9% at the beginning of 2022). By contrast, the rate of Catholics fell to 16.8% of migrants at the beginning of 2023, down from 17.2% as of January 1, 2022. As for non-Christian groups, the rate of Muslims entering Italy increased to 29.8% as of January 1, 2023, from 29.5% at the start of the previous year. Counting the religious affiliation of minors of any age, as is done each year by assuming that their distribution follows the same proportions as adults of their same nationality, there are just over 1.5 million foreign Orthodox Christians estimated in Italy and a similar but slightly smaller number of Muslims, followed by 844,000 foreign Catholics. All other religious affiliations of foreigners in Italy follow at a significant distance: 156,000 Buddhists, 136,000 Evangelical Christians, 126,000 "other" Christians (not Orthodox, Catholic, Evangelical, nor Coptic), 104,000 Hindus, 85,000 Sikhs, 81,000 Coptic Christians, and 20,000 adherents of other religions. Among foreigners, 478,000 identify as atheist or agnostic, which would represent the fourth largest group of foreigners classified by religious affiliation. In the Middle East, wars, violence and persecution have been the main reasons for an exodus of Christians that has seen hundreds of thousands flee their homeland. Since 2003, political changes and the spread of extremist religious groups have strained relations between Muslims and Christians in the Middle East and have exposed Christians and other minority groups to extreme danger.