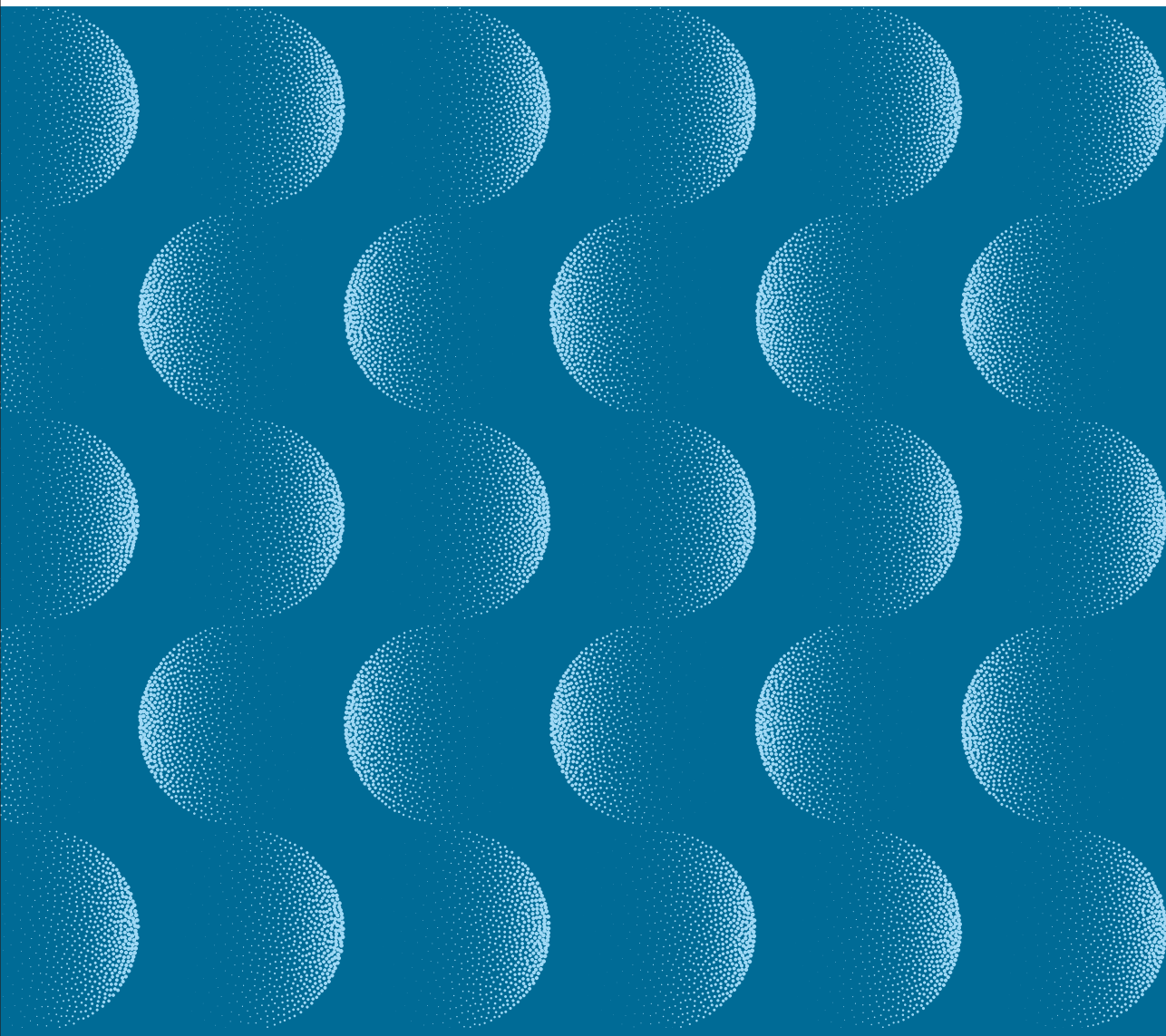
31st Italian Report on Migrations 2025



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31st Italian Report on Migrations 2025

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Table of contents

Part I

Flows, presence and citizenship

Chapter 1

The foreign population in Italy: numbers and trends

Gian Carlo Blangiardo

Several decades of migratory flows have led to a growing number of immigrants and their descendants, who have settled and grown up in Italy pursuing a life project that has culminated in the acquisition of Italian citizenship.

Consolidation of a more stable presence

Data updated to the most recent census (i.e., as of 1 January 2025) indicates that the number of foreign population with usual residence in Italy ("residents") increased by 117,000 compared to the previous year (ISTAT, 2025b). This data is increasingly approaching the 5.5 million resident threshold (i.e., 5,371,000) and a record proportion of the total population (from 8.9% to 9.1%).

Given the substantial stability of both irregular migrants (350,000) and regular non-residents (188,000), the increase in the number of foreigners present in Italy (+143,000) is mainly driven by the growth in the resident population and brings the total to just below the historical record of 6 million people (Table 1).

Table 1. Foreigners in Italy as of 1 January 2021–2025 by type of stay (in thousands)

Type of stay	1.1.2022	1.1.2023	1.1.2024	1.1.2025
Residents*	5,031	5,141	5,254	5,371
% on the total of residents	8.5	8.7	8.9	9.1
Regular non-residents	293	176	180	188
Irregular migrants	506	458	321	339
Total	5,830	5,775	5,755	5,898

* Values modified on the basis of subsequent ISTAT revisions after recalculation of the resident population during annual censuses as of 2018.
Source: Elaborations and estimates by ISMU based on ISTAT data.

Migration as a "shock absorber"

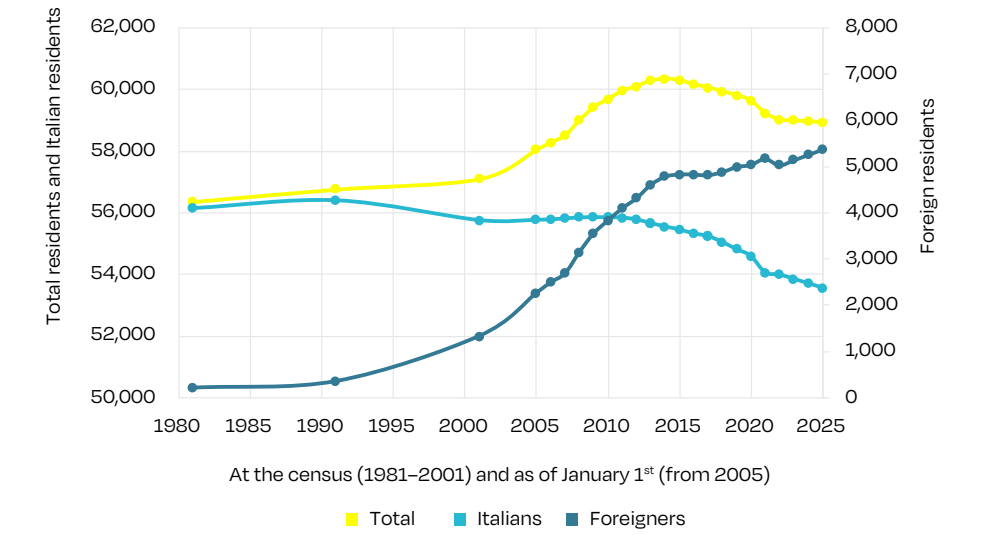
Within the framework of a population decline that raises serious concerns about the sustainability of Italy's socioeconomic model, the foreign population has previously played and will continue to play a mitigation role—as a sort of "demographic shock absorber".

Since 1990s and especially over the past two decades, the foreign population has played a key role in slowing the decline in the number of residents in Italy. Indeed, between 2012 to 2024 the number of residents with Italian citizenship decreased by 2,274,000 units, foreigners increased by 1,103,000 units, substantially halving the decline in the overall population (Figure 1).

ISTAT forecasts for 2025–2055 predict a loss of almost 6 million residents, considering the contribution of the migration balance under the median hypothesis (ISTAT, 2024). However, it should be underlined that, under the "zero migration" hypothesis—understood as null migration balance—this loss could be more than two-folds.

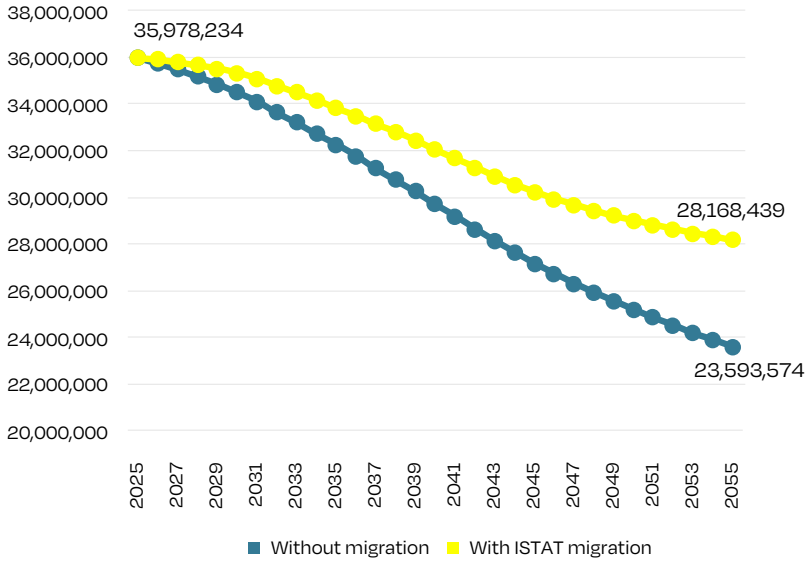
When considering the total working-age population (20–66 years), the decline is even more pronounced. According to the ISTAT forecasts, almost 8 million potential workers will be lost, but in the absence of migration this data goes up to more than 12 million (Figure 2), with a negative peak in 2041 showing the loss of over half a million units (CNEL, 2025).

Figure 1. Resident population in Italy by citizenship. Years 1981–2025. Absolute values in thousands



Source: ISMU ETS elaboration based on ISTAT data.

Figure 2. Resident population aged 20–66 estimated as of 1 January in the years 2025–2055 with and without migratory contribution. Absolute values



Source: ISMU ETS elaboration based on ISTAT data.

The complexity of citizenships

The composition of the foreigner population by citizenship proves to be a fundamental tool for understanding migratory dynamics and how the socioeconomic integration of the population involved occurs, also offering insights to identify internal mobility trajectories that are often linked to specific employment sectors or family reunification processes.

The analysis of the countries of origin of foreign residents in Italy highlights a clear predominance of Eastern Europe, with Romanians being the most numerous (1,053,000 residents as of 1 January 2025, 19.6% of the total), followed by Albanians and Moroccans (both 7.7% of the total). These are three communities that together cover 35% of foreign residents and suggest strong historical rootedness and marked settlement.

A further 5.8% of foreign residents is represented by Chinese citizens and 5.3% by Ukrainians, while the following five countries (Bangladesh, India, Egypt, Pakistan and the Philippines) each account for at least 3% and contribute to another 16.5% of the total. Almost two-thirds of foreign residents in Italy as of 1 January 2025 cover ten citizenships (Table 2).

In terms of gender, data shows that a large group of citizensh, especially from Eastern Europe, have a marked female predominance. Ukraine ranks first (74.9%), followed by Poland (74.2%) and Moldova (66.6%), Peru (57.1%), the Philippines (56.9%) and Romania (56.3%). This gender predominance usually reflects the weight of migration linked to occupations in the domestic work and personal care sector, the so-called “care chains” that includes, besides Eastern European migrants, also migrants from Asia (Philippines, Sri Lanka) and Latin America (Peru, Ecuador).

On the other hand, communities coming from South Asia and from some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa are characterised by a strong male presence, mainly oriented toward work sectors requiring physical resistance and strength (e.g., construction, trade and agriculture). In this respect, citizens of Bangladesh (74.1% men), Pakistan (74.4%), Senegal (73.1%) and Egypt (68.4%) stand out. Among groups from these countries, the national groups the low female incidence in migration also indicates a relatively modest use of family reunification and the still predominantly economic nature of settlement in Italy.

There are, however, also citizenships with relatively balanced gender composition, such as China (49.6% women) or Sri Lanka (47.8%), where family migration generally creates more favourable conditions for stabilisation.

In conclusion, it can be said that gender data shows the existence of consolidated migratory models: Eastern Europe, part of Latin America and Southeast Asia generate strongly flows of female migrants, driven by internal demand for care work. South Asia and part of Sub-Saharan Africa generate flows dominated by men, often in relation to employment in manufacturing, construction, agriculture and services. Finally, there are communities—the Chinese one, for example—

where more stable and family-based migration is observed, with a growing balance between genders, inserted in specific productive and distributive sectors.

Table 2. Foreign residents in Italy as of 1 January 2025, by citizenships and sex. Absolute values and percentages.

Citizenship	Absolute value	% Women	Citizenship distribution		
			Women	Men	Total
Romania	1,053,042	56.3	22.1	17.1	19.6
Albania	414,622	48.6	7.5	7.9	7.7
Morocco	412,457	45.2	6.9	8.4	7.7
China	311,250	49.6	5.8	5.8	5.8
Ukraine	287,187	74.9	8.0	2.7	5.3
Bangladesh	213,622	25.9	2.1	5.9	4.0
Egypt	174,141	31.6	2.1	4.4	3.2
India	171,429	43.4	2.8	3.6	3.2
Pakistan	171,179	25.6	1.6	4.7	3.2
Philippines	153,455	56.9	3.3	2.5	2.9
Nigeria	132,129	42.7	2.1	2.8	2.5
Tunisia	123,828	36.7	1.7	2.9	2.3
Senegal	119,067	26.9	1.2	3.2	2.2
Peru	116,169	57.1	2.5	1.9	2.2
Sri Lanka	113,705	47.8	2.0	2.2	2.1
Moldova	94,141	66.6	2.3	1.2	1.8
Poland	72,212	74.2	2.0	0.7	1.3
Ecuador	57,980	54.9	1.2	1.0	1.1
Other	1,179,636	52.0	22.9	21.1	22.0
Total	5,371,251	49.9	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Elaborations by ISMU based on ISTAT data.

Families with foreign members

According to the latest consolidated data from the 2023 census (CNEL, 2025), in Italy there are 2,743,000 families with at least one foreign member—of which 1,944,000 are composed solely of foreigners (Table 3)—representing more than 10% of the total number of resident families in Italy. In terms of members, the

structure of these families seems to highlight two opposite situations. On the one hand four families out of ten are composed of single persons (one-person households), which indicates temporary or early-stage migration. On the other hand, more than one in four families (26.5%) have four or more members and are likely to refer to households with children and to indicate greater rootedness. Unsurprisingly, the geographical distribution shows that one-person households have a higher incidence in the South—where the foreign presence is less stable and integration paths are much more complex—while the area extending between Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto shows a higher incidence of larger family units.

Table 3. Families composed solely of foreigners by number of members and geographical distribution. Absolute values and %, as of 31 December 2023

Area	Families composed solely of foreigners				
	1	2	3	4 or more	Total
North-West	53.3	14.4	12.1	20.2	637,281
North-East	53.8	13.5	11.9	20.8	448,117
Centre	58.9	13.7	11.0	16.4	503,699
South	60.8	14.5	9.7	15.0	256,666
Islands	63.8	12.7	8.8	14.7	99,013
Italy	56.4	13.9	11.3	18.4	1,944,776

Source: ISTAT, 2025.

As for the living conditions, data shows how families with foreigners face economic hardship more often than Italian families. In 2024 poor families with at least one foreigner amounted to 30.4%, compared to 6.2% among families composed solely of Italian citizens. This value rose to 35.2% for families composed exclusively of foreigners, highlighting a growing trend as it was 25.2% in 2014 and has since increased by ten points.

The gap in absolute poverty among families composed only of foreigners and only of Italians is greater in the South (42.5% vs. 8.9%), smaller in the North (30.4% vs. 5.2%) and even smaller in the Centre (24.9% vs. 4.2%).

It should be noted that within families with foreigners, economic hardship is particularly evident when minors are present. In this case the incidence of poverty reaches 33.6% and even to 40.5% in the case of families composed exclusively of foreigners—i.e., five times the data observed among families with only Italian citizens.

Citizenship acquisition

Several decades of migratory flows have led to a growing number of immigrants and their descendants, who have settled and grown up in Italy pursuing a life project that has culminated in the acquisition of Italian citizenship. Official sources estimate that 2,090,000 residents have become Italian citizens, with over 1,600,000 acquisitions in the last decade (2015–2024)[1].

The period between 2017–2021 was characterised by lower levels of acquisition than the previous five-year period due to both by socio-political and economic factors as well as unpredictable events (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic) and legislative changes in acquisition modalities (e.g., in the case of marriage). Starting from 2022, however, this situation has started to change. The frequency of acquisitions has increased considerably and has returned above the symbolic threshold of 200,000 units, as also confirmed in the 2023–2024 period.

This growth has been cross-cutting, involving all age groups (Table 4), but in particularly significant way among people under 20. This age group has exceeded 620,000 units between 2015 and 2024—more than one third of the total—and substantially coincides with second-generation youths, whether immigrated or born in Italy, who acquire Italian citizenship through transmission from parents (ex art. 14, Law 91/1992) or through "election" upon reaching the age of majority (ex art. 4).

While the surge in 2022 can be partly explained by administrative procedures resuming after being halted during the pandemic, the fact that the overall number of acquisitions has remained almost constant also after 2022 suggests an increase in the propensity to settle down in Italy as a definitive or at least long-term life choice. It should also be noted that, at the same time, there has been an increase in the citizenship acquisition among people born in countries where ius soli applies due to descent from Italian ancestors. These people are included in the count, yet statistics show only part of this phenomenon as they look at residents in Italy without considering those who reside abroad and apply for citizenship through consulates.

The distribution of acquisitions by country of origin (Table 5) confirms the predominance of groups that are historically more rooted in Italian territory, but also highlights the emergence of new communities that have grown in the last three-year period also as a result to changes in the rules on dual citizenship (e.g., Ukrainians).

The Albanian and Moroccan communities have been at the centre of acquisition of Italian citizenship throughout the past decade, with respectively 299,000 and 243,000 acquisitions. Both show a cyclical trend with high values in the first two years, followed by a drop in 2017–2021 and a surge in 2022, when volumes almost doubled compared to the previous year. This dynamic trend is likely to

[1] For more information: https://www.ismu.org/cittadinanza-banca-dati-sulle-migrazioni/

reflect the combination of administrative timeframes and regulatory changes occurring during the period.

Table 4. Acquisitions of citizenship by age groups. Years 2015–2024. Absolute values.

Year	Age						
	Up to 20 y.o.	20-29 y.o.	30-39 y.o.	40-49 y.o.	50-59 y.o.	60+	Total
2015	70,764	16,316	29,171	37,111	19,000	5,673	178,035
2016	80,520	20,540	35,918	40,568	18,659	5,386	201,591
2017	54,040	17,345	28,601	28,923	13,465	4,231	146,605
2018	39,945	13,538	23,826	21,295	10,224	3,695	112,523
2019	45,741	15,767	24,162	23,505	12,811	5,015	127,001
2020	43,916	13,813	24,700	27,871	15,430	6,073	131,803
2021	48,324	11,142	19,810	22,842	13,484	5,855	121,457
2022	78,639	20,309	36,705	41,044	25,163	11,856	213,716
2023	78,078	23,363	39,780	39,553	22,408	10,385	213,567
2024	82,448	23,194	39,315	41,412	21,754	9,325	217,448
2015-2024	622,415	175,327	301,988	324,124	172,398	67,494	1,663,746

Source: ISTAT.

The Romanian community also follows a similar trajectory, although with more limited values: a low point in 2017–2018 and a recovery over the following three-year period. For South American and Asian citizens, such as those from Brazil, India, and Bangladesh, the trends are more fragmented, but they share a relatively limited presence up to 2021, followed by a sharp increase starting in 2022. In the case of Brazil, the upward trajectory is driven primarily by acquisitions iure sanguinis, whereas for the two Asian communities the trend can be attributed to their growing stabilization, with the emergence of new pools of naturalized people linked to more recent migratory processes.

The growth of new Italians within certain communities, such as Argentinians, is particularly noteworthy. This community began to expand from 2022 onward, with more than 10,000 acquisitions per year and a total of over 43,000 in the most recent three-year period. It should be noted, however, that—similarly to Brazil—this concerns a country that was historically a destination for Italian emigration and where many descendants of Italians are interested in acquiring Italian citizenship. A growing trend also concerns Egyptians, which significantly increases their relative weight especially starting from 2021. In this case, the increase is the result of stabilization processes. The situation of Ukrainians is entirely dis-

tinctive as, in this case, the increase is concentrated in the years 2023–2024 and is likely linked to the conflict that began in 2022. Given the recent change in legislation, which now allows dual citizenship, it can be expected that the upward trend will continue in the coming years.

Table 5. Acquisitions of citizenship by country of origin. Years 2015–2024*. Absolute values.

Countries	Years										
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	'15-'24
Albania	35,134	36,92	27,112	21,841	26,033	28,107	22,493	38,129	31,728	31,643	299,140
Morocco	32,448	35,212	22,645	15,496	15,812	18,024	16,588	30,953	27,901	27,638	242,717
Romania	14,403	12,967	8,042	6,542	10,201	11,449	9,435	16,302	14,409	14,763	118,513
Brazil	..	5,799	9,936	10,66	10,762	7,149	5,46	11,239	12,891	11,058	84,954
India	6,176	9,527	8,2	5,425	4,683	5,602	4,489	8,509	9,736	12,258	74,605
Bangladesh	5,953	8,442	4,411	..	..	5,661	5,116	6,921	8,066	9,726	54,296
Moldova	..	5,605	3,827	3,068	3,788	4,34	3,633	7,527	8,02	9,154	48,962
Argentina	..	..	..	..	..	..	3,669	10,041	16,076	13,559	43,345
Egypt	4,422	..	..	..	..	..	3,531	7,029	8,675	9,073	32,730
Pakistan	5,617	7,678	6,17	..	2,722	5,629	4,41	..	..	..	32,226
Macedonia	5,455	6,771	3,845	3,487	4,966	3,23	..	..	..	..	27,754
Ukraine	..	..	..	..	2,423	..	..	..	..	5,881	6,28	14,584
Senegal	..	..	4,489	2,918	2,869	4,005	..	..	..	..	14,281
Peru	5,503	5,783	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	11,286
Ecuador	..	..	..	..	3,041	..	..	5,739	..	..	8,780
Tunisia	5,585	..	..	2,484	..	..	..	..	..	..	8,069
Other countries	57,339	66,887	47,928	38,179	42,124	38,607	42,633	71,327	70,184	72,296	547,504
Total	178,035	201,591	146,605	112,523	127,001	131,803	121,457	213,716	213,567	217,448	1,663,746

*The top 10 citizenships are listed for each year. ".." indicates that the country did not feature among the top 10 citizenships published by ISTAT.
Source: ISTAT.

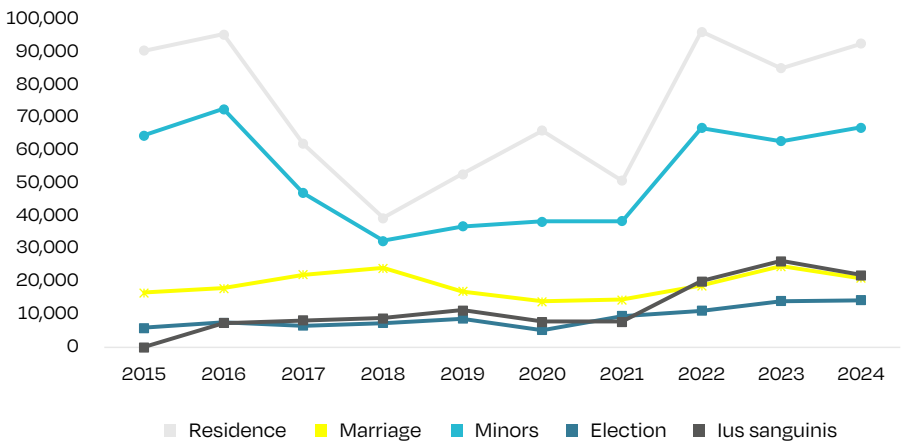
Overall, the decade 2015–2024 highlights a change in the composition by country of origin of new Italian citizens. Alongside the historical Balkan and North African communities, new key players are emerging, particularly from Latin America and South Asia, outlining an increasingly plural landscape not only in terms of presence, but also of the communities most integrated into Italy.
The trend in citizenship acquisitions by type of procedure over the period 2015–

2024 reveals differentiated dynamics and a clear hierarchy among the various access procedures. Despite marked fluctuations following a peak in 2016, acquisition through residence consistently represents the main pathway throughout the entire period (Figure 3). In 2017–2018, a sharp contraction in naturalizations by residence can be observed, followed by a gradual recovery that culminated in 2022, when figures returned to levels similar to those of the initial period.

Citizenship acquisitions through parental transmission to minors consistently rank as the second most significant modality. After peaking in 2016, this type of acquisition has substantial declined in subsequent years, reaching a low point in 2018. From 2022 onward, a strong recovery can be observed, clearly linked to the parallel increase in naturalizations and the overcoming of obstacles caused by the pandemic. Despite this rebound, levels do not reach the maximum values recorded in the first part of the decade, possibly also due to a smaller presence of minors resulting from the assimilation of foreign families to more recent reproductive patterns.

Acquisitions by marriage show a relatively stable trend over time and ranked third until 2022, when they were overtaken by acquisitions through descent.

Figure 3. Acquisitions of Italian citizenship by procedure. Years 2011–2024. Absolute values.



Source: ISTAT.

Election of citizenship, typically associated with young people born or raised in Italy, shows lower absolute values but a steadily increasing trend, especially in the period 2022–2024. Following the pandemic-related low point in 2021, levels

rose above those observed at the beginning of the series, marking a gradual consolidation of transition pathways to adulthood within second generations.

The dynamics of ius sanguinis are quite distinctive. Although it remained quantitatively less significant than other pathways, it showed very strong growth starting in 2022, when it started ranking consistently as third most common procedure for acquisition, with a peak in 2023. This growth suggests a renewed activation of the Italian diaspora abroad, potentially driven by globalization processes, complex situations in countries of birth and, more broadly, an increased demand for international mobility.

Features of new citizens

Detailed information on naturalised residents in Italy can be drawn from the 2021 ISTAT Labour Force Survey on education and employment (ISTAT, 2023). Employment continues to play a central role in the migratory project of many foreigners, whose presence among the labour force is very high and employment and unemployment rates are traditionally higher than those of Italian-born citizens[2]. New citizens, however, also include individuals who have already achieved high level of stability and good integration as they were either born in Italy or arrived through family reunification—sometimes as children. Compared to Italian-born citizens, this group shows a lower employment rate and a higher level of inactivity mainly due to women, while men show levels that are more similar to those of natives than to those of foreign citizens.

The education levels of naturalised citizens lie between that of Italian-born and foreign citizens. The incidence of those having completed lower-secondary education (40.2%) is lower than among foreigners (54.1%) and similar to that of native Italians (42.6%). Graduates (15.8%) are more frequent compared to foreigners (10.1%) but slightly less frequent compared to natives (17.3%).

Naturalised graduates have a lower employment rate than native graduates and higher employment rate than foreigners. The employment rate of naturalised citizens with lower-secondary education is higher than natives' and lower than foreigners'.

The contribution of education to employment levels is limited by the fact that over 80% of certifications were obtained abroad and only a fraction are recognised in Italy. Naturalised citizens, however, often face an intermediate situation, with 61% of foreign qualifications and a higher recognition rate (45%), which makes it easier for them to apply their qualifications in the labour market compared to foreigners—yet with more barriers than for Italian-born citizens.

Naturalised citizens face an intermediate situation between Italian-born and foreign citizens also when it comes to perception of work and their own skills.

[2] See also Chapter 4 of the ISMU Report

Among employed people, 14.2% of naturalised citizens believe they perform a low-skilled job, more than natives (9.8%) but less than foreigners (19.2%), with higher gaps among women, graduates and older people.

The job distribution partly explains this condition, as around 17.5% of naturalised citizens hold unskilled positions (vs. 8.2% of natives and 31.5% of foreigners) and 21.1% hold skilled positions (vs. 38.1% of natives and 7.9% of foreigners). Moreover, looking at graduates, only 61.5% of naturalised citizens hold skilled positions compared to 81% of natives and 38.4% of foreigners.

It should also be noted that naturalised citizens report greater difficulties than natives in finding an adequate job (10.6% vs. 8.8%), although the share of those do not seek employment is lower than among foreigners (18.6% vs. 31.1%). The main barriers faced are similar to those of foreigners but with smaller impact: non-recognition of qualifications, poor language proficiency, discrimination by citizenship, and formal requirements linked to citizenship.

Since the life project of naturalised citizens does not revolve solely around work but also involves other dimensions of living, it could be helpful to look at how people approach their relations. ISTAT data on marriage among new citizens, for instance, helps to better understand how people of foreign origin contribute to the Italian population and society even if they often do not clearly fall in the "foreign citizens" category.

For example, 14.6% of so-called "mixed" marriages involve a spouse who is Italian by acquisition and among marriages between two Italian spouses, 4,5% involve at least one Italian by acquisition—both values have more than doubled compared to 2018. Considering all marriages between at least one foreigner or one Italian by acquisition—and excluding couples of Italians born in Italy—almost two out of ten concern Italian couples where at least one spouse has acquired citizenship, and almost one out of ten mixed couples include Italians by acquisition. Ultimately, the marked increase in Italians by acquisition who marry is an additional sign of the advancing integration and the increasingly significant contribution that foreign citizens make to the demographic trends recorded in Italy.

Concluding remarks

The almost 5.5 million foreign residents in Italy and the additional two million residents who over time have become Italian show the reality of a country where international migration has consolidated, providing fundamental support both in absorbing the shocks of the progressively declining native population and in containing demographic ageing. However, in addition to acting as a "demographic lever", immigration flows to Italy have also found wide appreciation for their economic functionality namely related to countries of origin and the structurally young and strongly productive component, even this functionality is not always fully valued in terms of education and prior experience.

While it is undeniable that inclusion of foreigners in our society is proceeding rapidly—in this sense, the presence of families and children acts as an important catalyst—and often leads them to the acquisition of Italian citizenship, it is also true that some weaknesses still persist, both in terms of labour market inclusion (tasks, wages, recognition of skills and qualifications) and relations with and within institutions and social networks (school, healthcare, public administration and bureaucratic systems).

This requires take timely and effective actions—including corrective ones—that can improve the migration governance in Italy, better value migrants' potential and increase their contribution. This would make Italy not only attractive and competitive at the international level for regular migrants, but also able to become attractive for those who are already present in the country by fully including them in a virtual circle within the host society.

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Chapter 2

Arrivals and asylum applications

Livia Elisa Ortensi

While the agreements with Tunisia have undoubtedly led to a sharp decrease in departures from the country, the route through Libya has regained relevance by being, for the second consecutive year, the main point of departure for those arriving in Italy by sea.

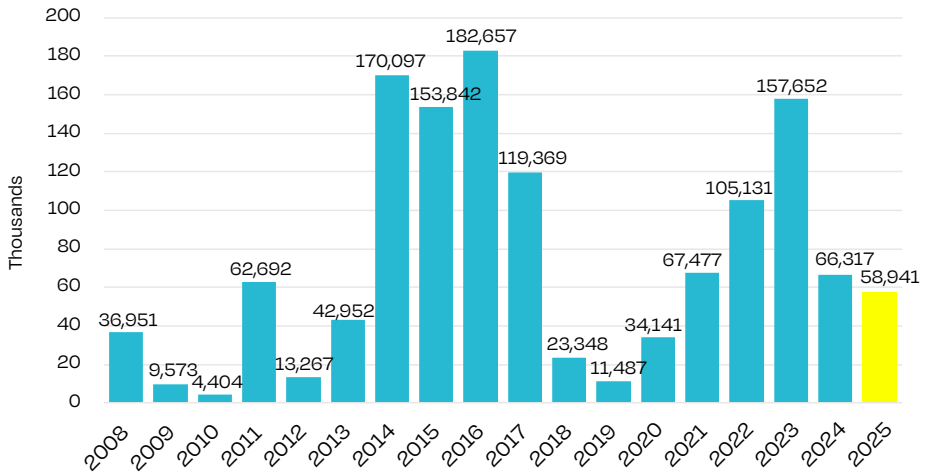
A slight recovery in sea and land arrivals

Mixed flows of asylum seekers and economic migrants entering by sea and by land represent the most dynamic, unpredictable, and emergency-driven component of migration flows to Italy and Europe and require close monitoring. Between 2019 and 2023, despite the pandemic, pressure on maritime borders increased steadily, fueled by the worsening economic and social conditions in countries of origin and transit. The peak was reached in 2023, when around 158,000 arrivals were recorded, similarly to the levels observed during the 2014–2016 crisis. The year 2024 marked a sharp reversal of this trend (66,000 arrivals; –57.9% compared with 2023), bringing the volume of the flow back to lower levels, but still similar to those observed in 2011—the year of the so-called Arab Spring in North Africa—and in 2021 (Figure 1). **A period of substantial stabilization characterized the first 10 months of 2025, where arrivals increased by only 6% compared to the same period of the previous year[1].** The year 2025 has been

[1] Data as of 31 October 2025 (Ministry of the Interior, 2025a).

marked by increased migratory pressure compared to 2024 between April and June (+43%) and between September and October (+21%), while sea arrivals decreased by 19% between January and March and by 22% between July and August—two moments of the year that are generally characterized by greater pressure on the national reception system.

Figure 1. Number of sea arrivals recorded in Italy. 2008–2025*. Absolute values.



* For 2025, arrivals as of 1 November 2025.
Source: Data from the Ministry of the Interior (2025a) elaborated by ISMU.

In the absence of significant improvements in the conditions of the main countries of origin, the trend from 2024–2025—with fewer arrivals compared to the previous two-year period—is attributable to the agreements concluded with Libya and, above all, with Tunisia, aimed at reducing departures from the two countries and, ultimately, to the European Union's policy of externalizing its borders. Such policies and agreements with transit countries typically have only a transitory effect and never achieve the goal of permanently reducing immigration (Cutitta, 2023). However, they repeatedly entail political and economic support for authoritarian regimes that implement, or tolerate, violent and inhuman practices against migrants and often against their own citizens, as extensively documented (UNHCR, 2018; RR[X], 2025). According to data provided by the Ministry of the Interior (2025b), between 1 January 2023 and 31 July 2025, 236,000 migrants were intercepted at sea while heading for Italy (Table 1). Most interceptions occurred off the Tunisian coast, where 78% of those intercepted were caught. In particular, starting in 2024, the number of interceptions by Tunisia far exceeded

the number of arrivals, thus explaining the evolution observed along these migration routes to Italy.

Table 1. Migrants intercepted from Libya and Tunisia and ratio between interceptions and departures. 1 January 2023–31 July 2025

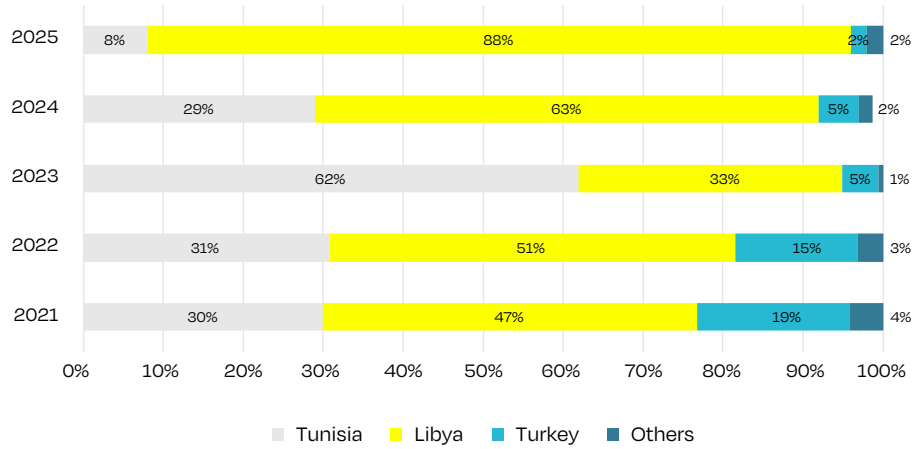
		Libya	Tunisia	Totale
2023	Number of interceptions at sea	17,190	76,321	93,511
	% interceptions by country on total	18	82	100
	Interceptions per 100 arrivals	33	78	62
2024	Number of interceptions at sea	21,762	80,942	102,704
	% interceptions by country on total	21	79	100
	Interceptions per 100 arrivals	61	443	190
2025*	Number of interceptions at sea	13,243	26,773	40,016
	% interceptions by country on total	33	67	100
	Interceptions per 100 arrivals	41	222	89

* Data as of 31 July 2025.
Source: Data from the Ministry of the Interior (2025a and 2025b) and UNHCR Italy Sea Arrivals Dashboard elaborated by ISMU.

As a result of the situation in Tunisia, **over the last two years Libya has once again become the main country of departure for those reaching Italy by sea**. Over the first eight months of 2025, 88% of arrivals originated from Libya compared to only 8% from Tunisia, 2% from Turkey, and 2% from Algeria (UNHCR, 2025a). In previous years, around one-third of arrivals originated from Tunisia, with a peak of 62% in 2023 (Figure 2). The changed balance in the countries of departure has direct effects on the composition of incoming flows, since these countries are the intermediate stops of two different migration routes. Indeed, in the first ten months of 2025, departures from Libya involved predominantly Bangladeshis (35.0%), Eritreans (15.4%), and Egyptians (14.7%), while those departing from Tunisia were Guineans (28.9%) and Ivorians (9.3%), as well as Tunisians themselves, who represent the largest group (32.1%). Consequently, migrants arriving in Italy in 2025 have profiles that largely mirror those of migrants leaving from the Libyan coast, with an unprecedented peak in Sudanese, likely linked to the further deterioration of the conflict in that country (Table 2). The strong presence of Bangladeshis—whose numbers increased by 61.2% compared to the same period in 2024—is not new when looking at flows from Libya. The existence of a consolidated route for people to travel to neighboring countries with a tourist visa and then enter Libya has been investigated through qualitative studies

(Morad, 2024). There was also an absolute increase in the arrivals of Egyptians (+123%), Eritreans (+300%), Pakistanis (+74%), in addition to Sudanese (+96%). On the other hand, arrivals of Syrians (–88%) decreased, likely due to recent political developments in the country that have reduced the likelihood of obtaining asylum in Central and Northern European countries.

Figure 2. Sea arrivals by country of departure. 2021–2025*. %



* For 2025, the first eight months are considered.
Source: Data from IOM–UNHCR (2025a) and UNHCR (2025b) elaborated by ISMU.

Table 2. Top 5 nationalities declared at sea arrival and percentage of total arrivals. Years 2019–2025*

2019	Tunisia	Pakistan	Côte d'Ivoire	Algeria	Iraq
	23.1	10.3	9.9	8.8	8.5
2020	Tunisia	Bangladesh	Côte d'Ivoire	Algeria	Egypt
	37.7	12.1	5.7	4.3	3.7
2021	Tunisia	Egypt	Bangladesh	Iran	Côte d'Ivoire
	23.4	12.5	11.7	5.8	5.7
2022	Egypt	Tunisia	Bangladesh	Syria	Afghanistan
	19.5	17.3	14.3	8.2	6.9
2023	Guinea	Tunisia	Côte d'Ivoire	Bangladesh	Egypt
	11.6	11.0	10.2	7.7	7.7
2024	Bangladesh	Syria	Tunisia	Egypt	Guinea
	19.8	18.7	12.8	6.5	5.5
2025*	Bangladesh	Egypt	Eritrea	Pakistan	Sudan
	30.6	13.8	12.3	6.8	6.0

* The 2025 figure refers to 1 November 2025.
Source: ISMU ETS calculations based on Ministry of the Interior data (2025).

There are also significant differences in the composition of flows by gender and age (Table 3). Men account for almost all arrivals among Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, while unaccompanied foreign minors represent about one-third of the total arrivals from Egypt, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, and as much as 40% of those from Somalia. In particular, half of the unaccompanied foreign minors come from Egypt or Guinea. Although female presence is residual, it is more noticeable among arrivals from Guinea (22.6%) and Syria (17.5%). For Syria, accompanied minors are also highly represented (14.5%), indicating the migration of entire or partial family units.

Table 3. Demographic composition of arrivals to Italy between 1 January and 31 August 2025

	Men (%)	Women (%)	Accompanied minors (%)	Unaccompanied minors (%)	Total
Bangladesh	93.2	0.1	0.2	6.5	6,319
Egypt	64.2	0.3	2.2	33.3	1,071
Eritrea	52.0	8.7	3.7	35.7	1,089
Pakistan	92.8	0.4	1.4	5.4	1,162
Sudan	77.7	3.5	3.9	14.8	1,575
Somalia	44.4	13.3	1.7	40.6	1,778
Ethiopia	57.4	6.9	2.1	33.6	2,133
Tunisia	65.5	6.8	9.3	18.4	3,094
Guinea	39.4	22.6	9.6	28.5	5,537
Syria	62.6	17.5	14.5	5.5	5,787
Others	70.8	11.3	6.0	11.9	13,148
Total	73.5	5.1	3.0	18.3	42,693

Source: UNHCR data (2025) elaborated by ISMU.

While 2023 was a particularly tragic year with reference to the known—and certainly underestimated—number of deaths at sea (at least 2,526), **2024 was characterized by higher mortality relative to the number of arrivals (27 deaths per 100). The partial 2025 figure is lower but in line with the lethality observed over 2023** (Table 4, IOM, 2025).

Obtaining information on land border crossings is much more difficult, as this kind of data is fragmented and incomplete. According to UNHCR, in 2023 over 12,000 arrivals were reported at the border between Slovenia and Italy, while in 2024 the figure settled around 7,300. In the first eight months of 2025, arrivals were 3,900, mainly from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Morocco, Pakistan, and Turkey (UNHCR 2024, 2025c and 2025d). According to the Ministry of the Interior, in the first nine months of 2025, 2,758 irregular migrants were identified, and more than half were immediately returned to Slovenia. There were 374 irregular immigrants intercepted before entering Italy. At the border between Italy and France, 572 irregular migrants were identified, and 462 of them were readmitted to France (Ministry of the Interior, 2025c).

Table 4. Attempted crossings, people intercepted, dead and missing people along the Central Mediterranean route. 2016–2025*

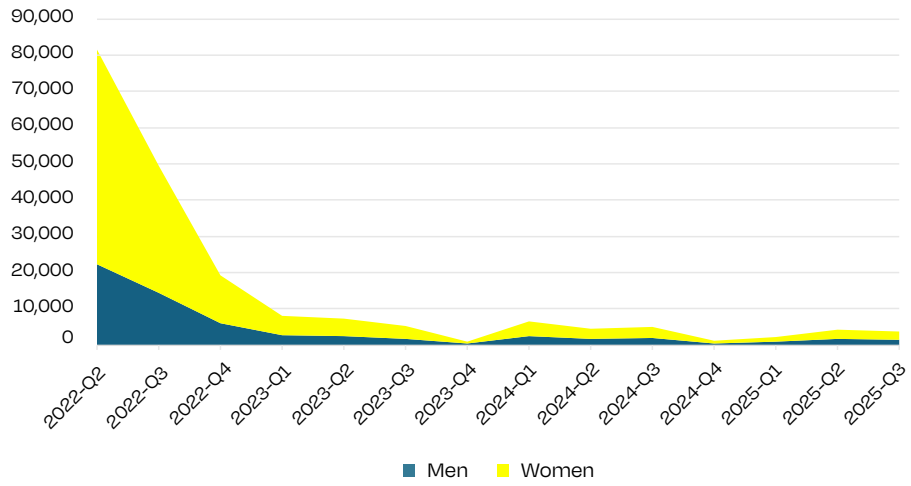
Year	Dead and missing	Dead and missing minors	Dead and missing migrants per 1,000 sea arrivals
2016	4,574	75	25.0
2017	2,853	52	23.9
2018	1,314	48	56.3
2019	1,262	40	109.9
2020	1,000	39	29.3
2021	1,553	48	23.0
2022	1,417	69	13.5
2023	2,526	91	16.0
2024	1,810	86	27.3
2025	1,044	68	17.7

* The 2025 figure refers to 1 November 2025.
Source: IOM (2025) and Ministry of the Interior (2025) data elaborated by ISMU.

As observed for sea borders, Syrians no longer featured among the main countries of origin, although data fragmentation prevents firm conclusions. Along this route as well, systematic abuses against people in transit and violent pushbacks by the transit countries' border guards have been reported for years (Ibidem).

The flow of beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine is declining further and remains far from past figures. In the first three quarters of 2025, nearly 10,000 new permits were issued, compared to about 15,000 in the same period of 2024 (–37.2%). The total number of permits issued since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine is 198,000 (Figure 3). Those benefiting from temporary protection are mainly women (70%), which is a major difference compared to the rest of the asylum-seeking population (Eurostat, 2025).

Figure 3. New temporary protection permits by quarter 2022–2025



Source: Eurostat (2025) migr_asytpfq data elaborated by ISMU.

Asylum applications

Although only a fraction of those who irregularly enter Italy submit an asylum application, the high number of sea arrivals and land entries over the last three years has undoubtedly contributed to the overall increase in such applications. In 2024, asylum applications submitted in Italy were about 151,000 (80.5% by men). **In the first eight months of 2025 they were 81,000—a decrease of 22.6% compared to the corresponding period in 2024** (Eurostat, 2025). Pending cases were about 216,000 as of 1 September 2025 compared to 195,000 at the same date in 2024.

Consistently with the observed data on sea and land arrivals, the main nationality among male asylum seekers in the two-year period (2024/2025) was Bangladeshi, with over one in four applicants (Table 5). Pakistan, Morocco, Egypt, and Peru appeared among the top five nationalities in both periods analyzed. The prominence of Peruvians among asylum seekers once again shows that sea landings, while undoubtedly important, are not the only entry point for those intending to seek asylum in Italy. Among women, those from Latin America are particularly present. Women from Peru accounted for about one-third of female applicants, but applications from Colombia and Venezuela were also significant. In both periods, Georgia ranked second and was consistently the second-largest group among women.

Table 5. Top 5 nationalities of asylum seekers, 2024–2025* and variation (%) from previous year

	2024			2025		
	Top 5	N	V.%	Top 5	N	V.%
Women	Peru	7,950	27.1	Peru	5,250	30.1
	Georgia	2,640	9.0	Georgia	2,355	13.5
	Tunisia	1,940	6.6	Colombia	960	5.5
	Colombia	1,675	5.7	China	855	4.9
	Venezuela	1,260	4.3	Venezuela	790	4.5
	Others	13,915	47.4	Others	7,260	41.6
Men	Bangladesh	32,695	26.9	Bangladesh	16,630	27.0
	Pakistan	11,465	9.4	Egypt	6,045	9.8
	Egypt	11,390	9.4	Pakistan	5,885	9.5
	Morocco	9,120	7.5	Morocco	5,315	8.6
	Peru	7,650	6.3	Peru	4,550	7.4
	Others	49,420	40.6	Others	23,260	37.7

* The figure for 2025 refers to the first nine months.
Source: Eurostat (2025) migr_asyappctza and migr_asyappctzm data elaborated by ISMU.

With regard to asylum applications in Italy in 2024, the list of most represented countries of origin among those entering Italy via the maritime border follows a pattern already observed in previous editions of this Report (Table 6). For citizens from Bangladesh and Pakistan, Italy is often the final destination. In addition, for these groups, the Central Mediterranean route exists together with other ones—and, based on data, even appears to be secondary compared to them. For this reason, their asylum applications are far higher than sea arrivals (294 and 507 applications per 100 landings, respectively). Furthermore, as already observed for 2024, there is a surplus of asylum applications compared to sea arrivals for Egyptians too, whose presence has increased along the so-called Balkan Route (EUAA, 2022; UNHCR, 2025e). The excess of asylum applications over sea arrivals is unprecedented for Tunisians, and it appears to be driven by the female component, which grew in 2024.

All other nationalities show a limited propensity to apply for asylum in **Italy, a country considered, in many cases, a transit country**. A particularly low ratio between sea arrivals and asylum applications is observed for citizens originating from Syria (3 applications per 100 arrivals), Eritrea (5), and Sudan (14). The ratio observed for Guinea is clearly increasing—70 applications per 100 arrivals—compared to 18 per 100 arrivals observed in 2023, the year in which Guinea was the

leading nationality. The increase in asylum applications by Guinean citizens may stem from growing difficulties in crossing Italian borders due to stricter controls (Ministry of the Interior, 2025c) and reaching the typical final destinations for Guineans—which, in the case of asylum seekers, is mainly France and, secondly, Germany, Belgium, and Spain.

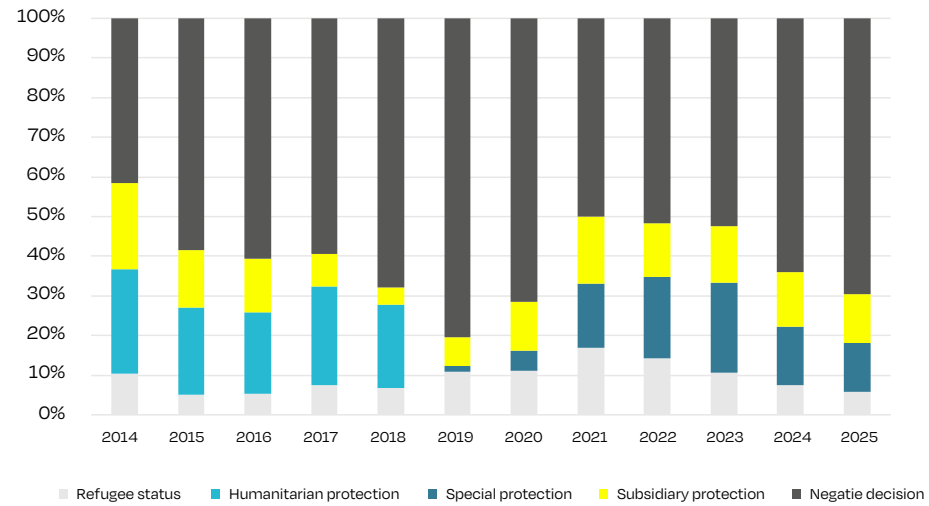
Table 6. Ratio between asylum applications and sea arrivals. Top 10 nationalities by number of people arrived in Italy by sea. 2024

	Asylum applications	Sea arrivals	Asylum applications per 100 sea arrivals
Bangladesh	11,180	32,865	294
Syria	10,554	365	3
Tunisia	7,289	9,435	129
Egypt	3,629	11,595	320
Guinea	2,983	2,090	70
Pakistan	2,314	11,740	507
Eritrea	1,807	90	5
Sudan	1,796	245	14
Mali	1,336	3,115	233
Gambia	1,290	1,735	134

Source: Eurostat (2025) and Ministry of the Interior (2025) data elaborated by ISMU. Eurostat data are rounded to multiples of 5.

As for asylum decisions, **in the first six months of 2025 there was an increase in the proportion of negative decisions** (69.5% of applications), compared to 64.1% in 2024 and 52% in 2023. Overall, 46,000 decisions were issued in 2023, just under 79,000 in 2024, and 49,000 in the first two quarters of 2025 (Eurostat, 2025).

Figure 4. Outcomes of asylum applications, first instance. 2014–2025*. %



* The provisional 2025 figure refers to the first two quarters based on Eurostat (2025) data.
Source: Eurostat (2025) data elaborated by ISMU.

In 2024, the highest negative decisions rates[2] were observed for citizens of Kosovo (93%), Morocco (89.9%), China (87.8%), Algeria (87.2%), and Senegal (86.8%), while the lowest rejection rates were observed for Burkina Faso (1.2%), Mali (4.6%), Palestine (5.5%), Somalia (7.8%), and Afghanistan (8.2). **Considering the most relevant countries of origin for which decisions were issued in 2024, rejection rates are very high—an aspect that, in the medium term, may lead to an increase in irregular legal status among these nationalities.** This is the case for applicants from Bangladesh (80.3%), Pakistan (68.4%), Egypt (86.2%), and Tunisia (85.5%). Beyond the legislative changes, the recent overrepresentation of nationalities with high rejection rates among the broader asylum-seeking population is a relevant factor that helps explain the growth in the share of negative outcomes observed in recent years.

The picture is quite different with respect to appeals, for which the proportion of negative decisions is much lower than at first instance (Eurostat, 2025). Only 23.6% and 15.3% of those who had a final outcome in 2023 and 2024, respectively, saw a negative result confirmed. Most appellants receive special protection (62.9% in 2023 and 74.6% in 2024). Rejection rates on appeal in 2024 were significantly contained, for example, for Bangladeshis (7.4%) and Pakistanis (13.0%), while they remained higher for Tunisians (65.7%). It must be specified, however, that the volume of appeals is much lower than the number of adminis-

[2] i.e., the percentage of negative decisions over the total number of applications by country.

trative decisions at first instance (about 15,000 in 2023 and 14,000 in 2024) and it is not possible to trace back to the year of the first outcome.

Conclusions

Even based on partial data for 2025, it is clear that the migratory pressure exerted by sea and land arrivals remains far from the levels observed in 2023. While the agreements with Tunisia have undoubtedly led to a sharp decrease in departures from the country, the route through Libya has regained relevance by being, for the second consecutive year, the main point of departure for those arriving in Italy by sea, with a growing number of departures observed in the first eight months of 2025 (+51% compared to the same period in 2024). There is also a further slowdown in flows from Ukraine, that have stabilized at around 10,000 annual entries. Finally, following the slowdown in landings that occurred in 2024, the number of asylum applications is decreasing, against a growth in the number of pending cases (over 200,000). Data on outcomes in 2024 and the first half of 2025 suggest an increase in rejection rates for asylum applications, also in relation to the greater presence of nationalities characterized by rejection rates above 80% such as Bangladeshis, Egyptians, and Tunisians. For these nationalities, including Pakistan, the ratio between landings and asylum applications suggests **the growing importance of other entry routes, in particular by air and by land through Slovenia, a border for which closer and more transparent monitoring of entries has been advocated for years**.

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Chapter 3

The legal framework

Ennio Codini

There has been a lack of political will to capitalize on innovative experiences to improve general arrangements that have become inadequate or marked by serious criticalities.

This chapter reports on the main recent developments of the Italian legal framework related to immigration, asylum, and citizenship. It does not cover the externalization of migration management under the agreement between Italy and Albania, which is included in Chapter 10.

Asylum

The experience of the so-called humanitarian corridors continued in 2025. In particular, on 26 September a new protocol was signed with the aim of resettle, over two years, around one thousand refugees currently hosted in Lebanon. Other corridors were also established in response to the war in Gaza.

These are important and positive measures. However, it should be noted that **humanitarian corridors continue to be established as exceptional, occasional solutions focusing on limited migration flows**. They therefore do not present per se an alternative to traffickers for most people who move to Italy to seek asylum. Previous ISMU Reports it have often recommended that humanitarian corridors should be scaled up to **create a general framework that could offer, in all crises,**

legal entry to Italy for people fleeing their country of origin—a framework that today should also take into account EU Regulation 2024/1350 on resettlement and humanitarian admission. However, even in 2025 no steps were taken in this sense and there is no suggestion of ongoing reflections and sufficient political will to do so in the future.

As for Ukrainian refugees, in 2025 the temporary protection provided for them was extended by the Council of the EU until 14 March 2026. However, as a result of the order of the Civil Protection Department of 29 December 2024, **the specific reception system set up in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine was dismantled**. That system was based on financial subsidies and housing by families and civil society organizations, with "mainstream" reception (i.e., SAI facilities or emergency facilities) acting only as a second option.

Considering that most Ukrainians refugees in Italy have been hosted since the first year of the war (2022), it was reasonable to expect that what was conceived as temporary assistance would came to an end—following the same logic that applies, in general, to international protection. However, there were unfortunately no initiatives to draw on the Ukrainians reception model and rethink the overall asylum reception system, which is still marked by major shortcomings and unmet needs. The 2022 ISMU Report recommended such overhaul, highlighting how **the system set up for Ukrainian refugees had successfully leveraged beneficiaries' personal resources as well as those of families and civil society actors and how it had shown levels of flexibility that were entirely absent from the mainstream system**. Unfortunately, as with humanitarian corridors, there was lack of political will to capitalize on innovative experiences to improve general arrangements that have become inadequate or marked by serious criticalities.

Another key development was the Constitutional Court judgment no. 101 of 21 May. The judgement concerned administrative sanctions (fine, vessel detention) applicable when private ships engaging in search-and-rescue operations at sea fail to provide the Italian authorities with requested information or do not follow their instructions. The Court found such sanctions legitimate, but expanded on the issue of the "first safe harbor", namely the possibility for rescuers to disregard instructions by Italian authorities' to head and disembark in a designated port and, instead, opt for a closer one. The Court ruled that instructions from authorities that would jeopardize the safety of rescued persons cannot be deemed 'binding' and, therefore, rescuers cannot be sanctioned for non-compliance.

Labour migration

Decree-Law no. 146 of 3 October introduced adjustments to the rules governing the nulla osta (authorization) required for the entry of foreign workers. The same decree also reviewed the rules on residence permits for victims of exploitation, with favourable outcomes for those concerned. Decree-Law no. 146 extended

the experimentation of out-of-quote entries for care givers supporting older adults with disabilities to the 2026–2028 period—up to than ten thousand persons per year.

Each of these measures has its own rationale. The changes to the **nulla osta** rules aim to counter the tendency to misuse the procedure, which often leads to authorizations not followed by actual hiring. Improving the protection of **victims of exploitation** is also appropriate to encourage victims to report or cooperate with the authorities tasked with combating labor exploitation. Derogations from the quota system aim to facilitate new entries that are deemed essential by overcoming the rigidity and forecasting limits that come with **quota-based programming**.

It should be noted, however, that **these measures do not address the heart of the problems**. As highlighted in previous ISMU Reports, serious criticalities are found in the application of the rules on the entry of workers—which are linked, to some extent, to irregular migration. These criticalities do not depend so much on the flaws of this or that provision as on a fundamental flaw of a general system that fail to ensure matchmaking between supply and demand of incoming foreign workers. In practice, this matching does not generally occurs *before* entry, as required by the rules, but *after*. Tinkering with the nulla osta rules means dealing with minor details. As for labor exploitation, better protection of victims can certainly help tackling this issue but cannot be decisive. Finally, with regard to the quota system, it should be noted that the increasingly recurrent use of derogations indicates that the logic of "quotas" should be comprehensively overhauled at a time when labour needs forecasting is increasingly difficult and immigrants show a certain propensity to settle and change career over time.

Another key development on labour migration were **the protocols signed in 2025 for the creation of work corridors for people trained abroad** within specific projects designed to respond to specific labour needs among Italian employers. Two protocols are particularly noteworthy: the one signed in April between the State and the Community of Sant'Egidio, which foresees the entry of three hundred foreign workers trained in Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Lebanon over two years and the one signed in June between the State and the Waldensian Church, which will enable about seventy refugees to enter Italy as workers under specific training programmes conducted in Colombia, Egypt, Jordan and Uganda. While these numbers are very small in relation to the total number of migrant workers entering Italy, in the future this approach could develop further, potentially becoming a significant pathways for labour migration.

Finally, Decree-Law no. 146 also extended the time limit for issuing the nulla osta for family reunification from ninety to one hundred and fifty days, thus affecting the rights of migrants and their families.

Detention

The Constitutional Court ruled on detention in CPRs (Centri di Permanenza per i Rimpatri—Return Detention Centers) through judgment no. 96 of 9 June, addressing an issue that might appear merely formal but that, in fact, concerns the substantive protection of rights.

The modalities of detention in CPRs are indeed not laid down by statute but only by provisions issued by the executive—most recently, by the so-called Lamorgese directive of May 2022. **This entails weaker protection**, because a framework established by law is better suited to guarantee rights than provisions laid down by the executive, given Parliament's representativeness and the complexity and publicity of the procedure. This is why Article 13 of the Constitution requires that any deprivation of liberty take place not only in the cases but also in the modalities provided for by law.

The Constitutional Court was asked to rule precisely on the legitimacy of detention modalities in CPR outside the scope of a law passed by the Parliament. It did so with Judgment no. 96, declaring—consistently with previous case law—that such detention too falls within the scope of Article 13 and that, therefore, setting the framework other than by a law is unconstitutional. However, the Court did not consider it possible to fill this serious gap by applying the provisions of the prison system to detention in CPR, because even if both systems entail the deprivation of liberty, the underlying premises are different too since detention in CPR is in no way linked to the penal-policy objectives, unlike the prison system. The Court also ruled that it was not possible to conclude, despite the serious gap identified, that the legal provisions on CPR were unconstitutional per se. Therefore, the Court limited itself to issuing a **strong invitation to the legislators to finally lay down, by law, the framework governing the modalities of detention in these facilities**.

It may seem paradoxical that application of the prison system to detention in CPR was excluded considering that, in practice, such application would have greatly improved the protection of rights in detention centres. However, from a legal point of view, the Court's position appears reasonable.

If there was political support to ensure that the rights of everyone—even those with an irregular status—are protected, the Court's invitation to the legislators to act could be considered sufficient to overcome the criticality highlighted by Judgment no. 96. However, in practice, this invitation was not followed by no concrete initiative by the Government or Parliament followed to fill the serious gap.

This has led to a situation that is, in principle, unsustainable. If the legislators do not intervene, the Court will inevitably be called upon again and will then face a dramatic dilemma: **declare the CPR system, as it stands, unconstitutional because it does not adequately guarantee rights**—a decision with a disruptive political impact that is easy to imagine—**or tolerate that, due to the legislators' inaction, detention exists without the guarantees** under Article 13 that, nonetheless, should be ensured.

Access to welfare services

In 2025 the Constitutional Court addressed, once more, the long-standing issue of whether it is **possible to discriminate against part of the migrant population requiring a minimum prolonged stay in the territory—usually ten years—as a requirement or factor of preference for access to certain welfare services**. This form of indirect discrimination is usually proposed for services that follow a medium- to long-term logic, such as the allocation of public housing, and is justified, in terms of the equality principle, with the argument that prolonged permanence would enable people to create local bonds and, ultimately, decide to stay in the hosting territory— which is relevant in the case of services that follow a medium- to long-term logic and are, therefore, tied to the idea of the beneficiary's continued presence.

The Court had repeatedly declared such discrimination unlawful in the past, observing that, even though the argument described above may be relevant and thus serve as an essential prerequisite or a factor of preference for services following a medium- to long-term logic, prolonged residence is not, per se, adequate for such a presumption. Judgment no. 44 of 2020 on public residential housing is, in this sense, clear.

In 2025, with Judgment no. 1 and no. 31, the Court ruled on the same issue. Judgment no. 1 concerned, yet again, a law—in that case, of the Autonomous Province of Trento—that required ten years of residence as a prerequisite for the allocation of public housing. Judgment no. 31 concerned an older dispute on the minimum income scheme (Reddito di cittadinanza) and addressed the provision that a ten-year residence should be the prerequisite for people to access that service.

In both cases, the Constitutional Court declared the prerequisite unconstitutional for violating the principle of equality. In doing so, it reiterated that prior residence is not an adequate criterion. In Judgment no. 31, in particular, the Court emphasized that discrimination based on prior residence relates to the principle of equality in a way entirely different from discrimination based on residence permits. While both cases involve aspects that indicate a higher likelihood that people remain in the territory in the medium to long term, in the Court's view:

- holding a permanent residence permit gives foreign nationals a specific legal guarantee for remaining in the territory in the medium to long term—a guarantee that does not exist in the case of a temporary, albeit renewable, permit. Therefore, requiring it as part of prerequisites may be considered reasonable and thus compatible with the principle of equality when dealing with benefits with a medium- to long-term logic (as the Court held in Judgment no. 19 of 2022 on the minimum income scheme); whereas
- prior prolonged residence is not, per se, an indicator of the likelihood that people remain in the same territory and, therefore, cannot serve as a legitimate factor of discrimination.

At this point, the question of whether part of the migrant population can be discriminated against by setting ten years of prior residence as a requirement or factor of preference for access to specific welfare services should be considered essentially settled. However, considering how adamant national and local governments have been to introduce such discrimination over the years—even in the face of clear indications against it from the Constitutional Court—one may expect further attempts.

Citizenship

Several important developments focused on citizenship acquisition in 2025. First, in the **referendum of 8–9 June**—that ISMU addressed in a thematic page on its website[1]—voters were asked to **reduce the period of prior residence usually required to apply for citizenship from ten to five year**. On the one hand, this would restore the provisions from the old framework (from 1912). On the other hand, it would align rules in Italy to those currently in force, for example, in France and Germany. However, the vote from the referendum was not valid due to insufficient turnout—less than the 50% required by the Constitution—and, therefore, the ten-year rule remained in force.

It is difficult to state how the missed referendum will impact the possibility to review the legal framework in the future. From a legal point of view, one might argue that in the current legislature there will no longer be room for changes along the lines of the referendum, because Italians voted "against"—albeit growing voters disaffection and massive abstention among those in favour or against the proposed changes. It should be noted that the Parliament had not expressed any intention to discuss such changes. By contrast, in future legislatures, a new Parliament may return on this issue.

The impact of the **missed referendum is entirely irrelevant for the reform of the so-called ius scholae**—presented in 2024 by various opposition and majority parties—since this is an entirely different issue focusing mainly on the **so-called "second generations"** (which ISMU analysed in its 30th Report[2]). It should be noted, however, that the Parliament did not express any intention to discuss this reform before and after the referendum.

In 2025, Decree-Law no. 36 of 28 March amended the framework on citizenship acquisition on two aspects. Restrictions were introduced to acquisition by descendants of Italian emigrants—that was previously essentially unlimited. An additional requirement was added for migrants' minor children, who now need to reside legally in Italy for at least two years or, if they are under two years of age, since birth.

[1] https://www.ismu.org/referendum-acquisizione-cittadinanza
[2] https://www.ismu.org/30-rapporto-sulle-migrazioni-2024/

The first change enacted formally creates discontinuity with what had long been considered an untouchable provision and will undoubtedly lead to restrictions on the mobility of the Italian descendants, who often applied for citizenship precisely to leave their countries of residence and move to Italy or elsewhere.

The second change enacted is somewhat surprising as the **transmission of citizenship by naturalised parents had never given rise to criticalities**. This logic was often mentioned even by those opposed to inclusive changes that would expand citizenship acquisition to people with a migration background. Indeed, according to this view, transmission from parents who had become citizens remained the most suitable option to respond to the needs of both migrants and the national community as it valued the centrality of families in the Italian culture. **The rationale behind introducing further restrictions remain therefore unclear**, unless there is a mere, general desire to restrict in some way the possibilities for people with a migrant background to acquire citizenship.

Finally, Judgement no. 25 of 7 March related to a particular—yet important—aspect of citizenship law, namely the exemption for persons with disabilities from providing proof of knowledge of the Italian language to acquire citizenship, even in situations where disabilities make it difficult or impossible to acquire and demonstrate such knowledge. In this regard, the Court declared that the principle of equality requires such an exemption, so that everyone has equal opportunities to acquire a status—"being a citizen"—that is key to personal development.

Concluding remarks

Based on the previous analyses, it is not easy to draw brief observations. As highlighted, many developments concerned marginal aspects of the framework, e.g., the tweaks to the rules on labour migration. Others dealt with important issues, e.g., the protection of rights in CPR or discrimination in access to welfare services, and led to adequate, stable arrangements. Some developments, e.g., the types of migration corridors, occurred as part of experimentations that have been underway for years but were also a missed opportunity to upscale numbers. Finally, some initiatives were characterised more by non-innovation or restricting opportunities—e.g., citizenship acquisition.

These developments show there is substantial inertia in the system. Judges act to uphold principles but, due to their mandate, their actions remain limited. At political level, policymakers avoid change and, if anything, prefer to 'tweak' specific provisions with results that are sometimes positive, sometimes negative, but lead to little impact. The so-called ius scholae is the only reform attempt with any ambition but is currently in deadlock. There is not much to report on labour migration and asylum as well as reception of beneficiaries of international protection, despite the persisting major criticalities due, among other things, to the legal flaws that we have highlighted for years in our Reports and that can impact

Italy's role as an immigration country in the future.

There is yet some optimism that in 2026 some structural solutions, **specific initiatives or at least political will for reforms develop also spurred by the gradual implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum**.

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Part II

Inclusion and coexistence

Chapter 4

The labour market

Laura Zanfrini

Work is both a place where opportunities and rewards follow an ethnic-based hierarchy—with clear implications for present and future social stratification—and a place where integration is built and interethnic coexistence is practised, with major impacts on social cohesion and the quality of democracy.

The role of immigration in an ageing labour market

Like many other countries of the so-called Global North, Italy is notoriously facing the challenge of an ageing population and its consequences for economic growth, employment, pension and other forms of social spending, and the organisation of everyday life. It is against this backdrop that this chapter examines the role of immigration, and in particular its impact on the labour market.

According to United Nations forecasts (UNDESA, 2024), over the next 25 years in many countries of the "Global South" the working-age population will grow at a much faster pace than the capacity to create new employment opportunities. By contrast, in middle- and high-income countries the labour force will shrink by 10%, generating a shortfall of hundreds of millions of workers. **In Italy, the combined effect of a fertility rate that has been for many years well below replacement level and a high life expectancy will lead to a serious deterioration in the ratio between the working-age and the inactive population** and, in particular, a strong incidence of the 65+ population, which already today accounts for a quar-

ter of the population and is set to reach 30% over the next ten years[1].

These demographic dynamics is also leading to a growing share of "mature workers", with implications that concern both productivity and openness to innovation and requires to prepare their replacement in the personnel or in managing the business activity (in the case of self-employed workers). **The ratio between workers aged 55+ and those under 35 (i.e. maturity index)** almost doubled between 2011 and 2022, rising from roughly one senior worker for every two young workers to an almost an equal weight. Today, across all economic activities, the **average age of workers is already over 44**. Moreover, for two decades now, **international mobility of Italians has produced a negative balance**, reaching over 820,000 units (i.e., the difference between 1.7 million departures and 864,000 returns), especially among the working-age population (–579,000 among workers aged 18–39, –148,000 among workers aged 40–64)[2].

One of the consequences of this trend, according to most experts, is the **structural shortage of labour that, in turn, generates—and will increasingly generate—an additional gap that can only be filled through immigration** (see, e.g., Galli et al., 2025)[3]. A recent contribution by the Bank of Italy (Basso et al., 2025) also drew attention to this issue, noting that maintaining the working-age population and the employment levels depends almost entirely on immigrants, and that Italy's low attractiveness compared with other major European countries—where not only are foreign-born residents more numerous, but inflows are also larger—should be a cause for concern.

Even today we can observe that, in recent years, the pace of job creation has exceeded the increase in the working-age population, causing a rise in vacancies, falling unemployment rates and widespread concern among businesses that cannot find the human resources they need. The Excelsior 2025 survey indicates that, out of more than 5.8 million programmed hires, around one in two was hard to find. Furthermore, increasing upper-secondary and tertiary education, with the share of 25–34-year-olds with a university degree rising from 7% in the 1990s to over 30% in 2023, contributes to aggravating mismatches in manual and low-skill and low-pay jobs. This is reflected in the sustained demand for migrant labour, which has increased in the post-pandemic period. According to the Excelsior projections, Italian firms have programmed to hire 1,358,890 immigrants—23.4% of the total hires—and considered 53.7% of these hires hard to find. Assindatcolf & Idos (2025) estimated, for 2026, a need for 678,000 immigrant workers—almost two-thirds of the total needs—for the home-based assistance of people over-65s[4] that is set to reach 692,000 in 2028. The same assessment indicated a need of over 706,000 domestic workers—almost two-thirds of the total needs—set to reach 722,000 in 2028. Based on these estimates, for these two professional profiles the additional need for immigrant workers beyond those already employed would amount to almost 60,000 workers over the three-year period.

Considering the current situation, the peculiar age composition of immigrant population in Italy—more favourable than in the other European countries (Balbo et al., 2025)—produces a positive demographic dividend that, however, will vanish in the absence of strong inflows from abroad. Currently, **77.5% of resident foreigners are of working age (15–64), compared with just 61.9% of Italians**. Resident foreigners are particularly represented in the 24–57 age group, with over 70,000 residents in each single cohort, and are clearly over-represented among people under-18[5], despite many children and adolescents of migrant origin having acquired Italian citizenship, thus disappearing from the statistics.

In a labour market that in the coming years will undergo a massive generational turnover, **immigrants thus have first and foremost the advantage of a lower average age than Italians**, with implications for the future—see, for instance, their contribution to births—but also the present—by "rejuvenating" the employed labour force. No fewer than 53.8% of non-EU employees registered in INPS pension schemes are under 40, compared with 43.5% of all employees (Directorate-General for Migration Policies and for the Social and Labour Inclusion of Migrants, 2025). Among non-EU artisans, 26.7% are under 40 (compared to 15.5% overall) while only 19.6% are over 55 (compared with 43.4% at national level). Non-EU traders are also over-represented in the 25–29 age group (6.3% vs 4.2% overall) and the 30–39 age group (24.2% vs 15.2%) and much less present among 60+ people (10.8% vs 25.6%).

Differently from the OECD and the EU averages, where **the gap between foreigners and nationals in the labour force participation rate is positive for natives** (OECD, 2025)[6], in Italy it is largely due to the different demographic structure and the significant gap between foreigners and Italians in activity rate. In terms of stock data, this means that the share of foreigners in the labour force is greater than their weight in the total population.

In detail—and bearing in mind that the figures reported in Table 1[7], broken down by citizenship, underestimate the actual contribution of immigration owing

[1] As calculated by ISMU based on ISTAT data, *Demografia in cifre*, https://demo.istat.it/?l=it. Last accessed on 16/112025.
[2] In the in-depth analysis in its latest annual national, ISTAT (2025a) also notes that almost 4 in 10 young people who left Italy in 2014–2023 had a degree at the time of departure, with a peak in 2023, when 21,000 graduates aged 25–34 represented half of young emigrants.
[3] Some experts, however, insist on the need to activate potential labour reserves —see, for example, Bonatti, 2025.
[4] This estimate is constructed by statistically considering types of domestic work (home-based care assistants and domestic workers) and citizenships (Italians, EU and non-EU citizens) reported in INPS data to estimates of the 65+ population with barriers to self-care who resort to paid help.
[5] ISTAT, Demografia in cifre. Last accessed on 7/10/2025.
[6] It should be noted that comparisons from the World Migration Outlook are based on country of birth, not citizenship.
[7] For this chapter we use Eurostat data that slightly differ from that published by ISTAT and featured, for example, in the Report on the immigrant labour market produced by the Directorate-General for Migration Policies and Social and Labour Inclusion of Migrants.

to the large number of naturalisations over the years[8]—**the number of foreigners of working age reached almost 4 million in 2024, i.e., 10.6% of the entire 15–64 population**. Compared with 2023, while the working-age population as a whole grew by 2.3%, the foreign component grew by as much as 4.5%. By contrast, the overall volume of inactive people among the foreign population grew by 5% while it remained almost stable among the overall population, reflecting inflows composed predominantly of so-called "noneconomic migrants". Nonetheless, **the incidence of foreigners on the total number of inactive people is lower than their incidence on the active and the employed people**.

The overall labour force grew by 1%, while the foreign one grew by over 4% and now represents 11% of the total. In the context of positive employment trends, which culminated in a historic high in the number of working people in 2024, **the overall labour force increased by over 315,000 units (+1.4%) between 2023 and 2024 and included over 133,000 foreign workers (+5.7%)**. Unemployment fell by almost 7% among the overall population and in a slightly more significant way among foreigners. However, **the incidence of unemployed foreigners on the total number has risen from 15.5% to 16.9%**, reinforcing their disadvantage—something that can also be seen clearly when comparing unemployment rates.

Table 1. Population aged 15–64 by labour status and citizenship. Thousands. Year 2024

	EU citizens	Non-EU citizens	Total foreigners	Italians	Total (foreigners + Italians)	% foreigners out of total
Labour force + Inactive, of which:	1,124.3	2,803.7	3,931.0	33,297.0	37,230.4	10,6
Labour force, of which:	810.4	1,915.7	2,728.4	22,069.0	24,798.1	11,0
Employed	729.4	1,718.4	2,450.0	20,699.3	23,150.0	10,6
Unemployed	81.0	197.2	278.3	1,369.8	1,648.1	16,9
Inactive	313.9	888.0	1,202.7	11,228.0	12,432.2	9,7

Source: ISMU elaborations based on Eurostat data.

As for the sectoral distribution of workers, the incidence of foreigners is particularly high in personal and collective services (around 3 in 10 workers), in agriculture (around 2 in 10) as well as tourism and construction—thanks above all to the contribution of the non-EU component. A more detailed analysis is provided by the Directorate-General for Migration Policies and for the Social and Labour Inclusion of Migrants (2025). Despite the dynamism of immigrants in self-employment and entrepreneurship confirmed by the most recent trends (Unioncamere & Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2025), around 86% of foreign workers in 2024 (over 2.1 million) had an employee contract, and only the remaining 14% (350,000) were self-employed.

[8] Using "country of birth" as a criterion would, in turn, have the limitation of including Italians by descent who, for various reasons, were born abroad.

Flow data too highlight the role of immigration both on overall employment and in specific sectors. **In 2024, about one in five employment contracts activated and recorded by the Statistical Information System of Mandatory Notifications concerned foreign workers (2,673,696 contracts).** Out of these contracts, two in ten concerned EU citizens and eight in ten concerned non-EU citizens. A very similar incidence of foreigners is found among those concerned by contract terminations during the year, with 164,000 contracts converted from fixed-term to open-ended and involving foreign workers—yet following a 2:8 ratio between EU and non-EU citizens. In 2024, foreign workers accounted for about 70% of the 379,505 domestic-work contracts signed and mainly concerned non-EU citizens in over half of cases. The incidence of foreigners among the total number of workers affected by the termination of their employment during the year was similar. In the same year, 164,000 fixed-term contracts were converted into permanent contracts involving foreign workers, again split between EU and non-EU citizens with a ratio of two to eight. Employers are familiar with the immigrant human resources, as by the fact that as many as 429,084 employers hired at least one foreign worker in 2024, i.e., 36.5% of all firms that registered new employment contracts.

Employment outcomes of immigrants and critical issues

As highlighted in the ISTAT 2025 Report, two years after the end of the COVID-19 emergency, labour participation in Italy has surpassed pre-pandemic levels thanks to the steady expansion of employment and a partial increase in real wages. On the other hand, wage trends have suffered from low productivity growth—a persistent feature of the Italian economy for the past twenty-five years—with consequences that combine with those of demographic decline and make the future more uncertain. In particular, the limited growth of real GDP—which is three to four times lower than in countries such as Germany, France and Spain—limits economic well-being, a circumstance that may related to people's disengagement with work and growing selectivity among young people entering the labour market. This is the background to immigrants' integration paths, to the extraordinary growth in the number of foreign workers—driven by the expansion of labour-intensive, low-productivity services—but also to the criticalities that continue to characterise the relationship between immigrants and the labour market. These criticalities both indicate structural problems—such as low activity rates, stagnant productivity and territorial differences—and are mirrored in the gaps between immigrants' employment outcomes and those of Italian-national

workers. Even today, **forty years after Italy got from being a country of emigration to being a country of immigration and despite the high incidence of incoming noneconomic migrants, foreigners continue to show higher activity rates than Italians** (Table 2). However, this is partly due to the groups of Italians—the young and the low-educated—showing considerably lower participation levels compared to the international average. Furthermore, this result is due to the male component and, for women, to the European one. Non-EU women, instead, suffer a decidedly negative gap with Italian women—as well as with EU foreign women, i.e. over 10%—and even more so with non-EU men—almost 30%—despite the presence of national groups that show particularly high activity rates such as the Chinese and Filipinos.

Foreigners' employment rates appear almost aligned with the ones of Italian—and have slightly increased between 2023 and 2024—but, in fact, result from very different performances between EU and non-EU citizens, men and women, and especially between EU and non-EU female citizens—with a differential of 9%.

Table 2. Activity, employment and unemployment rates by sex and citizenship of the population aged 15–64. Selected years between 2005 and 2024

	2005		2019		2023		2024			
	Foreigners	Italians	Foreigners	Italians	Foreigners	Italians	Non-EU citizens	EU citizens	Total foreigners	Italians
					Activity rate					
Totale	73,4	61,9	70,9	65,2	69,6	66,4	68,3	72,1	69,4	66,3
Men	88,1	74,0	84,1	74,1	83,5	74,8	82,8	84,7	83,3	74,8
Women	59,1	50,0	59,4	56,2	56,8	57,8	53,0	63,2	56,3	57,7
					Employment rate					
Totale	65,8	57,2	61,1	58,9	61,6	61,5	61,3	64,9	62,3	62,2
Men	82,0	69,3	74,2	67,4	75,6	69,9	75,2	78,1	76,0	70,5
Women	50,1	45,1	49,6	50,3	48,7	53,0	46,5	55,5	49,5	53,7
					Unemployment rate					
Totale	10,3	7,7	13,9	9,6	11,5	7,4	10,3	10,0	10,2	6,2
Men	6,9	6,2	11,8	9,0	9,4	6,7	9,1	7,7	8,8	5,7
Women	15,3	9,8	16,5	10,5	14,2	8,3	12,2	12,1	12,2	6,9

Source: Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa_argan__custom_13475007/default/table?lang=en,https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa_ergan/default/table?lang=en&category=labour.employ.lfsa.lfsa_emprt, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa_urgan__custom_13475111/default/table?lang=.

In a labour market that still poses major barriers to gender equality, **immigration—or, more precisely, non-EU immigration—thus constitutes a setback factor or, more precisely, something that is at the same the cause and the consequence of persistent disadvantage among women**. On the one hand, differences in activity and employment rates make non-European female workers—with some significant exceptions among single nationalities—a clear case of intersectional disadvantage, especially in southern regions where the migrant background adds to a gender disadvantage due to the local widespread "hostility" to working women. On the other hand, the dominant gender and cultural norms within some migrant communities legitimize female inactivity and thus end up normalising it even among younger women, as discussed in previous editions of the ISMU Report.

The difference between EU and non-EU women blurs, and almost disappears, when considering **unemployment rates**. Despite a significant decrease compared with 2023, the gap between foreign women and Italian women remains very high (the latter, in this period, have partially absorbed the negative gap with Italian men), even wider than the gap separating foreign women from foreign men who, for their part, are clearly at disadvantage compared with Italian men. Finally, the gap between EU and non-EU male immigrants is modest. Overall, one could argue that in Italy, despite all its peculiarities, the "immigrant labour market" is gradually becoming similar to that of other countries, with increasing convergence in the levels of labour market participation and greater exposure to unemployment risk, which adds to other structural disadvantage.

Among the other structural disadvantage, a critical aspect is **immigrants' work segregation**. This phenomenon is also confirmed by a recent ILO study (ILO, 2025) that indicates that 80% of immigrants are concentrated in the "secondary tier" of the labour market, characterised by low skills, low pay and low occupational mobility.

Segregation takes two different forms: "vertical segregation" (at job level) and "horizontal segregation" (in terms of distribution by sectors and occupations). To put this into perspective, 7.6% of people born in Italy are employed in elementary occupations, compared to 26% of people born abroad. Considering clerical support workers, the figure is 4.7% and 13.7% respectively. In the case of managers and professionals this gap increases further, with only 7.5% among the people born abroad compared to 21.5% among those born in Italy[9].

As for employment contracts signed in 2024, agriculture is the main sector (44.1% of contract signed involved foreign workers) followed by construction (35.8%), manufacturing (24.8%), wholesale and retail trade (15.4%) and other

[9] Eurostat, *Employed persons by migration status, occupation and educational attainment level. Migliaia di unità, 15-64enni, 2024* (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa_egaisedm__custom_18746557/default/table). It should be noted that in this case distribution is done not considering citizenship (which is unavailable) but, rather, the country of birth (a criterion that features the limitations described in note 8).

services (15.0%). The most interesting figure, however, concerns the occupations. On the top of the list of new contracts signed are agricultural workers, followed by personal care workers, waiters and related occupations, labourers and low-skilled workers in civil construction and related occupations. Considering the number of house-based work contracts signed that was mentioned before in this chapter, this highlights a hiring dynamic that tends to reproduce well-entrenched ethnicisation patterns and underpin the demand for migrant labour in line with the idea of complementarity. Only modest changes can be seen in the distribution across occupations of the 30,748 extra-curricular traineeships involving foreign citizens that were activated in 2024. While these concerned mainly retail sales assistants for both EU and non-EU trainees, the distribution reveals a divergence between EU nationals—mainly involved as secretarial and general-affairs staff as well as software designers, alongside waiters, bartenders and cleaners—and non-EU nationals—mainly involved as cooks, low-skilled staff in food services and cleaning, waiters and food delivery assistants.

As we have stressed in previous editions of this yearly Report, **this model of integration also affects Italy's broader attractiveness and, in particular, its (in)ability to hold the interest of the more educated segments of prospective migrants**, a phenomenon that the report of the Bank of Italy (Balbo et al., 2025) calls "negative selection"—a term we quote without any judgement about the desirability, work capacity or moral virtues of less-qualified immigrants. Moreover, by concentrating in the lowest-productivity sectors and businesses, **immigrants pay the highest toll in a system, like the Italian one, where wage levels are notoriously uncompetitive**, especially in relation to the cost of living in some areas.

Conversely, wage stagnation is certainly due also to the opening of employment opportunities for immigrants in low-skilled and low-productivity sectors. The flip side is that **immigrants still earn on average less than Italians and, more importantly, earn on average too little**. Besides the fewer hours worked, pay gaps can almost entirely be explained by the type of job and business, which points to structural criticalities such as the presence of low-productivity, low-innovation businesses and the dramatic expansion of poor jobs—which all drive people's disengagement and voluntary unemployment or inactivity. INPS data on employees shows that, in 2024, non-EU employees earned on average 30.4% less than all employees (€17,015 vs €24,449), a gap that was greater for open-ended employees (€20,939 vs €29,567) and smaller for fixed-term employees—these latter, in any case, have particularly low wages (€10,060 vs €10,626). By contrast, non-EU domestic workers earned 13.1% more than all employees, probably due to a higher number of worked hours per week, while wage levels were, however, significantly low (€8,809 vs €7,791). The same goes for non-EU agricultural workers, who earned slightly more than all employees (€9,477 vs €9,185). An ILO (2025) study comparing median hourly wages concluded that the immigrants' median hourly wage is 26.3% lower than that of Italian nationals. Moreover, the

gap—which is higher than the European average—has increased significantly over time (from 21.6% back in 2006) and is even higher for women, who face additional disadvantage to the overall gender pay gap.

In light of this data and considering not only the weak assets that many immigrant families have but also the lack of access to the intergenerational solidarity that is so valuable for many Italian households—e.g., grandparents' supporting children and grandchildren with their pension—**it is hardly surprising that the incidence of foreign families in absolute poverty is very high** (35.2% of households composed exclusively of foreigners, compared with 6.2% for households composed solely of Italians[10] (ISTAT, 2025b). This has a direct impact on people's everyday life and the future prospects of new generations, from food insecurity affecting 17.9% of foreign households (ISTAT, 2025c)[11] to absolute poverty hitting 40.5% of foreign-only households with minors (ISTAT, 2025b)[12]. This also undermines people's ability to plan long-term spending and investment, such as purchasing a home.

Finally, in a country where social mobility has stalled, **immigrants also seem to face a mobility disadvantage**. An ISTAT (2025a) analysis shows that being a foreigner represents a disadvantage when trying to see their income grow over time. Between 2011 and 2022 the share of those who had improved their condition compared with 2011 was 25% among foreigners—with real increases nonetheless lower than those of Italians—41% among those who had acquired Italian citizenship, and 51% among Italians. Job instability and greater risk for foreigners to work in the informal economy were mentioned among the causes of this gap.

Conclusions

The data presented highlight the risk that structural disadvantage become chronic and affect also new generations born to migrant parents, as discussed in previous editions of the ISMU Report. However, the same data also indicates that immigrants who have fully integrated in the Italian society through citizenship acquisition are more likely to improve their income levels over time.

This shows that integration support is **an investment to increase, among other things, immigrants' contribution to wealth creation**—especially in a country that usually attracts immigrants with low levels of economic and educational resources and where recent legislative changes that could encourage the arrival of more qualified immigration are being timidly implemented. Overseas training is not taking off due to businesses' limited propensity to invest on this despite their widespread concern on labour shortages. Converting study permits into work

[10] The incidence among households with *at least one foreign member is 30.4%.*
[11] The incidence among households composed only of Italians is 9.1.
[12] Compared with 8.0% for households with minors composed only of Italians and 33.6% for "mixed" households.

ones will also not be enough given Italy's low attractiveness for international students—with only 20,000 permits issued in 2024 (OECD, 2025).

The demographic and employment situation discussed in this chapter confirms that it is essential to keep modernizing legal migration pathways and overcome the staggering mismatch between policies and practice that has been present since the early stages of Italy's history as a country of immigration (Zanfrini, 2023) and which is still evidenced today by the low percentage of requests for entry that result in the signing of a real employment contract. However, it should also be recognised that **the evolution of the legal framework governing economic migration is by no means sufficient to ensure better labour inclusion**, especially considering that the positive migration balance—so valuable to mitigate the consequences of an aging labour force—is, to an overwhelming extent (around 9 cases out of 10) driven by the entry of so-called noneconomic migrants. These latter represent a group of people who could potentially contribute to the labour force but who, at the same time, have a high risk of being discriminated against in the labour market—as international experience teaches.

We should therefore remember that **work is both a place where opportunities and rewards follow an ethnic-based hierarchy—with clear implications for present and future social stratification—and a place where integration is built and interethnic coexistence is practised, with major impacts on social cohesion and the quality of democracy**.

This issue has also been highlighted in the latest edition of the International Migration Outlook (OECD, 2025), starting from the evidence that immigrants' occupational segregation is a widespread and persistent phenomenon that largely explains pay discrimination. Italy stands out as the country where concentration in the lowest-paid sectors and businesses has the strongest impact on wage gaps. There are several levers to tackle the issue, for instance supporting the recognition of education credentials—a fundamental step to both mitigate over-qualification (which is particularly high in Italy) and multiply the positive stories of immigrants who break free from the traditional "immigrant jobs"—something that could also help to attract highly-skilled workers from abroad. Other levers include improving language skills—an essential pathway to better professional and wage mobility. These measures are long overdue considering that in Italy the share of migrants who do not know the local language is above the European average while, conversely, the share who attend language courses is significantly lower [13](Balbo et al., 2025). The actionable levers also involve other aspects, such as sustained employment support, professional development, workplace inclusiveness and the creation of migrant-friendly ecosystems, that requires the involvement and collaboration of a variety of economic and institutional actors and domains, including housing.

On the other hand, we are not starting from scratch. **In the context of collective bargaining, immigrants' specific needs have gradually come to the fore.**

[13] Data from the migration module of the 2021 EU Labour Force Survey.

Almost half of national collective labour agreements (CCNL) allow for holiday accumulation and paid leave for people to temporarily return to their countries of origin or welcome their newly reunited family members. More than half of these agreements extend paid study leave to attend Italian courses. One in four agreements provide targeted training schemes for foreign workers, with bilateral bodies also implementing programmes that facilitate migrants' inclusion and counter their employment segregation. Around forty agreements contain clauses to promote integration and equal opportunities, sixty agreements prohibit discrimination based on citizenship, religion or political orientation, 20% of agreements recognise that workers of religions other than Catholicism can replace national holidays with those of their own religion or take unpaid leave to celebrate them. More than half of agreements establish observatories dedicated to monitoring immigrants' working conditions, collect data, practices and suggestions, and prevent undeclared work. Through these and other provisions, in the relations between businesses and trade unions **the idea is gaining momentum that integration is not only an objective per se but also an important condition for social cohesion and the development of the national productivity**[14]. This idea is being embraced by businesses through HR practices, corporate welfare initiatives and commitment to social sustainability and corporate citizenship.

However, much remains to be done. The approach of DEI—Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, now a mantra in people management—is still often interpreted, as regards migrant human resources, as valuing their willingness to perform roles that are difficult to fill due to their low qualifications and wages. There is still too little awareness in business management of the importance of acquiring, through ad hoc investment, the competences needed to manage the presence of people with different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds in the workplace. There is still insufficient monitoring of subcontracting and outsourcing chains, where risks of safety breaches, under-paid work and sometimes outright exploitation are engrained and primarily affect immigrants. Finally, businesses and their stakeholders still largely need to show co-responsibility and contribute to building a governance system for overseas recruitment processes and truly inclusive reception models that are free from cognitive bias and consistent with the ambition of an economy open to the world.

[14] This data is based on research by Angelique Viscuso for her master's thesis (The role of collective bargaining for the integration and inclusion of migrant workers, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. Supervisor: Laura Zanfrini) analysing 282 CCNLs in force in September–December 2024.

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Chapter 5

Education

Mariagrazia Santagati

The Italian school system is designed as a privileged space of intercultural encounters and mirrors a "super-diversity" where education inclusion of new Italian generations is implemented on a daily basis.

A highly multicultural educational space

Against the backdrop of progressive ageing and structural demographic decline, migration represents a key factor for the stability of the Italian school population thanks to the presence of children with migrant background who, to a large extent, were born in Italy. Since the publication of the 2019 ISMU Report and within the framework of the AMIF project *"Actions and governance tools for the qualification of the school system in multicultural contexts"* supported by the Ministry of Education, we refer to this group using the denomination *"students with a migrant background"*, which conveys the plurality of experiences of students belonging to this group. They come from immigrant families, were born abroad and—increasingly— were born and raised in Italy, and, albeit legally without Italian citizenship, they are de facto citizens thanks to long and extensive schooling.

The ISTAT survey *"Children and adolescents"* (2024b) highlights that, as of 1 January 2024, **almost half a million young people aged 11-19 are foreign nationals (9.7% of this age group)**, a value that is higher than the overall incidence of foreigners in the resident population (9%). The "children and adolescents" group also proves to be heterogeneous, as 59.5% are foreigners born in Italy, 11.7% are

born abroad but moved to Italy before the age of 6, 17% immigrated between the ages of 6 and 10, and 11.8% moved at age 11 or older. In addition, more than 6% of Italian adolescents aged 11-19 hold dual citizenship, while 8% have one parent born abroad.

In this framework, the Italian school system is designed as a privileged space of intercultural encounters and mirrors a "super-diversity" where education inclusion of new Italian generations is implemented on a daily basis. The data from this chapter refers to students with a migrant background without Italian citizenship, namely the reference group for the main available statistics.

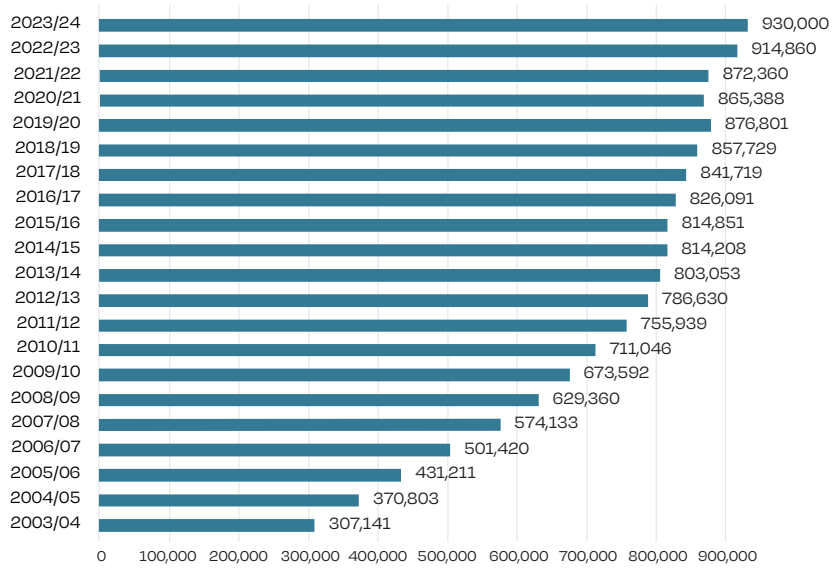
Students with a migrant background: Estimates for the 2023/24 school year

After decades of continuous and close monitoring, until now the Italian Ministry of Education and Merit has not yet published the statistical bulletin with final data on students with non-Italian citizenship (NIC) for the 2023/24 school year. For this reason, this chapter takes into account the most recent available data (2022/23 school year: MIM, 2024), complemented with estimates by ISMU ETS Foundation for the 2023/24 school year, using additional sources to explore specific topics in greater detail.

Overall, the picture seems consistent with recent years. The longitudinal analysis of attendance trends shows a sustained increase over the last twenty years, alongside changes in the intensity growth. While in the decade between 2003/04 and 2013/14, the increase in the number of students with NIC amounted to +495,912, in the second decade between 2013/14 and 2023/24 it was +126,947, indicating a kind of growth that, albeit not halted, has slowed significantly. At present, ISMU estimates that **930,000 students with non-Italian citizenship** were enrolled from pre-schools to upper secondary schools in the 2023/24 school year (Figure 1).

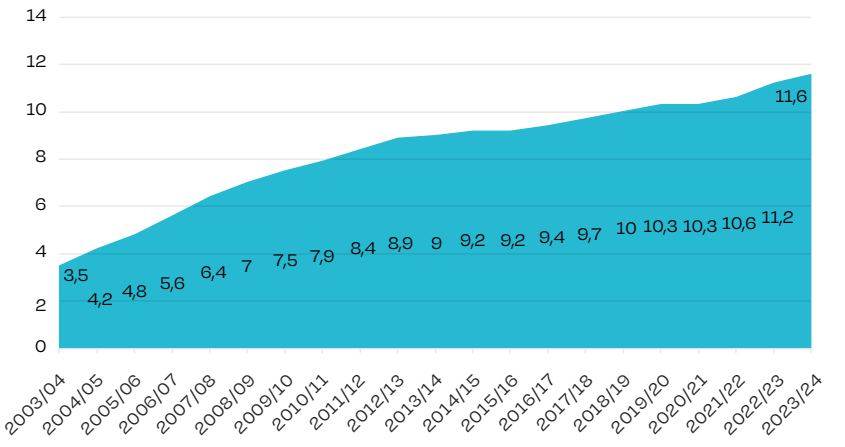
The average share of students with NIC of the total school population has also changed significantly, increasing from 3.5% to 11.6% over twenty years, that is, from just over 3 to more than 11 non-Italian students per 100 pupils (Figure 2). In the 2023/24 school year, according to the information available in the *"Portale Unico dei Dati della Scuola",* 51.7% of students with NIC were male, while the remaining 48.3% were female.

Figure 1. Students with non-Italian citizenship in the Italian school system. S.y. 2003/04–2023/24 . Absolute values*



Source: ISMU elaboration on MIM data.
* The 2023/24 figures are estimated by the Statistics Unit of ISMU Foundation, https://www.ismu.org/istruzione-e-formazione-banca-dati-sulle-migrazioni/.

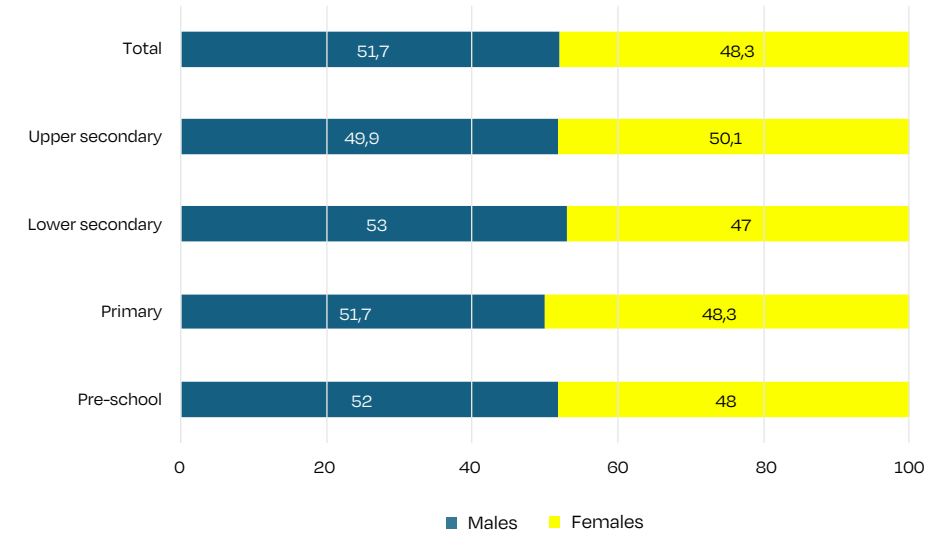
Figure 2. Share of students with non-Italian citizenship on the total school population. S.Y. 2003/04–2023/24. %



Source: ISMU elaborations of MIM data.

Of the total number of enrolled students with NIC, 36.4% attended primary school, one quarter attended upper secondary school, 21.5% attended lower secondary school, and 17.1% attended pre-school. By crossing the "gender" and "school level attended" variables, it can still be observed that **in the first cycle of education (primary and lower secondary school) girls were the majority, while in the second cycle (upper secondary school), they were almost equally represented**, as they accounted for 49.9% of upper secondary students compared to 50.1% males (Figure 3). At each education level, children of immigrants born in Italy represented the majority of enrolled students, ranging from the highest percentage of 80.7% of those born in Italy in pre-schools to 51.8% in upper secondary schools (IDOS, 2025: 499).
Data confirm that the majority of students with NIC were concentrated in the **northern regions** in 2023/24 (38.3% in North-West, 25.7% in North-East), followed by central regions (22.1%) and southern regions. Lombardy continues to host more than one quarter (26%) of students with NIC (235,826) while at the same time, the region's total school population continues to decline between 2020 and 2023, decreasing from 1,173,000 to 1,132,000 students and losing around 40,000 students.[1]

Figure 3. Distribution of students with non-Italian citizenship by gender and education level. S.y. 2023/24. %

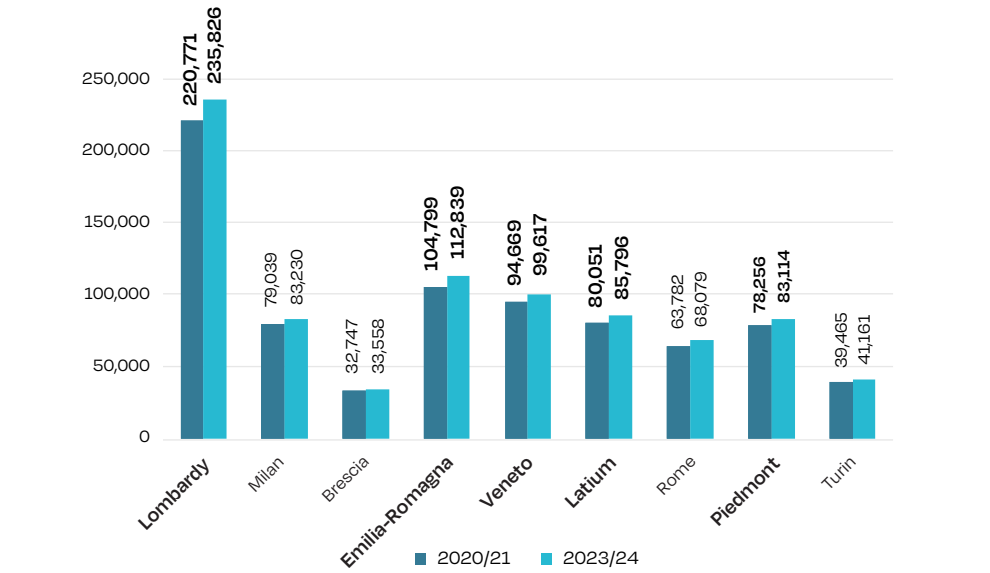


Source: ISMU elaborations of MIM data.

[1] https://www.mim.gov.it/documents/9064803/0/3.1+-+Alunni+iscritti+in+Lombardia+dal+2020-2021+al+2025-2026_OK.pdf/23bce92c-ce4f-1d9c-5d40-4b3c443d2739?t=1757524701588.

In terms of the number of foreign students, Lombardy is followed by Emilia-Romagna, where students with non-Italian citizenship represent 18.7% (112,839 students) of the regional school population, the highest value nationwide[2]. **Milan is the Italian province with the largest number of students with NIC** (83,230), followed by Rome (68,079), Turin (41,461), and Brescia (33,558). As shown in Figure 4, in the last four s.y., an increase was recorded in these areas, especially in Lombardy (+15,000) and Emilia-Romagna (+8,000). Among provinces, Rome is the province with the greatest increase (+4,300), followed by Milan (+4,200).

Figure 4. Regions and provinces with the highest number of students with non-Italian citizenship. S.Y. 2020/21-2023/24. Absolute values.



Source: ISMU elaborations of MIM data.

The analysis of more recent data on the children with a migrant background in the main Italian metropolitan areas by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (2025) highlights clear territorial variability. With regard to minors of foreign parents, cities are almost evenly divided between those with more and less than 1,000 minors of foreign parents per year. The figures range from a minimum of Cagliari (109 foreign minors) to a maximum of Milan (4,660), while the highest incidence is recorded in Venice (21.6%), followed by Milan (20.6%), Bologna (19.6%), and Genoa (19%).

[2] https://www.istruzioneer.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/23_24-14-Studenti-con-cittadinanza-non-italiana.pdf.

Similar imbalances, as expected, can be found in the distribution of non-EU students: Milan in its metropolitan area hosts around 74,000 non-EU students, Rome 44,000, Turin 25,000, while southern cities such as Naples show values of around 13,000. **Considering unaccompanied foreign minors (UAMs), Milan remains the leading city in terms of presence (over 1,000)**, but Sicily—and in particular Catania (745)—also shows very high numbers, followed by Rome (685), **outlining a diversified geographical distribution of minors** that also includes southern areas characterised by high vulnerability. As highlighted in other studies (Barzaghi, Santagati, 2025), only 21% of a representative sample of UAMs from a survey conducted between 2020 and 2022 were enrolled in school or training programmes that were also open to Italian students—therefore not CPIAs, i.e., the Provincial Centres for Adult Education—and offered formal certificates.

Table 1. Number of foreign minors in major metropolitan cities. Absolute values and %

Province	Foreign born	Foreign born on total born	Non-EU students	Unaccompanied minors in the reception system	Country of unaccompanied minors
Bari	460	5,4	7,985	145	Gambia 28,3
Bologna	1,336	19,6	18,881	498	Ukraine 26,5
Cagliari	109	5,3	2,214	126	Ukraine 73
Catania	304	3,4	3,795	745	Guinea 16
Florence	1,083	17,4	19,058	342	Tunisia 22,5
Genoa	880	19,0	13,668	485	Egypt 50,5
Messina	222	5,6	3,111	441	Gambia 18,6
Milan	4,660	20,6	74,059	1.086	Ukraine 51,4
Naples	1,025	4,1	13,421	463	Egypt 19,4
Palermo	373	3,8	4,435	290	Guinea 20,7
Reggio Calabria	242	6,1	2,982	306	Ukraine 33,7
Rome	3,858	14,5	44,301	685	Ukraine 39,4
Turin	2,168	16	25,586	475	Egypt 28,4
Venice	1,088	21,6	13,731	129	Ukraine 33,3
Italy	53,079	13,5	741,085	20.206	Egypt 19,4

Source: ISMU ETS elaborations of MLPS Data – Directorate-General for Immigration and Integration Policies (2025)

Educational disparities between Italian and youth with a migrant background prove to be cross-cutting and take on greater relevance in Southern Italy. According to ISTAT (2024a), among 15–19-year-olds, only 93% of non-Italian adolescents have obtained at least a lower secondary education certificate, compared to 99.5% of Italian citizens, with markedly lower values in southern areas, particularly in Naples and Reggio Calabria (around 85%). In the 20-24 age group, only 53.5% of foreign young people have completed upper secondary education compared to 88.6% of Italians, with even more pronounced differences in Catania and Naples, where around two thirds of foreign youth do not obtain a diploma.

Overall, data indicates a strongly unequal territorial framework where the vulnerability of young people with a migration background intertwines with the structural weaknesses of southern contexts. As Girardi and Rocco (2025) observe, understanding such disparities requires moving beyond the individual or biographical dimension of inclusion and **adopting ecological educational policies that can act in territorial and institutional contexts to promote authentic and lasting inclusion**.

Students with non-Italian citizenship in Italy **originate from almost 200 different countries**. About 43% have European origins (with a prevalence of Romania, Albania, Ukraine, Moldova as countries of origin), 32% are of African origin (Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Nigeria, Senegal), around 20% come from Asia (China, India, Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh), and 8.5% are of Latin American origin (Peru, Ecuador: cf. IDOS, 2025).

According to the Reports on migrant communities in Italy (MLPS, 2023), the distribution of students by school level varies by nationalities. Filipino, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian communities—characterised by low birth rates, female prevalence, and strong insertion in domestic services—show a greater presence in upper secondary schools. Conversely, communities with high birth rates and larger shares of minors (Nigerian, Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Moroccan, Egyptian) are mainly concentrated in pre-schools and primary schools.

Overall, 48.2% of non-EU students are females, with a peak of 49.9% in upper secondary schools. The highest proportions of female students are observed among Moldovans, Ecuadorians, and Peruvians, where females also prevail among regular residents. Conversely, the lowest percentages concern Egyptians, Senegalese, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Tunisians, and Indians—communities that are traditionally male-dominated in terms of presence. Finally, a decrease in female incidence is observed in the transition from primary to lower secondary school for Bangladeshis, Egyptians, Senegalese, Tunisians, and Pakistanis. This share rises again in upper secondary school only among Tunisian students, while it decreases further among Egyptians (42.2%) and Bangladeshis (44.9%).

Educational pathways, school choices and aspirations of young people of migrant origin

Examining difficulties and disparities experienced by immigrant-origin students, **early school leaving** remains an area of evident inequality for foreign students compared to native ones. The 2015-2024 trend data on *Early Leavers from Education and Training* (ELET), that is, young people aged 18-24 who stopped at lower secondary education (Table 2), shows that Italy has aligned with European levels, with an average of 8.5 ELET per 100 young people compared to 8.1 in the EU-27. The situation progressively worsens at European level, and even more in the Italian context, when considering males, foreigner-born students, and finally **foreign-born male students**. Indeed, Italian data for 2024 does not differ much from European data, except for the worse situation of foreign males.

Table 2. ELETs (18–24 y.o.) by place of birth. 2015–2024. %

	ELET EU27				ELET ITALY			
	Tot.	Males	Foreign -born	Male foreign-born	Tot.	Males	Foreign -born	Male foreign-born
2015	10	11,5	25,3	26,4	12,8	15,5	34,1	38,2
2016	9,5	11,0	25,3	26,4	11,8	14,3	32,8	35,1
2017	9,4	10,9	24,7	26,2	12,1	14,8	33,1	35
2018	9,2	10,7	25,4	27,8	12,2	14,3	37,6	38,6
2019	8,8	10,4	25,4	27,8	11,3	13,1	36,3	39,2
2020	8,7	10,5	25,9	28,5	12,1	14,6	37,2	41,3
2021	8,5	10,0	25,4	29,7	08,9	12,7	32,5	37,6
2022	8,3	9,7	28,0	28,0	9,8	11,6	38,1	36,2
2023	8,2	9,8	24,6	27,7	9,0	11,4	26,8	32,9
2024	8,1	9,6	23,1	25,7	8,5	10,6	24,3	29,2

Source: ISMU ETS elaborations of Eurostat data.

Furthermore, in Italy non-Italian youth show significantly lower levels of education than their Italian peers (ISTAT, 2025). In 2024, the risk of implicit school dropout defined as failure to reach minimum competence levels at the end of the first cycle of education (Italian, Mathematics, English) is significantly higher among males (13.8%, +3 percentage points compared to females) and among first-generation immigrant students (22.5%), compared both to Italian students (11.6%) and second-generation foreign students (10.4%). Finally, family socio-economic background is confirmed as a decisive factor, as among students from disadvantaged contexts the risk of implicit school dropout is more than double compared to peers in more favourable socio-economic conditions.

Signs of improvement, however, have been observed in recent years, with a progressive convergence in **school choices between students with NIC** and Italian peers, although significant differences persist. Foreign students remain a stable component of technical schools, while their presence decreases in vocational schools and increases in lyceums, especially among those born in Italy. Nevertheless, a marked "lyceum gap" persists: among Italians, students enrolled in these types of high schools represent 53.7%, more than 20 percentage points higher than among foreigners, indicating persistent obstacles in the transition between lower and upper secondary education (MIM, 2024).

Educational aspirations also confirm this gap. According to the aforementioned ISTAT survey *"Bambini e ragazzi"* (Children and adolescents) (2024b), more than half of lower secondary students wish to enrol in a lyceum, but among foreign students the share drops to 38.3% compared to 52.4% among Italians. Foreign students show a greater propensity towards technical or vocational schools and a higher degree of indecision. Gender differences remain marked: 60.6% of girls intend to enrol in a lyceum compared to 41.6% of boys. Among national groups, Romanians appear most oriented towards lyceums (48%), while Albanians and Moroccans show aspirations oriented towards professionalisation. Data from Save the Children based on INVALSI elaborations (2025) add further detail on the interaction between non-Italian citizenship and family economic situation, showing that, given the same disadvantaged socio-economic conditions, among top-performing lower secondary students 60.7% of Italians enrol in lyceums compared to 52.7% of second-generation students and 48.7% of first-generation students.

A similar pattern emerges for **university aspirations**. Among upper secondary students, 56.6% declare an intention to continue to university and non-Italian students express such ambitions at lower rates (44.5% compared to 57.8% of Italians). National differences mirror those observed in upper secondary school choices. Only 38.3% of Moroccans and 41.3% of Albanians intend to enrol in university, compared to 48.1% of Romanians. Economic factors once again confirm their influence, as among students with a very good family economic condition, 67.1% aspire to university, compared to 46.0% of those living in difficult economic conditions, who show a greater propensity towards early entry into the labour market.

Despite progress, **significant inequalities persist in school outcomes and learning achievements to the detriment of students with NIC**. According to ISTAT (2025), 75% of young people born abroad do not reach a sufficient level in literacy skills and 67.6% are not sufficient in numeracy skills. Among those born in Italy from foreign parents, the shares drop to 57.2% and 52.6% respectively, while among native students they stand at 37.0% and 41.4%. The **INVALSI Report 2025** highlights a weakening of learning outcomes in Italian and Mathemat-

ics from 2018 to 2025, linked to structural criticalities and the persistent effects of the pandemic (Barabanti, 2025). In lower secondary schools, first-generation students record scores in Italian that are 22.6 points lower than Italian peers—equivalent to around two years of schooling—and 13.2 points lower in Mathematics. Among second-generation students, gaps are reduced to 13.3 and 7.7 points respectively. Similar trends are observed in upper secondary schools, with gaps of –19.2 and –8.5 points for first-generation students and –9 and –6.4 points for second-generation students.

Table 3. The impact of migrant background on learning outcomes in Italian, Mathematics and English (reading and listening) in upper secondary schools (final year). INVALSI tests 2022 and 2025

	2022		2025	
	First generation	Second generation	First generation	Second generation
Italian	-9,2	-8,6	-9,7	-8,6
Mathematics	-2,3	-4,7	-1,6	-3,6
English Reading	+7,7	+2,7	8,8	3,4
English Listening	+10	+5,6	11,8	7,1

Source: INVALSI.

At the end of the upper secondary schools, the disadvantage in Italian tends to persist, while in Mathematics it is significantly reduced, reaching similar levels for first- and second-generation students with immigrant-origin. Particularly interesting is the highly positive performance in the English (listening) test, where students born abroad achieve better results even than second-generation students, suggesting a possible favourable influence of migratory background on language skills.

Along the same lines, the CENSIS Report (2024) also confirms a growth in language skills among new generations, with 69% of young people aged 15-39 speaking at least one foreign language (compared to 50% of those aged 40–54 and 22% of those over 55), 29% speaking two languages, and 12% speaking three or more. Knowledge of languages is perceived as a factor of mobility and opportunity, particularly for working abroad, accessing better jobs, and interacting with different cultures. The vast majority of Italians (82%) consider English to be the most important language for children's future, followed by Chinese (17%).

Overall, data suggests that, although gaps persist in basic learning outcomes—especially in Italian—**there are signs that foreign language skills are more and more spread among all new generations**, showing a slow but progressive process of socio-educational inclusion and cultural openness.

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Chapter 6

Health

Daniela Carrillo and Nicola Pasini

Once again, the issue of health highlights the shortcomings of a system that not only fails to recognize, protect and safeguard the fundamental right to health of all people living in our country, but also underestimates the consequences that the lack of rights and protection for certain segments of the resident population will have on everyone in the years to come.

The health of the population with a migration background was investigated in several research projects in 2025[1]. The results of these studies are yet to be published but, in the coming years, will surely allow to better identify trends and their implications for people's psychophysical well-being. However, for some years now, many surveys and studies have already highlighted how the migrant population faces barriers of various kinds—economic, social, and/or cultural—in accessing fundamental services. These services are provided in areas such as healthcare, education, and housing, with barriers faced also by a significant portion of the Italian population, and generating substantial inequalities between individuals and within groups.

The 8th GIMBE Report shows a *"National Health Service in a state of structural crisis resulting from indirect underfunding and characterised by growing inequalities, increasing private spending and healthcare personnel leaving the public sector. Regions are facing budget cuts, shortages, and delays in implementing territorial reforms and the National Recovery and Resilience Plans. Without key*

[1] See, for instance, the MIGHTY project https://www.epidemiologia.it/notizie/webinarmighty and the Age-IT project https://ageit.eu/wp/.

intervention, millions of citizens risk renouncing care. GIMBE recommends a relaunch plan based on a new political, social, and professional pact to save public healthcare" (GIMBE, 2025: 1).

Additional problems for the migrant population or those with a migration background add to the effects of this structural crisis, such as logistical difficulties in reaching healthcare facilities—particularly among certain groups—and, especially, poor health literacy. These make it very difficult to use digital booking systems or to understand how healthcare facilities work. These are factors that influence well-being and health and, ultimately, the enjoyment of fundamental rights, especially among more vulnerable groups such as minors, women and older people.

This chapter addresses several critical issues affecting different people at different stages of their lives, such as the issue of voluntary termination of pregnancy (VTP) and abortion among women with a migration background, aging—which is increasingly affecting segments of the population with non-Italian origin—and the living and health conditions of migrants within repatriation centers

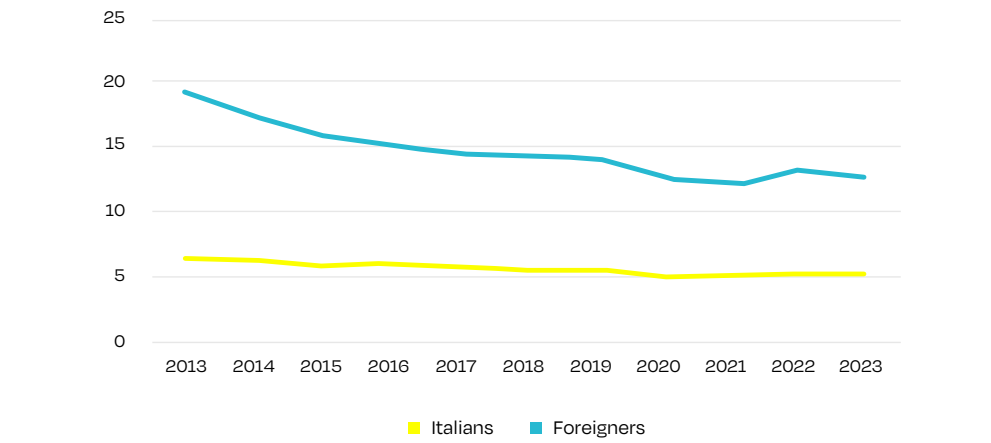
Right and access to abortion among women with a migrant background

In April 2025, the final results of the project *"Actions to improve the quality of data, the provision and appropriateness of procedures for voluntary termination of pregnancy (VTP), and the dissemination of information on VTP"* were presented. The project was funded by the Ministry of Health (CCM Programme 2022, Ministry of Health, 2025). The coordination of the project was entrusted to the Department of Women's and Developmental Age Health of the Italian National Institute of Health (ISS). The implementation took place in collaboration with ISTAT, AIFA (the Italian medicine agency), the Regions of Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Lazio and Sardinia, as well as relevant scientific groups and federations.

In particular, the part of the project dedicated to recourse to VTP by the population with a migration background tapped into the evidence by the Immigration and Health Working Group and its stakeholders (the Italian Society of Migration Medicine, Doctors Without Borders, Médecins du Monde). The project clearly shows the critical issues that this target population encounters in accessing the right to abortion and highlights the increasingly crucial role of family counselling in responding to women's health needs.

In 2023, the resident population in Italy with a migration background accounted for about 9%, of which women of reproductive age (15–49 years) represented 12.2%. Among women who had undergone a voluntary termination of pregnancy, **the share of women with migrant background went up to 27.4%, with an abortion rate of 12.4 per 1,000 compared to 5.2 per 1,000 among Italian women** (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Abortion rates per 1,000 women. Italian and foreign nationals. Years 2013–2023



Source: ISTAT[2].

Apart from a slight increase between 2021 and 2022, the abortion rate has continued to decrease among foreign women (-7% over ten years). In terms of nationality, the highest rates can be observed among Peruvian and Nigerian women, followed by Chinese, Albanian, Moroccan, and Romanian women. The reduction affecting Romanian and Albanian women—who have greater migration seniority—could be the result of increased familiarity with local services and, therefore, with family planning.

As highlighted in the ISS report on women who had an abortion, foreign women have more children compared to Italian women (49% have at least two children, vs 32%), are more often married (47.2% vs. 28.8%) and are less educated and less active in the labour market (Angelucci et al., 2025). **Low educational attainment and lack of employment play a clear role in the inadequate or inexistent use of services.**

The report also clearly highlights the important role of family counselling services, which remain the first choice among immigrant women or women with a migration background—22.1% of this group turn to counselling services, compared to 13.8% of Italian women. **These services represent a fundamental space in fostering maternal and child health and would require targeted support and**

[2] ISTAT data collected from "Interventions to improve data quality, prevention, and the appropriateness of procedures for induced abortion (IVG): the CCM project", available at https://www.epicentro.iss.it/ivg/progetto-ccm-2022.

greater investment in human and logistical resources. In particular, with regard to the right to abortion, more resources should be invested in training staff on interpretation and cultural mediation and in developing multilingual background materials that can provide clear information on procedures and available services.

While staff training is considered a priority—demonstrating how this activity should never be underestimated—the report also focuses on the **need to overcome stereotypes and biases among social and healthcare workers**, who are still too inclined to view foreign women as fragile and non-autonomous persons who are often considered incapable of using contraception.

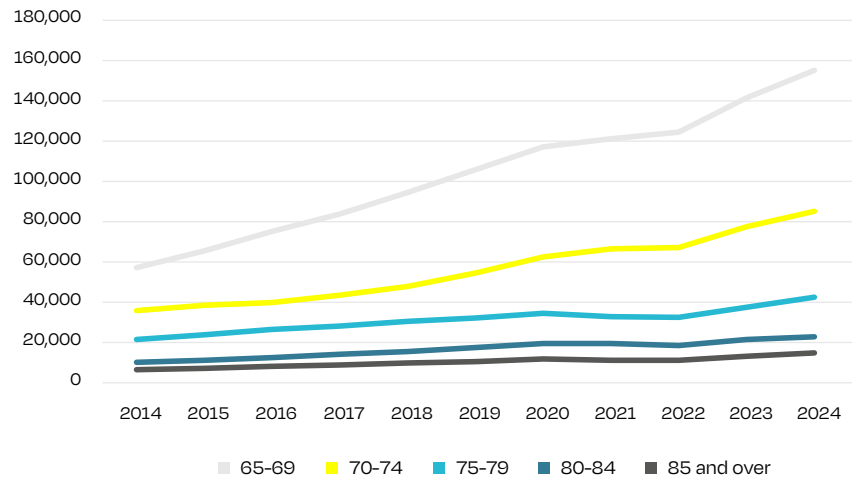
Women with a migration background undergo medical abortion in 56.1% of cases, compared to 59.4% among Italian women. This difference, albeit not very significant, lies in the late request for VTP—which can be carried out up to the ninth week—and in the higher perception that this procedure is more difficult to manage independently by women—an idea that is often shared not only by women but also by healthcare professionals. Women's concerns around particularly complex medical procedures are compounded by those of professionals, who fear that these procedures might not be managed correctly and independently. In this context, access to less traumatic and invasive alternatives to surgical procedures is limited, and the latter are more often offered. To this end, strengthening services—especially in terms of staffing and time dedicated to listening to women—would allow to establish a more constructive and clear dialogue, thereby improving access to this service (Angelucci et al., 2025).

An aging process that is already underway

Using services to improve health protection is even more important for the elderly population. Italy has been a country of immigration for more than half a century and, even though the arrival of many people and the formation of new families continue to keep the foreign population younger than the Italian population, the older segment has continued to grow over the years (Figure 2).

The migrant population is increasingly old as it is composed of those who came to Italy at a young age in the 1980s and 1990s and are now ageing and of those who migrated at a later stage of their life following a very different migration path. This is the case of the *zero generation*, a term used to refer to people who came to Italy through family reunification with the aim of supporting their sons and daughters engaged in the labour market, caring for their grandchildren and carrying out domestic activities (King et al., 2014). In addition, there has been a growing migration of family caregivers—who are entirely women—mainly from Eastern Europe, but also from the Philippines, who arrived in Italy between their fifties and sixties. A third segment includes people from economically advanced countries who, upon reaching retirement age, have chosen Italy as their elective residence.

Figure 2. Elderly people with a migration background in Italy by age group. Years 2014–2024



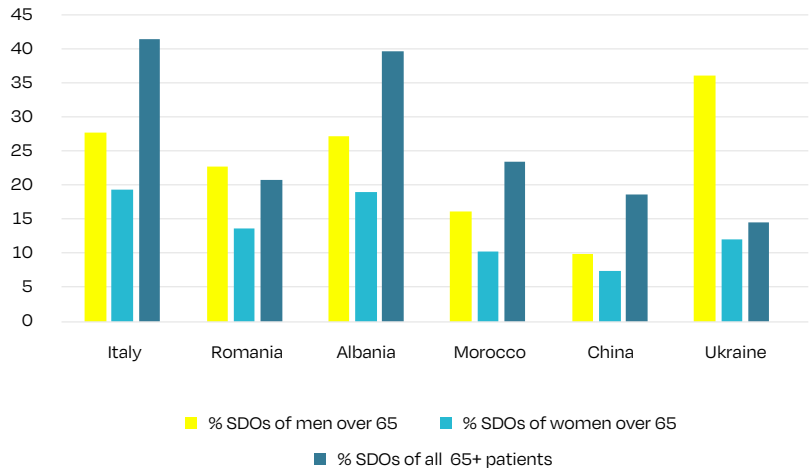
Source: Eurostat (2025)

Within all these groups, needs—as well as resources to be resilient—are highly heterogeneous and depend on individual characteristics and on a multiplicity of factors such as origin, gender, social class, level of education, and religion.

Health data is still partial and difficult to analyze also because, due to citizenship acquisition, an increasingly substantial part of the migrant population is aggregated with the native population, partially distorting the outcomes of diachronic and/or synchronic analyses, especially across different territories.

Keeping this limitation in mind, it is nevertheless interesting to look at hospital discharge records (HDRs, SDOs in Italian) for 2023 (Figure 3) to assess the different access to hospital facilities among the foreign population aged over 64. In particular, the main nationalities and their comparison with the Italian population indicate that there is greater proportion of hospital discharges among Italians and a clear majority of men in all populations, namely among Ukrainians, who show the largest difference between men and women. Conversely, HDRs among the Chinese population over 64 are the lowest for both men and women.

Figure 3. Share of HDRs among the population over 64, by gender and nationality. %. Year 2023.



Source: Ministry of Health (2025) and Eurostat (2025) data elaborated by ISMU.

The limited availability of recent statistical data[3] is compensated for by a vast body of literature that allows to show the **complexity of health needs among elderly migrants**. First of all, precarious and tyring types of work, unhealthy housing conditions often characterized by overcrowding, uncertainty on residence status, isolation, and disorientation all contribute to determining the so-called *"exhausted migrant effect".* This is the result of the health capital of young migrants arriving in Italy being depleted, especially when Italy is the first country of arrival in their migratory experience.

Secondly, the exhausting living conditions are exacerbated by negative acculturation and assimilation, which involve adopting habits that are harmful to health, such as alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, and changes in diet with lower consumption of fruit and vegetables (Pasini & Merotta, 2025).

There are also socio-economic and cultural factors that contribute to undermining access to healthcare facilities and, thus, their use, including low levels of health literacy that are often responsible for delayed—or even absent—access to care. This factor leads to poor awareness of their health status among migrants, who overlook warning signs and have limited knowledge of the potential support offered by healthcare services (Trappolini & Giudici, 2021). Non-compliance, especially in the case of chronic diseases, can also play a central role.

[3] During 2025, several surveys on the health of the migrant population were conducted but their results have not yet been published. In particular, within the Age-IT research project, a specific focus was dedicated to health, and the results will be presented in forthcoming publications.

Other barriers are the social isolation caused by the absence of family members or other people from alternative or complementary social networks and the lack of inclusion pathways that support and guide people during the aging process. **Individuals belonging to the so-called "zero generation" are among the most vulnerable due to their strong dependence on resident sons and daughters, their limited—sometimes non-existent—social networks, and their inability to speak the language and move autonomously within the territory** (Kobayashi & Khan, 2020).

The aging process is not the same for men and women. As in the general population, despite a longer life expectancy, women show worse health outcomes than men. In the case of the foreign population, there are additional overlapping factors linked to migration itself, the limited responsiveness of services, and social and cultural norms that define gender and generational roles that are not aligned with the health-protective behaviors of the receiving society. People's acceptance of their old age, combined with a fatalistic attitude, may contribute to the adoption of behaviors contrary to health protection (Horne & Tierney, 2012). Some studies have shown that alongside the socio-economic hardship faced by elderly women with a migration background, there is also the loss of social role within the family that may lead to reduced self-esteem and have major consequences on mental well-being. These effects are more pronounced among women than among men, precisely because life and work conditions very often push men outside the domestic sphere (Cohen et al., 2018).

Dementia is gaining relevance as it will increasingly affect the immigrant population or those with a migration background, in addition to the elderly Italian population. A survey conducted in the Lazio Region on Italian and foreign individuals over the age of 50 assisted by the Regional Health Service in 2021 showed a growing incidence of dementia among foreign individuals in the local centers dealing with these disorders (Angelici et al., 2024).

This result, however, rather than being reassuring, invites reflection on why this phenomenon may have been underestimated. First, the diagnosis of any form of cognitive disorder may be delayed or never occur due to linguistic problems, poor health literacy among users and barriers related to communication and acceptance of these pathologies. A key element in delaying diagnosis is also the scarcity of diagnostic tests validated in cultures other than the dominant one. However, within the ImmiDem project[4], a translated and adapted version of the RUDAS scale—commonly used for screening cognitive disorders and less influenced by cultural differences and language skills—has been proposed[5].

Nevertheless, the work of multidisciplinary teams remains essential to ensure

[4] https://immidem.it/en/the-project/
[5] For more information see https://www.epicentro.iss.it/demenza/migranti-progetto-immidem-scala-rudas

that services are capable of welcoming and responding to diverse needs, including overcoming stigma and feelings of shame that very often come with these diseases and that, in practice, prevent adherence to treatment.

Ultimately, **it appears that foreign individuals or those of foreign origin can be considered as part of the most disadvantaged groups of the Italian population, for whom low educational attainment has a greater impact than income in limiting access to healthcare**, as highlighted by the *ISTAT Report on older people* in 2019 and further elaborations of European data where health is found to decline among people of migrant origin is greater among those with lower levels of education (Solé-Auró et al., 2024).

Living conditions and protection of health in Return centers

In 2025, the debate on Repatriation Centers (CPR) remained very intense, especially on health aspects. The call launched in 2024 by members of the Italian Society of Migration Medicine (SIMM), together with the Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (ASGI) and the network *Mai più lager – No ai CPR*, was joined by many other organizations, including the National Federation of Doctors (FNOMCeO)[6] and the National Council of the Psychologists Association. The appeal called upon medical staff not to cooperate with the repatriation facilities by not issuing certificates of fitness for detention and by not participating, through their work, in the normal functioning of CPRs, due to the strongly iatrogenic environmental conditions of the centres (ASGI).

The detention system of CPRs, which provides for confinement for up to 18 months unrelated to the commission of crimes, places a severe strain on people's psychophysical health. As stated by the National Guarantor for the Rights of Persons Detained or Deprived of Liberty, administrative detention must guarantee:

"detention conditions that ensure absolute respect for human dignity (Article 19, paragraph 3 of Decree-Law No. 13 of 17 February 2017). Protection of this fundamental right implies rigorous checks by a National Health Service physician prior to entry, screening visits by the CPR physician, effective coordination with local healthcare facilities, constant attention by all professionals operating in the centre to ensure that individuals presenting health conditions incompatible with detention are promptly subjected to a new medical evaluation, and careful consideration and management of psychosocial vulnerability factors" (GPNL, 2024: 4).

In reality, the certificate of compatibility with detention—which should confirm the absence of contagious and community-threatening diseases, acute or chronic-degenerative pathologies, and psychiatric disorders—is increasingly reduced to a mere clearance stating only the absence of infectious diseases. In most cases, the document is issued by staff not specialized in migration medicine or detention medicine. Moreover, in some circumstances and in violation of regulations, the initial screening is carried out by medical personnel directly employed by the CPR managing body (BMJ, 2024).

As widely denounced by various actors, living conditions inside CPRs heavily affect both the physical and mental spheres of detainees. Besides the neglect of facilities there is also the lack of privacy, the absence of meaningful activities (including physical or sports activities), difficulties in communicating with the outside world, and the unclear future of CPR's residents. The abuse of psychotropic drugs and social isolation is particularly dangerous to their pathogenic effects and should not be permitted in CPRs except for health reasons (Rondi & Figoni, 2023; Cocco & Mazzetti, 2024).

In this context, the *"detained-migrant effect"* aptly exemplifies the consequences that detention in these facilities has on individuals and stands in stark contrast to the health conditions that most migrants still exhibit at departure, as illustrated by the so-called *"healthy migrant effect"* (Cocco, 2025).

Ultimately, detention within CPRs violates the right to health due to the material conditions of the facilities, the profound uncertainty about the future, isolation from family and social networks, and the sense of precariousness induced. All these factors significantly affect the well-being of detained individuals.

From a "healthy migrant" to an "exhausted migrant" to a "detained migrant." Once again, the issue of health highlights the shortcomings of a system that not only fails to recognize, protect and safeguard the fundamental right to health of all people living in our country, but also underestimates the consequences that the lack of rights and protection for certain segments of the resident population will have on everyone in the years to come.

[6] https://portale.fnomceo.it/la-fnomceo-accoglie-lappello-della-simm-sui-cpr-e-diritto-alla-salute

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Chapter 7

Religion

Alessio Menonna and Giovanni Giulio Valtolina

The religious composition of the population with a migration background is therefore no longer merely the result of recent and "emergency-driven" migration, but also the outcome of long-term processes of citizenship acquisition, socioeconomic integration and the increasing influence of international events and geopolitical factors.

Religious identity allows migrants to mobilise many resources within their migration process, especially in terms of coping and resilience when facing the high levels of stress generated by obstacles along the way. These resources have often been overlooked. Today, however, partly due to the increasingly visible presence of migrants of Islamic faith in our country, the public opinion and political debate seem to have started to pay proper attention to the religious affiliation of those arriving in Italy.

In line with previous editions of the ISMU Report, this chapter of features estimates on the religious affiliations of migrants residing in Italy in 2025. Estimates are provided in terms of foreign residents' nationality. They do not include those who are not registered in the National registry but do include all minors. These are, therefore, conservative projections that do not consider possible conversion or different religious profiles—especially among first- and second-generation migrants.

Religious affiliation of foreign residents

The updated ISMU estimates[1] as of 1 July 2025 show an increase in foreign residents in Italy over the previous twelve months across all religious affiliations. The highest increase relates to Copts (+10.3%), who grew from 84,000 to more than 92,000 mainly due to the growth of Egyptians (from 38,000 to 45,000, +16.1%) and Ukrainians (from 14,000 to more than 16,000, +15.2%), while Romanian Copts remained stable at 28,000. The lowest increase involved Evangelicals (+0.5%), who increased only from 145,000 to around 146,000 despite significant increases among Nigerians (from 29,000 to nearly 32,000, +7.5%), who are the main nationality.

Looking at the three main religious affiliations, the increase in the number of Muslims from 1.6 million to more than 1.7 million (+8.8%) is particularly significant. It is the largest increase in absolute terms and the second largest percentage after that of Copts.

In comparison, growth among Christians—both Catholics and Orthodox—is less than one third of that recorded for Muslims: +2.4% for Catholics (from 894,000 to around 915,000) and +2.8% for Orthodox (from more than 1.5 million in 2024 to just under 1.6 million in 2025).

Unlike Muslims, these two Christian groups show some of the smallest relative increases among all religious affiliations, except for Evangelicals and by excluding atheists or agnostics, who increased by only +2% (from 508,000 to about 518,000).

Other religious groups recorded less significant increases: +3.8% for Buddhists, +3.7% for Christians of other traditions (i.e., other than Catholics, Orthodox, Copts or Evangelicals), +6.4% for Hindus, +5.6 for Sikhs and +7.4% for people of other religions.

As in the past years, Christians still represents the absolute majority but have continued to decline in relation to the total number of foreigners. On 1 July 2024 their share among the foreign population in Italy fell for the first time down to 53.0%, with estimates for mid-2025 at 52.0%, due to the relative reduction in the numbers of Catholics (from 17.0% to 16.6%), Orthodox (from 29.1% to 28.6%) and Evangelicals (from 2.8% to 2.6%). Only the Copts show a slight increase (from 1.6% to 1.7%) while all other Christian subgroups remain stable (2.5%).

By contrast, the share of Muslims has risen from 29.8% of foreigners as of 1 July

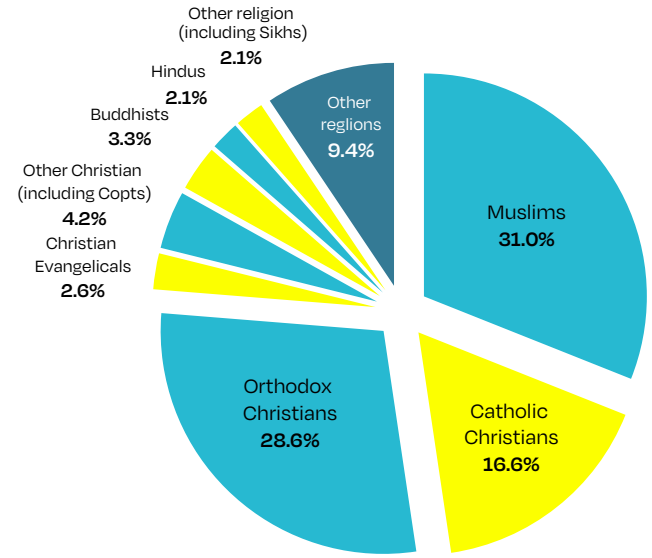
[1] As for the previous Reports, it was not possible to include in the count foreigners who are not registered in the civil registry (those irregularly staying or non-residents, for whom there are no numerical breakdowns by citizenship). All non-Italian minors were included; in the absence of information, national religious profiles were assumed to be the same as those of the respective adult components. Numbers on religious affiliation by citizenship as of 1 July 2025 were thus estimated by taking the number of foreign residents by citizenship (according to the most recent ISTAT data, updated to 1 January 2024) and multiplying it by the incidence of the various religious affiliations. Results were then updating to 1 July, assuming an increase proportional to that observed in the last year in terms of each citizenship and sex.

2024 to 31.0% twelve months later, thus strengthening their primacy in Italy ahead of Orthodox Christians—if these latter are considered separately from Christians.

The share of other religious has remained unchanged between 2024 and 2025: 3.3% are Buddhists, 2.1% are Hindus; 1.7% are Sikhs; and 0.4% follow other religions.

The only other notable change is among atheists or agnostics, whose number has slightly declined from 9.7% to 9.4%.

Chart 1. Distribution of foreign residents in Italy by religious affiliation as of 1 July 2025 (in %)

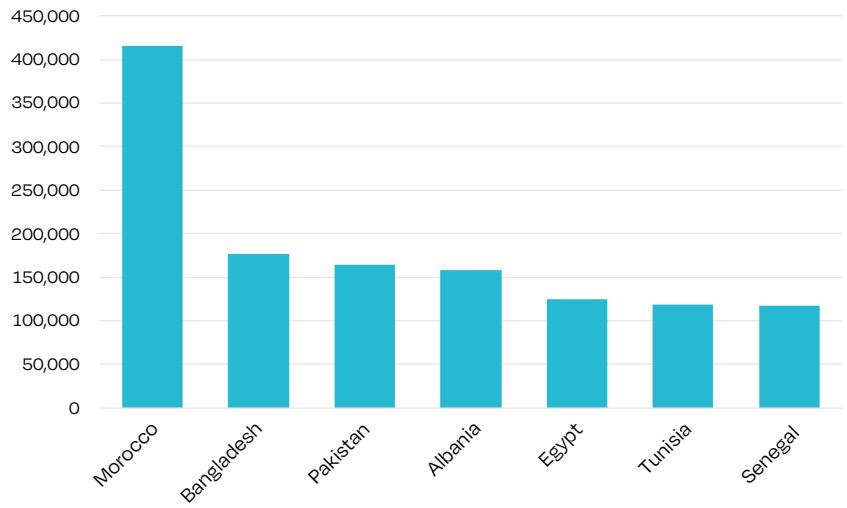


Source: Data by ISTAT and the Regional Observatory on Integration and Multi-ethnicity elaborated by ISMU.

The main nationalities among Muslims

In terms of nationalities, the groups historically most present in Italy—Moroccans and Albanians—lost ground over the last year compared with other collectives. In mid-2025, Moroccans still ranked first with 416,000 Muslims but with a very modest annual increase (0.5%, from 414,000). Albanians lost two positions in the ranking, with an increase of 1.2% (from 156,000 to 158,000) to Bangladeshis (+18.3%, from 149,000 to 176,000) Pakistanis (+18.2%, from 139,000 to 165,000).

Chart 2. Main nationalities by number of Muslims residing in Italy as of 1 July 2025



Source: Data by ISTAT and the Regional Observatory on Integration and Multi-ethnicity elaborated by ISMU.

Following a long-standing trend, the dynamics of the first four nationalities (Moroccans, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Albanians) has been substantially changed, with an increase in migrants from Asia—particularly from South Asia—and a decrease in migrants from Albania and Morocco. Other nationalities also increased to a varying degree, e.g., Senegalese increased by 5,3% (from 111,000 to 117,000) but lost two positions to Egypt (+16.1%, from 108,000 to 125,000) and Tunisia (+13.6%, from 105,000 to 119,000).

These seven nationalities account for three in four foreign Muslims present in Italy as of 1 July 2025. For the other nationalities values are much smaller: 27,000 Gambians, 26,000 Malians, 23,000 Kosovars, 23,000 Turks, 20,000 Algerians, 19,000 Afghans, 18,000 Sri Lankans, 17,000 citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 15,000 Guineans.

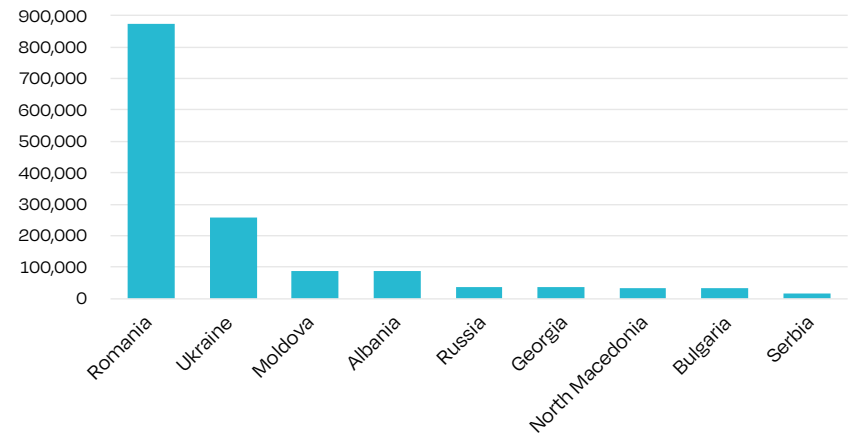
The main nationalities among Orthodox Christians

The mix of different nationalities among Orthodox Christian is, as in 2014, less geographically varied than among Muslims. This is due both to the stronger presence of the leading nationality—in this case Romanians, whose number (874,000) did not increase over one year but who still represent the majority (55.5%) of foreign Orthodox residents in Italy—and to the fact that all nine lead-

ing nationalities accounting for 92.7% of the total are from Eastern Europe. Romanians are indeed followed by Ukrainians (+15.2%, from 225,000 to 259,000), Moldovans (from 96,000 to 88,000, -8.8%), Albanians (from 85,000 to 86,000), Russians (from 34,000 to 37,000), Georgians (from 30,000 to 37,000), North Macedonians (from 34,000 to 33,000), Bulgarians (stable at 32,000) and Serbs (from 16,000 to 15,000).

In other words, as of 1 July 2025 the Orthodox Christians community in Italy is still predominantly composed of Romanians, whose incident has nevertheless gradually decreased in recent years due to the growing presence of Ukrainians and the even faster increase of Georgians—which reflects the recent geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe. This points to an internal shift that does not alter the strong centrality of Eastern Europe in this religious community—unlike the greater geographical variability found among Muslims and Catholics—but nevertheless shows that nationalities are diversifying and their incidence is gradually being redistributed.

Chart 3. Main nationalities by number of Orthodox Christians residing in Italy as of 1 July 2025



Source: Data by ISTAT and the Regional Observatory on Integration and Multi-ethnicity elaborated by ISMU

The main nationalities among Catholics

Catholics constitute the third-largest group among foreigners in Italy by size and, unlike Orthodox Christians, show greater heterogeneity of nationalities despite sharing the broader Christian identity.

The main nationality in 2025 remains Filipinos (from 141,000 to 140,000, -1.0% compared to 2024), followed by Peruvians (from 81,000 to 90,000) who have overtaken Albanians (from 88,000 to 89,000).

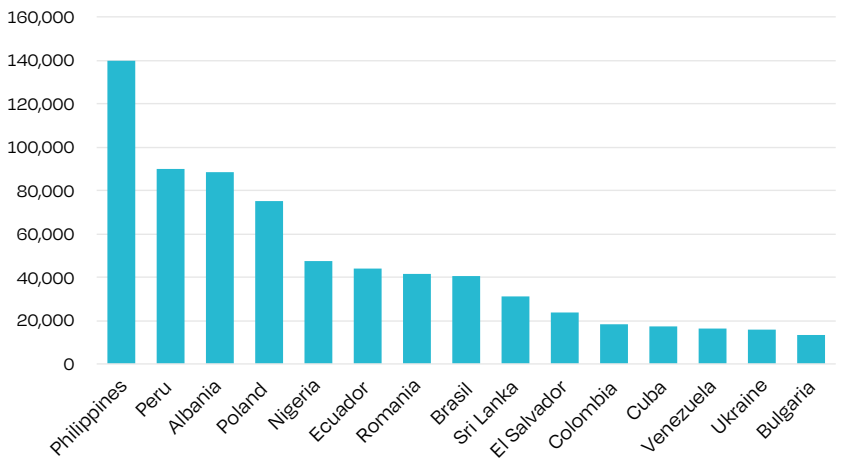
As can be seen, the top three nationalities already span three different continents (Asia, the Americas and Europe), which shows the broad and non-selective distribution of this religious affiliation. These nationalities also account for just over one in three (34.8%) whereas the top three nationalities among Orthodox Christians—all from Eastern Europe—account for 77.5% of the total.

It is also interesting to note that the other clusters of nationalities in the Catholic rank spans three different continents.

From fourth to sixth place, are indeed Poland (from 76,000 to 75,000), Nigeria (from 44,000 to 48,000) and Ecuador (from 48,000 to 44,000). From seventh to ninth place are Romania (stable at 42,000), Brazil (from 39,000 to 41,000) and Sri Lanka (stable at 31,000).

This data further confirms there is broad and more balanced distribution of this religious affiliation among migrants across different continents. Only from tenth place on do we find four countries from the same continent (the Americas): El Salvador (from 21,000 to 24,000), Colombia (from 16,000 to 19,000), Cuba (from 16,000 to 18,000) and Venezuela (from 14,000 to 16,000). The following nationalities are all from Europe: Ukraine (from 14,000 to 16,000) and Bulgaria (stable at 14,000).

Chart 4. Main nationalities by number of Catholic Christians residing in Italy as of 1 July 2025



Source: Data by ISTAT and the Regional Observatory on Integration and Multi-ethnicity elaborated by ISMU.

Geopolitical factors and evolving scenarios

The slow but steady change in the main religious affiliations among foreigners in Italy shows that migratory flows are determined not only by demographic or economic dynamics but also by geopolitical factors and the international context. In particular, for Orthodox Christians, the increase in some nationalities from Eastern Europe—especially Ukrainians and Georgians—appears closely linked to regional tensions and the conflict in Ukraine, which have generated significant movements toward Italy, altering the make-up of this religious group and gradually reducing the predominance of Romanians. Among Muslims, migratory flows show a growing relevance of countries from the South Asia. The strong growth of Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslims—compared with more limited increases or even decreases among historically present populations such as Moroccans, Albanians and Senegalese—indicates a gradual shift toward emerging Asian communities.

Part of this apparent decrease among long-established communities can be explained by the fact that many of their members acquire Italian citizenship. In other words, they do not disappear from the social fabric, but become formally Italian, reducing their numerical representation among foreigners and thus changing the statistical perception of their share.

This phenomenon does not, however, substantially alter the difference between consolidated historical communities and emerging communities that are smaller in size but growing rapidly.

Analyzing migratory flows against geopolitical factors allows to observe not only changes in numbers but also potential social, cultural and demographic effects in Italy. Emerging communities—particularly those from South and East Asia—come with new linguistic, cultural and religious features, with potential effects on the composition of the Italian cities and regions where they concentrate the most. At the same time, communities with a longer migration history are decreasing in numbers due to naturalization and, therefore, continue to play a significant role in keeping established traditions and social networks alive, acting as ‘poles of stability’ within their respective religious groups.

These highlights the highly dynamic and multidimensional nature of the foreign population in Italy. The religious composition of the population with a migration background is therefore no longer merely the result of recent and “emergency-driven” migration, but also the outcome of long-term processes of citizenship acquisition, socioeconomic integration and the increasing influence of international events and geopolitical factors. The observation of migratory flows in recent years suggests that, in the future, we will likely see further diversification of ethnic groups, a gradual redistribution of relative weights among the main communities, and the consolidation of emerging communities in strategic urban and regional contexts. In this sense, studying flows linked to politically unstable areas where local tensions have major impacts internationally can be particularly useful to anticipate transformations in the different religious—and cultural—components of Italian society.

Part III

Applied research as a migration observatory

Chapter 8

The criminalization of solidarity

Guia Gilardoni

The criminalization of solidarity, as broadly understood, can manifest itself in many different ways through legal and administrative instruments, through institutional and operational practices, and through public discourse that delegitimizes humanitarian aid.

The principle of solidarity as a legal principle has its roots in international human rights law, which recognizes the universality and indivisibility of fundamental rights and binds States to shared obligations of cooperation and protection toward every individual. The European Union, in turn, is

"founded on the values of the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for the human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, nondiscrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail" (Article 2 TEU).

In line with this, within the European civil society, solidarity is understood as a constitutive value of communal life, deriving from the idea that human rights are universal. Within the framework of migration policies, however, the principle of solidarity takes on a different functional connotation, becoming a compensatory tool for the fair distribution of responsibilities among States in hosting asylum seekers, with the aim of reducing the burden of migration management borne by border States (Article 80 TFEU). The Pact on Migration and Asylum signed

in 2024 further defines its operational aspects and provides for a permanent mechanism of flexible solidarity which operates through the relocation of migrants, financial contributions, and/or operational or technical support. With the implementation of the Pact, starting from 2026 solidarity among Member States will remain mandatory but will no longer necessarily consist in the reception of asylum seekers. Each State will be required to contribute to the common mechanism by choosing whether to receive a quota of asylum seekers or to provide a financial contribution or other forms of support to the States carrying out reception.

This creates a semantic gap between the principle of universal solidarity and a form of solidarity that is functional to the management of migration flows. It is precisely within this space that the criminalization of solidarity takes shape and, in a strict sense, can be understood as a situation whereby human rights defenders—whether nongovernmental organizations, volunteers, or ordinary citizens—are prosecuted by national authorities for having carried out acts of solidarity aimed at protecting the rights of migrants (ReSOMA, 2019). A review of the English-language literature shows that acts of solidarity that may constitute criminal offenses include formal or spontaneous assistance in crossing a border, search and rescue operations at sea or in the mountains, provision of water or food, shelter, or access to facilities where it is possible to sleep and wash, medical assistance, and participation in public demonstrations in support of migrants (Mayblin, 2022).

Criminal, administrative, and symbolic mechanisms of criminalization

The criminalization of solidarity, as broadly understood, can manifest itself in many different ways through legal and administrative instruments, through institutional and operational practices, and through public discourse that delegitimizes humanitarian aid. At criminal level, activities supporting migrants are prosecuted by pressing charges such as facilitation of irregular immigration, criminal activities, or even human trafficking. In the field of search and rescue (SAR) operations, criminalization instead takes the form of investigations, seizure of vessels, and administrative or technical challenges based on provisions of the navigation code, maritime safety requirements, or vessel registry regulations. These are compounded by port entry bans and systematic delays in the assignment of a safe harbour. At the administrative level too, obstacles are numerous and include fines, suspension or revocation of licenses, along with an increasingly expansive use of bureaucratic obligations that ultimately slow down or prevent assistance activities.

With regard to legislative reforms, since 2017 increasingly restrictive measures have been adopted affecting the functioning of nongovernmental organi-

zations. This includes the assignment of distant ports for disembarkation, the prohibition of rescue operations after the initial intervention, and administrative detention of vessels. Institutional measures are often intertwined with operational ones that create obstacles to accessing essential services and that result in provisions limiting or excluding undocumented migrants from access to healthcare, education, and emergency housing. In the Italian context, such restrictions have made it impossible for asylum seekers to register with the city population registry—a condition needed to access social services—introduced by the socalled Security Decree (DecreeLaw 113/2018, converted into Law 132/2018), despite the Constitutional Court later declaring it unconstitutional in judgment no. 186/2020. In this case, it is not a matter of criminalization of solidarity but, rather, of measures that complicate and discourage the work of those who strive to ensure fair and dignified treatment of undocumented migrants.

Restricting the work of mediators, lawyers and human rights defenders through limited access to preremoval detention centers and denied access to disembarkation venues is a way of preventing civil society from overseeing institutional conduct. In the Italian context, the abuse of antitrafficking provisions is widespread, in particular Article 12 of the Consolidated Immigration Act which does not provide a clear distinction between traffickers and rescuers and under which migrants themselves are often identified as traffickers.

There are also **cases of intimidation, harassment and surveillance enacted through repeated checks, interrogations, arbitrary searches, police monitoring of volunteers and NGOs, as well as media smear campaigns aimed at discrediting human rights defenders**. Criminalization, viewed as part of the "spectacle of illegality," also becomes a form of symbolic and political violence as it generates consent around the border regime and frames acts of solidarity as deviant behavior. Each case sensationally reported by media has a strong symbolic effect and contributes to reinforcing the idea, in the public narrative, that issues related to migrants are inevitably associated with crime and illegality (Escarcena, 2020).

According to the latest data published by PICUM (the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants) in its 2025 annual monitoring report based on a systematic review of major media sources in EU countries, **142 cases were recorded in 2024 in which citizens, volunteers and humanitarian workers were prosecuted in 17 Member States** for having assisted migrants in situations of difficulty or emergency. This figure is likely underestimated as the monitoring relies on mediareported incidents and does not account for numerous situations that do not receive public attention nor for those cases that remain hidden because they are unreported, not formalized, or classified as simple administrative checks, intimidation or informal pressure. The lack of an official data collection system and the reluctance of those involved to publicly share their experiences further contribute to a picture that represents only a portion of the real phenomenon.

Among the most recent cases in Italy, a relevant one involved the crew of the ship *Mare Jonio* of Mediterranea Saving Humans. The trial started in May 2025 and was the first case where the entire crew of a civil society vessel engaged in search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean was being accused. The case emblematically highlights how the **criminalization of solidarity produces not only judicial consequences for humanitarian operators but also affects the very meaning of solidarity, improperly associating it with alleged criminal activity.** The investigation stems from the rescue of 27 migrants transferred to *Mare Jonio* from the oil tanker *Maersk Etienne* after a prolonged standoff at sea in August 2020. The Ragusa Public Prosecutor's Office registered the crew as suspects, pressing charges of "facilitation of irregular immigration" and also alleging profit motives—both accusations that later proved unfounded. Nevertheless, the case was the first formal criminal proceedings against a civil rescue crew in Italy, marking a significant precedent in the criminalization of solidarity in Europe.

The indictment of the six rescuers involved sparked a heated public debate where sea rescue was turned into a suspicious activity. Following a logic of stigmatization, national media instrumentally amplified the judicial case, contributing significantly to the delegitimization of NGOs and instilling the idea that saving lives amounts to complicity with traffickers. This contributes to the construction of a collective imaginary in which acting in the name of human rights becomes a deviant act.

The *Kinsa* case represents an opposite legal precedent addressing the core of the regulatory framework that has fueled the criminalization of solidarity and family mobility for years. The case began in 2019 at the Bologna airport, where a Congolese woman was arrested for using false documents to take her daughter and niece to Italy with the intention of seeking international protection. According to the authorities, on the basis of Directive 2002/90/EC, this act constituted facilitation of irregular entry. However, the reference for preliminary ruling submitted by the Bologna court paved the way for a ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union (C460/23) which in June 2025 established that, in these circumstances, a family member accompanying minors cannot be classified as facilitation of irregular immigration. With this decision, the Court for the first time undermined the expansive interpretation of "facilitation," recognizing the **need to read EU legislation in light of fundamental rights and family protection**. The *Kinsa* case has thus become a crucial step towards limiting interpretative abuses of European legislation and has paved the way for future legal challenges to the repressive framework affecting migrants, their relatives and supportive citizens.

Another emblematic case is that of Nawal Soufi, an Italian citizen investigated in 2014 for having purchased train tickets for Syrian citizens who had just disembarked in Syracuse, enabling them to reach Milan. In 2024, the Catania Public Prosecutor's Office requested her acquittal, recognizing the solidaristic nature of her action. The decision—which found the actions of Soufi, known as the "angel of the Syrians", as nonpunishable—mentioned the constitutional principles of solidarity (Article 2 of the Italian Constitution) and protection of fundamental rights, reaffirming that an act aimed at protecting vulnerable people cannot be equated with migrant smuggling in the absence of a concrete benefit to criminal networks. **This ruling is in line with the growing jurisprudence clearly distinguishing humanitarian practices from genuinely unlawful activities**.

It is important to note that the Italian legal system already provides for a humanitarian exemption clause (Article 12(2bis) of the Consolidated Immigration Act), which formally protects those who assist migrants in situations of necessity, provided that such assistance is not provided for profit. However, this provision does not prevent investigations form being launched nor does it offer automatic protection. Volunteers, activists, and humanitarian workers may still be involved in criminal or administrative proceedings, even for years, before the solidaristic nature of their actions is recognized. Furthermore, the application of the exemption remains subject to broad interpretative discretion, especially in cases not linked to immediate rescue, such as personal support, logistical support, or ticket purchases. In practice, despite the existence of formal protection, grey areas persist allowing investigations and charges to proceed and fueling a climate of uncertainty that contributes to the criminalization of solidarity.

It is precisely in light of these criticalities that the European debate around the revision the Facilitation directive assumes particular relevance. The proposal currently under discussion does not introduce a mandatory clause explicitly excluding humanitarian activities from the criminal sphere—a shortcoming that risks further exacerbating the phenomenon and creating a less protective framework than that outlined by Italian jurisprudence in the *Soufi* case. **Without binding safeguards for those acting on humanitarian or solidaristic grounds, Member States remain free to widen national disparities** and legitimize further forms of judicial and administrative pressure against volunteers, NGOs, and supportive citizens. Thus, the absence of a clear clause could weaken the distinction between aid and complicity, hindering precisely those solidaristic practices that Italian law has recognized as expressions of the fundamental values of the democratic legal order.

The link between the criminalization of solidarity and migration governance

In light of the principles and values recalled at the beginning of this chapter, a question arises: why are the people who act in defense of human rights the ones being criminalized? The criminalization of solidarity is not a new phenomenon. The literature often recalls emblematic historical precedents, such as the Underground railroad in the United States or the networks supporting Jews during

Nazism—contexts in which solidarity conflicted with political decisions based on the suspension of rights for specific groups of people, i.e., African Americans and Jews respectively. Today we witness a similar dynamic. The suspension or limitation of rights applies to migrants, who are progressively excluded from the full enjoyment of fundamental guarantees, thereby rendering vulnerable—and potentially punishable—those who seek to protect them.

In this sense, the **criminalization of solidarity can be read as an integral part of the broader criminalization of migrants and as a mode of governance that uses crises as a governing technique**, thus allowing for the suspension of rights and the normalization of non-access to protection. "Criminalization of solidarity" can therefore be better understood in combination with "crisis governance", two sides of the same process where the former punishes those who attempt to reassert the rights that the latter suspends. Understanding this connection makes it possible to critically analyze the way in which the European Union, in the name of crisis management, is redefining the boundaries of legality, citizenship and the European democratic space (Moreno-Lax, 2024).

Under this approach, extraordinary measures suspending the rule of law are progressively normalized, **making explicit the assumption that human rights are no longer to be understood as universal, but rather applicable only to part of the population**. According to this understanding, undocumented migrants become illegal persons, and helping them becomes a sufficient ground for criminalization. Those who act in the name of civic solidarity through actions of rescue, assistance and defense of human rights are therefore criminalized because their solidaristic actions is in conflict with the security-driven logic. Punishing humanitarian aid thus serves to preserve the suspension of international law within a system of crisis and "permanent exception".

Although most proceedings initiated against European citizens end in full acquittal, their duration—averaging three years across Member States—produces a significant chilling effect, impacting not only those directly involved but also those who might find themselves in similar situations (PICUM, 2025). By discouraging solidaristic actions, this negatively affects the freedom of expression of individuals who intend to affirm the values of solidarity and human dignity through concrete practices. The **criminalization of solidarity therefore leads to a progressive restriction of European civic space** whereas citizens, organisations, NGOs and human rights defenders should be guaranteed the ability to participate in public life and freely express their commitment in this space without fear of retaliation or judicial proceedings.

In a European context marked by the growing criminalization of solidarity and the progressive erosion of the civic space, the WING project (*EmpoWerING Actors in Civic Space Protection*), coordinated by Fondazione ISMU ETS, contributes to the monitoring of criminalisation cases by PICUM and the development of more articulated knowledge of the phenomenon. Adopting a multi-actor and multidimensional approach, ISMU coordinates civil society organizations, legal

experts, scholars, journalists and policymakers from Italy, Greece, France, Poland and Hungary to gather uptodate evidence, co-create solutions to mitigate the effects of criminalization, and strengthen the resilience of actors acting in solidarity. The project includes the creation of a dedicated European database, the provision of methodological and training tools for an independent monitoring, and the activation of a structured civic-political dialogue at national and European levels aimed at translating empirical evidence into operational and policy guidance. At the same time, awareness-raising campaigns and transnational exchanges seek to reconnect different segments of civic space and reaffirm solidarity as a foundational principle of the European legal system. In this way, the project aims to contribute to research, advocacy and democracy, supporting the idea that protecting those who defend human rights is a civic obligation.

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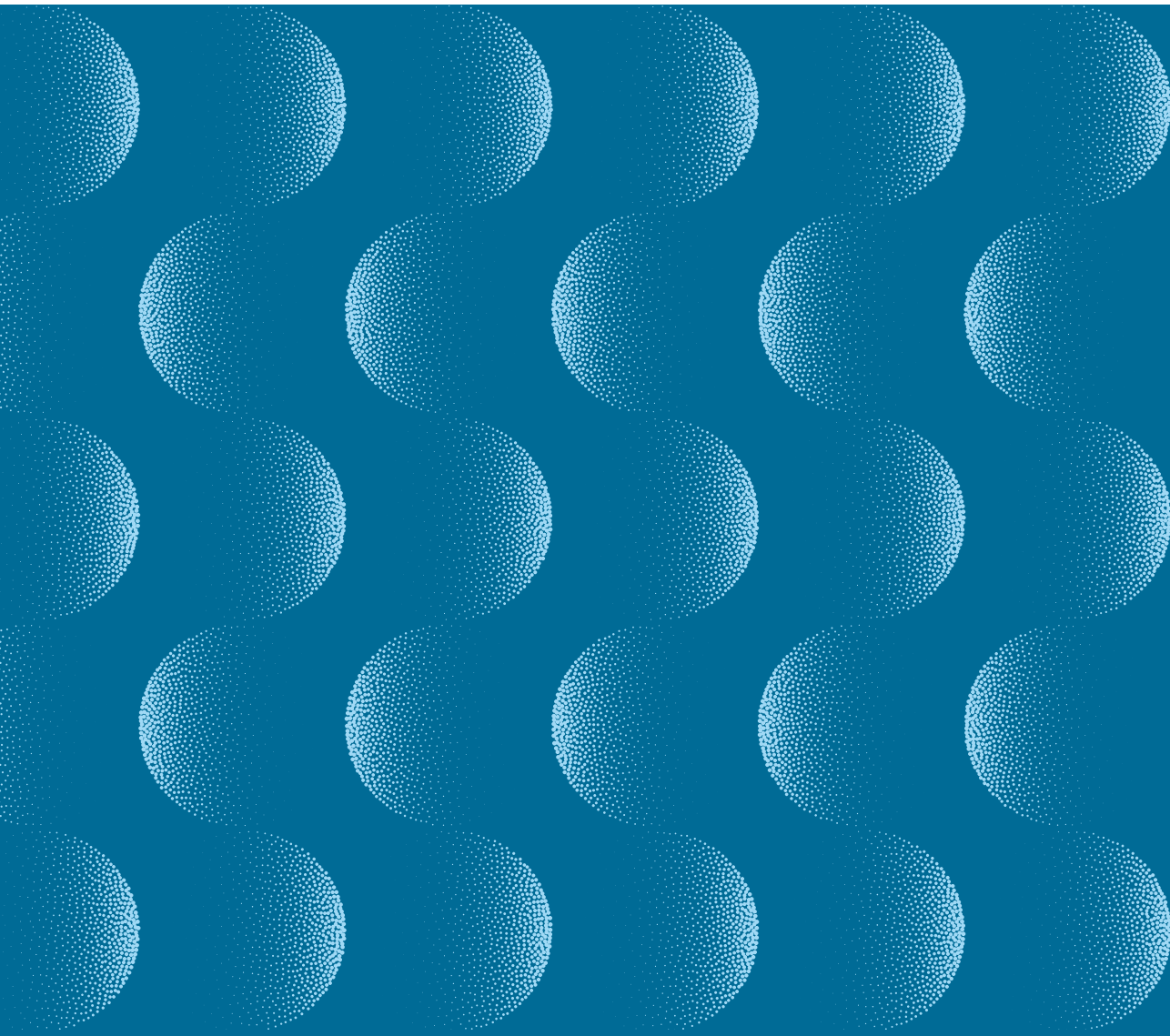
The ISMU Report, now in its 31st edition, continues to focus on the study and monitoring of migration in Italy. Through an analysis of migration flows, the presence of migrants, and pathways to the acquisition of citizenship, the report provides an overview of the most recent developments within a context shaped by ongoing geopolitical and social transformations, with particular attention to arrivals, asylum applications, and the evolution of the legal framework.

Thematic chapters are devoted to the main areas of coexistence and participation in social life — employment, education, health, and religion. These dimensions are essential for understanding the living conditions of populations with a migratory background. This year's edition also highlights the knowledge produced through one of the many projects in which ISMU is involved, focusing in particular on criminalisation of solidarity.

Foundazione ISMU ETS is an independent scientific institution that promotes studies, research, training, and projects on multiethnic and multicultural society, with particular attention to the phenomenon of international migration. ISMU collaborates with institutions, public administrations, the third sector, schools, companies, international agencies, and both Italian and foreign scientific research centers.



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