

CARITAS E MIGRANTES

# XXXIII Rapporto Immigrazione 2024

Popoli in cammino

Summary



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## International context

According to the World Migration Report published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of international migrants grew from about 84 million in 1970 to 153 million in 1990 and has now reached approximately **281 million**, about three times the number recorded in 1970. These figures continue to rise: International migrants accounted for 2.3% of the global population in 1970, 2.9% in 1990, and now represent **3.6% of people worldwide**. Migration is a global phenomenon with relatively stable trends—on a macro level, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia are regions where more people emigrate than immigrate, while Europe, Oceania, and North America have net positive migration—and migration flows have become increasingly entrenched in specific patterns, with migrants typically moving from the former “global periphery” toward the “Western center.” However, intra-regional migration, particularly for refugees, remains a significant aspect of global migration.

### Italian Context: Citizenship

2023 saw a gradual decrease in the number of **Ukrainian** nationals arriving in and residing in Italy, a trend that became more evident in data from 2024. Although up to 1.3 million internally displaced people returned to their homes and at least 324,600 refugees returned to Ukraine in 2023, according to UNHCR estimates, around 9.7 million Ukrainians were still forcibly displaced by the end of the year. Meanwhile, 2024 saw an increase in air arrivals to Italy from Latin America, particularly from **Peru**, due to the difficult economic and social situation and widespread insecurity in the region.

As of January 1, 2024, the population residing in Italy totaled 58.99 million people, a decline of 7,000 people compared to the same date in the previous year. Foreign residents play a critical role in stabilizing the total population: As of January 1, 2024, **the foreign population in Italy was 5.308 million, an increase of 166,000 individuals (or +3.2%) compared to the previous year**. Foreign residents now account for 9% of the total population. Of these, 3.109 million foreign residents, or 58.6% of the foreign population, live in northern Italy, where they account for 11.3% of the region’s population. Central Italy also attracts a significant number of foreign residents, with 1.301 million people, or 24.5% of the country’s foreign population, making up 11.1% of the region’s total population. In contrast, southern Italy has a smaller foreign population, with 897,000 foreign residents, accounting for 16.9% of the national total and just 4.5% of the region’s population. More than 200,000 foreign nationals acquired Italian citizenship in 2023, a figure roughly in line with the previous year (214,000), though with a slight decline.

**The foreign population in Italy is significantly younger than the native Italian population:** the most represented age group among foreign nationals is children and teenagers up to 17 years old (20.6%), followed by people 60 and over (10.8%), those between 35-39 years old (10.7%), and those between 40-44 years old (10.2%).

There were 4,244,521 valid residence permits in circulation the first three months of 2024, a slight increase compared to 2023 (+0.4%). Morocco continues to lead the list of nationalities with the most residence permit holders, followed by Albania and Ukraine. Tunisia reappeared in the top

ten of nationalities with Italian residence permits this year after being surpassed by Moldova last year.

The presence of foreign residents and the increase in mobility have reshaped how social and international relationships are organized in physical spaces. This is evident, for example, in the growing presence of the Hispanic community in Rome, which is now the second-largest Italian city for Latin American residents after Milan. These communities actively shape and redefine the spaces they inhabit.

## **Crime and Discrimination: Both Perpetrators and Victims**

The data on the presence of foreigners in penal institutions remains consistent with previous years. As of December 31, 2023, there were **18,894 foreign persons in prison** out of a total prison population of 60,166, representing **31.4% of all incarcerated persons**. Of these, 18,193 were men and 701 were women. In terms of nationalities, the five most represented countries among foreign incarcerated persons were Morocco (20% of the foreign prison population), Romania (11%), Albania (10%), Tunisia (10%), and Nigeria (6%). While foreign women make up less than a third of the female prison population, almost half of incarcerated mothers with children are foreign nationals (there are 11 migrant mothers with 11 children out of a total of 20 women prisoners and as many children). Most of the offenses committed by foreign incarcerated persons, in line with figures for Italians, are property crimes (9,635 foreign persons in prison), personal crimes (8,130), and drug-related offenses (5,988). Foreign residents are victims of violence and fraud at higher rates than Italian citizens, in addition to being subject to various forms of discrimination, including institutional discrimination.

## **School and Education**

**Nearly 915,000 students, or 11,2% of Italy's student population, do not have Italian citizenship**, according to the latest data. Recent years have also seen an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors and refugee children arriving in Italy. The complex situation of these groups brings **new challenges and needs** to the education and formation system. While schools have made progress in welcoming and integrating foreign students, disparities and other critical issues persist even for students from migrant backgrounds who were born and raised in Italy (which now make up 64.5% of students without Italian citizenship, a share that continues to increase). Among the main difficulties for foreign students are lower attendance rates in early childhood education for the children of immigrants, particularly those from Asia and Africa; delayed school enrollment resulting in older students being placed in lower grades; difficulties in completing their studies; and a higher dropout rate, especially after middle school.

In many cases, **learning disabilities** are being diagnosed and treated as medical conditions, with such diagnoses on the rise. Foreign students are often diagnosed with learning disabilities when

common challenges in language acquisition or cultural adjustment for newcomers from different backgrounds are labeled as medical conditions. It is crucial to promote and implement common and shared measures for welcoming and integrating students in as many schools as possible to avoid inconsistencies and disparities from one school or city to another.

Looking at **textbooks** used in the Italian school system, discussion of the role of schools and the education system in integrating foreign students is marginal. At the same time, there is no mention in textbooks of unaccompanied minors or the protections that international and Italian law provide for them despite the scale of the phenomenon. Overall, there is little discussion of the challenges migrants face in their destination countries, and textbooks do not reflect the efforts of the Catholic Church, other religious institutions, or civil society organizations in supporting immigrant communities and promoting integration. Similarly, migrants are absent from discussions related to religious practices.

In 2024, three years after the first data was collected, **a new study was launched on after-school programs operated by dioceses formed in response to post-pandemic challenges.** The study involved the charitable organizations Caritas and Migrantes across Italy with the aim of assessing the impact of diocesan actors, determining whether these initiatives were continued after the pandemic and if additional educational support actions were undertaken for foreign students, and looking for new student needs or areas of vulnerability that may have emerged since the pandemic.

There are **121,165 students with foreign citizenship enrolled in Italian universities, accounting for 6.3% of the total student population.** Over the last 10 years, this number has grown from 69,582 students in the 2013/2014 academic year, an increase of 74%. These students are divided into two categories: foreign students, who have foreign citizenship and completed their high school education in Italy, accounting for 31.5% of all foreign university students and 2% of the total student population; and international students, who migrated to Italy for the purpose of studying and left their families behind, making up 4.3% of students enrolled in Italian universities and more than half of all students with foreign citizenship.

Foreign students predominantly come from Romania (10,302), Albania (5,053), China (2,406), Ukraine (1,957), and Morocco (1,924), which are also among the most represented nationalities among foreign residents in Italy. International students, on the other hand, primarily come from Iran (9,837), China (5,687), Turkey (4,939), India (4,066), and Albania (2,971).

## **Work, Poverty, and Economy**

Compared to the previous year, 2023 saw **an overall increase in employment in Italy.** An analysis of such job growth reveals a complex and multifaceted situation marked by significant differences between Italian and foreign citizens, as well as **persistent disparities based on gender and nationality.** The growth mainly involved Italian workers (+2.3%), while there was a slight increase in the employment of non-EU citizens (+0.2%) and a slight decrease in non-Italian EU citizens (-0.5%). The total number of employment contracts issued for foreign citizens amounted to 2,518,047, 75.9% of which were for non-EU nationals (1,910,624 contracts). In 2023,

414,409 employers hired at least one foreign worker, representing 35.1% of all companies that registered new employment contracts during the studied period. Of the contracts signed, 70.8% were for **fixed-term employment**, 20.3% for permanent positions, 3.2% for apprenticeships, 1.5% for collaborative contracts, and 5.6% for other types of work arrangements. Among Italy's provinces, most employment contracts for foreign citizens were registered in Milan (9.8%), followed by Rome (8.0%), Bolzano (3.3%), Verona (2.8%), and Florence (2.5%). Foreign workers were primarily employed in **unskilled jobs across various sectors**, particularly in agriculture and landscaping (22.2% of total foreign employment), cleaning services, construction, transportation, and delivery work. The majority of foreign workers continue to be classified as laborers (73.9% of all employed foreigners), with smaller percentages working as clerical staff (11.1%), middle managers (0.9%), or executives (0.2%). At the same time, highly educated migrants remain employed at lower rates than Italians with their same education level and often find themselves in positions for which they are **overqualified**. Italy is one of the countries with the highest rate of overqualified workers.

The employment rate among **young migrants** is almost 10 percentage points higher than that of their Italian peers, despite the overall employment level in the country being lower than the European average. The makeup of Italy's "**NEETs**" (young people not in employment, education, or training) is particularly significant. In 2023, there were about 1.4 million NEETs in Italy, with the majority being Italian citizens (85.1%), followed by EU citizens (2.9%) and non-EU citizens (12%). Young people dropping out of school, known as "**ELETs**" (Early Leavers from Education and Training), is another critical issue, particularly among non-EU young people: Almost a third of them (29.5%) leave school early, a rate that is about three times higher than that of Italian students (9%). This issue is especially pronounced among young people from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Senegal, where more than half do not complete secondary education.

**Women** are particularly affected, with high rates of NEETs among non-EU women in Italy (39.6%), followed by EU women in Italy (25.2%), and Italian women (16%). Migrant women, especially those with children, have higher levels of unemployment and involuntary part-time work. Foreign citizens continue to play a dynamic and vibrant role in **entrepreneurial activities and other forms of self-employment**. In 2023, the number of sole proprietorships owned by non-EU citizens in Italy reached 392,489, an increase of about 2,000 compared to the previous year (+0.5%). Businesses owned by non-EU citizens represent an average of 13% of all companies, with higher concentrations in Liguria (20.6%), Tuscany (19.6%), Lombardy (18.3%), and Lazio (16.9%). In 2022, a total of 703,569 workplace injuries were reported (latest available data), marking a significant increase compared to previous years, with a 24.6% rise from 2021 (when there had been a 14% decrease from 2020 to 2021). Workplace injuries reported by foreign citizens accounted for 17.5% of the total.

According to data from 144 Italian dioceses participating in the national data collection system *Ospoweb*, 269,689 individuals sought help and support from 744 Caritas Listening Centers or services in 2023. The majority were foreign nationals (57%), while Italians made up 41.4% of those assisted; stateless persons and individuals with dual citizenship accounted for 1.6%. Over the past seven years, the proportion of foreign nationals availing themselves of Caritas services has steadily increased. In 2023, **146,415 foreign individuals were assisted**, mostly

concentrated in the north east and north west regions of Italy. The ten countries of origin most represented by foreign nationals assisted by Caritas were Morocco (17.1%), Ukraine (9.1%), Romania (7.3%), Peru (6.5%), Nigeria (6.4%), Albania (5.3%), Tunisia (5.0%), Senegal (3.6%), Egypt (3.0%), and Pakistan (3.0%). Their average age was 42, and they were mostly married individuals with low levels of education and in unstable employment situations. Homeless people accounted for 24,146 individuals assisted, making up 23.8% of the foreign population assisted. Along with economic and material hardships, Caritas beneficiaries reported other vulnerabilities linked to the migration process, including family problems and health issues. Given these many challenges, the actions taken by the more than 3,000 Caritas services in the network have primarily involved distributing goods and providing material assistance.

**The relationship between the financial system and migrants** is often-overlooked among the many facets that characterize the phenomenon of migration. This relationship is complex for both parties, involving numerous factors that may seem unrelated to the economy and finance but are in fact essential in today's multicultural society. A **new study** carried out by Caritas Italiana and the Fondazione Migrantes aimed to explore the ways migrants in Italy navigate the challenges of living in Italy with a particular focus on their working conditions, satisfaction levels, and the growth of entrepreneurial activities. The goal was to offer a different perspective on the daily experiences of migrants, viewing them not solely through the lens of marginalization, vulnerability, or poverty, but also as workers and potential entrepreneurs.

## Health

In 2022, out of a total of 7,002,779 hospital discharges for acute cases of treatment, including both regular hospital admissions and “day hospital” stays (outpatient visits for scheduled tests, treatments, or procedures without overnight stays), 6,536,427 pertained to Italian citizens, while **458,890 were for non-Italian citizens, accounting for 6.6% of the total**. Among foreign patients, the majority came from European countries, making up 50.7% of the total, while patients of African origin accounted for nearly a quarter (23.2%), and those from Asia made up 15.9%. Complications related to pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period were the most common reasons for hospital admissions, accounting for 24.03% of cases. The number of reported voluntary terminations of pregnancy (abortion) was 63,653 in 2022, representing a 4.2% decrease from 2020. Foreign women accounted for 27% of all voluntary terminations of pregnancy in Italy (compared to 28.5% in 2020), totaling 17,130 cases. Data from the Italian Mental Health Information System (SISM) monitoring **mental health** treatment shows that in 2022, 39,584 non-Italian nationals accessed services from the Department of Mental Health (DSM) at least once.

Access to healthcare services and medical treatment is not equally available to all those stably residing in Italy, especially for non-EU citizens who are in precarious socio-economic conditions. An analysis of the critical issues surrounding access to public health services shows that the main barrier to accessing the public healthcare system for foreign residents in Italy is often the existing legal framework, which has been further complicated by recent **changes to the requirements for non-EU nationals to register with the National Health Service**.

## Communication

It is important to look at acts of discrimination aimed at Italy's foreign population for two reasons: because of the severity of these acts, and because immigrants are among the groups whose experiences reveal deteriorating social conditions in Italy, such as an increase in discriminatory or intolerant behavior. A severe lack of accountability in online spaces exacerbates various forms of violence, especially due to inadequate transparency in content moderation by social media companies. Recent studies suggest that the **increase in arrivals of migrants and refugees is one of the main triggers for hate speech**. Moreover, young people of foreign origin are more exposed to online content compared to their Italian peers, stemming from factors such as more extensive phone usage, smaller living spaces, and more time spent on the internet, often with limited alternatives. This exposure increases the **risk of isolation, alienation, and vulnerability to different forms of violence**. As a result, nearly 49.5% of young foreign residents report experiencing at least one offensive, disrespectful, or violent episode from other young people in the past month, compared to 42.4% of their Italian peers. Misogyny is the most prevalent form of online hate; it is estimated that one in two girls has been a victim of gender-based violence online, most often in the form of sexual harassment. Common intersections of multiple discrimination factors make matters worse for victims, such as being both a woman and a migrant. While it is crucial to condemn the global issue of violence against women, focusing exclusively on the "vulnerabilities" of female migrants risks reinforcing the reductive and marginalizing stereotype of the "disadvantaged" migrant woman.

The **relationship between gender, mass media, and migration** remains largely unstudied in Italy, partly due to programs in media and gender studies being developed relatively recently in the country. Monitoring studies from 2014-2015 highlight the invisibility of migrant women in the media: They were represented in only 0.7% of news programs in 2014 and 2.7% in 2015. Data monitored in 2018-2019 show a predominance of ethnically Western women appearing in most television content, accounting for 94% of appearances in 2018 television broadcasts on RAI, Italy's public and most widely-viewed television network, and 95.5% of appearances in 2019. A review of data from 2019 to 2023 **conducted for this report** indicates that over the past five years, only 113 news stories, or 1% of the 12,468 stories focused on migration issues, have considered migration from the viewpoint of gender. Migrant and refugee women accounted for a small minority of the sources cited in news stories on migration, only about 7%. This reality highlights the need for increased visibility of women in minority communities, such as immigrants or refugees, and for developing effective research methods and theoretical frameworks to collect detailed data on their representation in media coverage worldwide, including in Italy.

## Culture: Migrant and New-Generation Music in Italy

Music is one of the main channels of communication and integration between cultures. Like any form of art, it reflects the time in which it is made and has the ability to capture it. Italian songs from the late 19th and early 20th centuries inevitably recount the experience of Italian emigration to the Americas. Similarly, songs from the latter half of the 20th century depict a new scenario: an

Italy that first experiences significant internal migration from the south to the north, and later becomes a destination for migrants, with people arriving to stay or to move on to other European countries, particularly from Albania and Africa.

Naturally, there are musicians among the migrants who come to Italy, some of whom become part of Italy's "world music" scene, a genre that blends traditional and contemporary music from diverse cultures. However, the most interesting phenomenon today, with an ever-growing presence in the Italian music scene, is the emergence of **singers and musicians from new generations**—often not only second-generation immigrants but even third- or fourth-generation children of immigrants to Italy. These artists navigate multicultural identities, balancing the heritage of their parents' cultures with that of the country where they were born and/or raised, making them natural cultural bridges.

In the last 15 years, **rap music in Italy** has undergone significant evolution, transitioning from a niche genre listened to and experimented with by a few, to a mainstream genre with a large following. Today, a considerable number of rap artists are second-generation immigrants or children of mixed-race couples, young people born in Italy or who arrived at a very young age, who have found in rap music the means to express their hopes and dreams, as well as their anger and frustrations. The rap world, and the broader **hip-hop culture**, have a longstanding connection to immigration, resulting in a dynamic mix of words, music, and styles, which is a strength not only of rap but of the new Italian music scene as a whole.

## Religious Belonging and Faith

At the start of 2024, **Christians** constituted **53%** of the total foreign population registered in Italy's municipal records, maintaining their status as the absolute majority. **Muslims**, however, made up a close relative majority at **29.8%** (1.582 million people). The **Orthodox Christian** community, counted separately from the Catholic community, accounted for **29.1%** (1.545 million people) at the beginning of the year. Among Christians, **Catholics** numbered 902,000, representing **17%** of the migrant population, while Evangelicals made up 2.7% (145,000), and Copts represented 1.6% (84,000).

Among other religious groups, the number of Buddhists entering Italy numbered 177,000 (3.3%), Hindus 112,000 (2.1%), and Sikhs 90,000 (1.7%). Meanwhile, atheists and agnostics constituted 9.7% (512,000 individuals). A closer analysis by **age groups** as of January 1, 2024, reveals significant differences among religious communities: although Muslims and Orthodox Christians are nearly equal in overall numbers, Muslims are more prevalent among younger age groups up to 35-39 years old, while Orthodox Christians are more numerous among those 40-44 and older.

**Secularization**, understood as a general decline in religious beliefs and practices in society, has deep roots and is closely linked to various global trends with significant influence across different regions. A **new study** compares secularization in Italy with five other countries—Germany, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and Greece—chosen for their long-standing immigration histories and



distinct cultural and religious realities. In these countries, ranging from northern Europe to the Mediterranean there is a pronounced plurality of religious groups rather than a dominant, unified religious practice.

**The role of Catholic immigrants**—both consecrated and laypeople, mostly younger than the native population and from non-European countries—appears significant in the religious practice of the Catholic community, although it has yet to be fully realized. The responsibility for addressing the challenges surrounding human mobility falls also to the Church, particularly through participatory bodies such as diocesan and parish pastoral councils. Here, Catholics of foreign nationality, called to be active participants, can express the variety of cultures and experiences that make the Church authentically Catholic. Persistent stereotypes around immigration hinder efforts toward active ecclesial inclusion. For example, there is a perception that immigration poses “external” challenges to the Catholic Church, such as issues concerning ecumenical or interreligious dialogue.

Over the past three years, the universal Catholic Church has undergone a **synodal** experience, generating an unparalleled process of listening and global reflection within the Church. An array of voices passionately sharing stories, desires, and experiences are contributing to discernment on how the Church can be faithful to its mandate of proclaiming the Gospel in different historical contexts. The synodal journey is oriented around mission: Anchored in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, it has sought to listen to the entire people of God to gather the riches of its faith and charity, discern its needs and proposals, and reach certain decisions about the Church.

The **Sikh** religion, with its deep historical roots and global spread, is one of the world's major religious traditions. The Sikh movement emerged in a society marked by profound religious and social divisions between Hinduism and Islam. The Sikh diaspora is the result of various economic, political, and environmental challenges that have led many to seek better opportunities abroad, particularly in countries such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Italy. Today, the Sikh community in Italy is considered diverse and vibrant, a dynamic and respected part of society that is valued for its economic contributions, ethical values, and commitment to interreligious dialogue. Their presence enriches the country's cultural diversity and promotes a culture of inclusion.