

HISTORY OF MIGRATION IN ITALY



History of migration

Italian emigration characterized Italian life from the Country's unification to the Seventy years of the former century. During the XIX century, about 27 million Italians went abroad and about 25 million changed their residence inside the Country, from South to North

Italian emigration had different phases and it changed the demographic, economical and social structure of our Country; it was addressed mostly to America (USA, Brazil and Argentina, where manpower was necessary) and to France. In the USA emigration was mainly for long periods, while in Latin America it was both stable and transitory. The main causes of the large scale of emigration were poverty and the desire to change life. Between 1876 and 1900 the exodus involved the northern regions of our Country: Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Piemonte comprised 47% of the total amount of Italian emigrants. Northern Italy emigration was more specialized and it was usually transitory to European countries. Afterwards emigration increased in the southern regions: Southern emigrants were mainly farm workers, forced to emigrate by the poverty of their villages. They were ready to accept any kind of job and a stable emigration oversee.



Causes and consequences of migration

Between 1880 and 1915 four million of Italians arrived in the USA; a lot of them (50/60%) came back to Italy between 1900 and 1914. There were several causes for emigration:

- the southern population was severely damaged by the war
- the agrarian crisis which started about in 1880
- the worsen of taxation after the unification of Italy
- the decline of old artisan jobs and of domestic factories and the crisis of mountain farms and rural production.

Since 1880 the USA were open to immigration, in order to start their capitalistic development; ships carried goods to Europe and sailed back with emigrants. Ship transport to America was cheaper than trains to Northern Europe, and so many people chose to cross the ocean. The journey to America was hard and difficult, due to medical and bureaucrat controls.

European emigration developed in the second part of 20th century and concerned the movement to European states like France (from 1850) Switzerland, Belgium (from 1940) and Germany. Many people considered it, when they had to left their homes, a temporary emigration . During this time they find out a work to earn money and then to have a better life coming back in Italy. But this thing didn't take place and lots of emigrants stayed in France, Switzerland, Belgium and Germany.

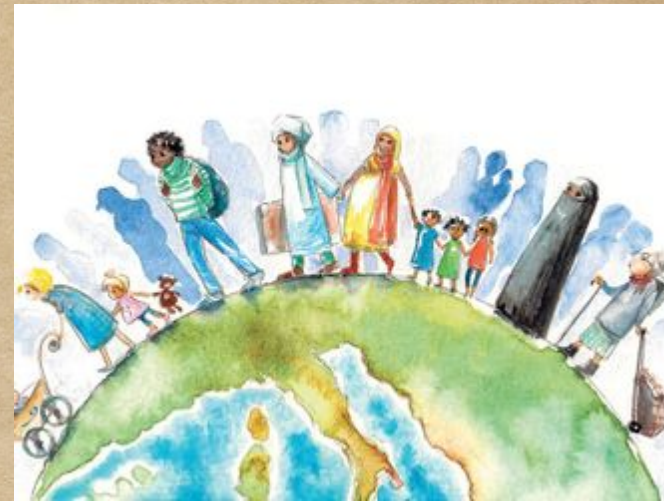


From emigration to immigration

The transformation of the role of Italy from a country of emigration to a country of immigration took place somewhat suddenly from the late 1970s onwards. Especially in the last twenty years, Italy has experienced stronger immigration than many other European countries and currently the annual growth rate of the immigrant population is one of the highest in the European Union. Despite its young history of immigration, the country has significant experience regarding migration movements: apart from being one of the world's largest exporters of manpower in the past, Italy, from the end of the 19th century onwards, also experienced sizable movements of internal migration from the agricultural South to the more industrialized North.

In 1991 Italy faced the first wave of “mass immigration”: on only two days, around 50,000 Albanians arrived in Italy as a result of the collapse of the Albanian communist regime. The 1990s were marked by an acceleration of immigration flows.

Since the progressive EU enlargements, immigrants especially come from Eastern European countries. Since 2004 Romanians have constituted the largest immigrant community in Italy, followed by Albanians and Moroccans.



As for the gender of the people disembarked, 72% of people arriving on the Italian coasts in the last years is male, women are 10%, children 18% - mostly unaccompanied minors.

Lampedusa... a particular case

There has recently been an argument among the different political parties which rule Italy, as there are those who want to send home as quickly as possible the bulk of new arrivals by speeding asylum procedures, and those that want to let them keep staying in our country

In the Sicilian Isle of Lampedusa, the majority of immigrants have been disembarking and seeking refuge for years. There have been several episodes when lots of immigrants have fought against death for many days in the sea and many of them have tragically lost their lives or disappeared. There are many sad stories of desperate people which we could talk about. They might reveal all the difficulties and the desperate situations people had to face in their countries before leaving. Maybe we could hear about dreams which for many people will never come true. However, we should emphasize the importance of the activities of the Italian volunteers belonging for example to the Red Cross or other associations. Every day hundreds of volunteers are involved in complex and delicate operations to help thousands of people who are looking for help in Sicily. In Lampedusa the need to respond to citizens' needs is constantly growing. to guarantee increasing support within the reception centers that host migrants. The initiatives foresee the carrying out of numerous activities like the rescue in water, the accompaniment of people with motor difficulties, language lessons for the guests of the center, assistance to unaccompanied minors, medical clinic activities.





Some figures...

From January to November 2021, 59.7 thousand migrants arrived by sea in Italy. In 2020, 34.1 thousand migrants arrivals on the Italian coasts. Between 2014 and 2020, the number of migrants setting foot in the country peaked in 2016 at 181 thousand individuals. Among the most frequent countries of origin declared upon arrivals in 2021, Tunisia and Bangladesh ranked first.

One third of the immigrants are Moslem. Employment data are scarce but indicate that around two-thirds are involved in low-grade service sector activities (street-trading, domestic service, hotel work etc.).

The main causes for immigration are the ease of entry in a country which is increasing prosperity, the segmentation of the Italian labour market, opening up specific niches for immigrant employment; the dominance of push factors from the countries of origin; and the demographic collapse in Italy.

Within Italy, the reaction to immigration has not been very favourable. Opinion polls indicate that Italians have mainly negative and stereotyped views of immigrants and there is disturbing evidence of growing racism. Further inflows of immigrants are likely, whatever policies Italy attempts to put in place.



