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Improvements in use of administrative data for migration statistics

New citizens in Italy: number, characteristics and behaviours

Note by Istat* |

Abstract

After a first attempt made in June 2019th, researchers from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat), in cooperation with the University of Naples Federico II, has implemented a new methodology for estimating the size, the characteristics and the demographic behaviours of the national resident population that have acquired the Italian citizenship. The paper describes the characteristics of the new citizens (origin, age, sex, place of residence), reflects on the different attitudes in acquiring the citizenship shown by the most important foreign communities and investigates the reasons at the basis of the different choices. Furthermore, the paper focuses the attention on one relevant demographic behaviours: emigration of foreigners and new Italians. As for international migrations, the acquisitions of citizens are commonly considered as an indicator of settlement and, also in the Italian case, new citizens show a lower propensity to emigrate respect to ones that have not acquired the citizenship. Nevertheless, it seems that recently a different behaviour is emerging as many new Nationals, compare with the past, seem keener to exploit the possibility to move within the European Union.]

*Prepared by Cinzia Conti (Istat), Salvatore Strozza (University “Federico II” Napoli) and Enrico Tucci (Istat)

NOTE: The designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

I. Introduction

1. In Italy, during the last decade, the public discussion about migration has been mainly focused on the emergency of new arrivals by the sea. While the matter of the asylum seekers has been crucial in the political debate, the issues relating to the long-term presence of foreigners and to the integration process have been confined to the background. Over the years, however, the population of foreign origin who live permanently in Italy has grown considerably. Population with a migratory background has become a stable part of the Italian society. As a matter of fact, many people with a foreign origin have become Italians, especially the ones who have been residing in the country for a long time. Despite their important role both from social, economic and demographic prospective, few and partial information were available about the “new Italians”. In 2021, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat), by integrating different data sources, made available new data about this target-population. These new information allow us: 1) to quantify Italian residents who have acquired the Italian citizenship at one specific point in time, 2) to study their main socio-demographic characteristics, 3) to follow some of their behaviours over a period of time.
2. The estimations presented in this paper are the result of a complex work based on the activities carried out by two research projects of Istat. The first project "Reception, integration and citizenship: new approaches for the analysis of migration paths and models" had the aim to provide adequate governance tools for increasingly complex phenomena, such as foreign presence and integration of immigrants. The project, following a longitudinal and multidimensional perspective, is aimed at reconstructing the different migration and inclusion paths followed by several cohorts of migrants, paying special attention to the acquisition of citizenship. In order to achieve these tasks the project exploit the progresses made in the integration between administrative data and information from different statistical sources. During the work it seemed really useful to integrate the results of the analysis with those of another project “A measure of Italian emigration through integration and analysis of administrative data”. The aim of this second project is to provide a measure of the migratory phenomenon as far as possible free from administrative procedures and in line with the United Nations recommendations on international migration statistics. To this end, the project proposes the construction of a total population counting system at the micro level that allows a longitudinal reading of the data and the possibility of following the movements of individuals over time.
3. The cooperation between the two research teams, supported by the experts of the University of Naples Federico II, made it possible to deepen the analysis of the aspects related to the acquisition of citizenship in a broader demographic context where those who become Italian citizens can be observed over time and their behaviours can be compared with those of foreigners and Italians at birth.

II. Data and record linkages

4. The estimation procedure involves the integrated use of the different data sources for the production of a single longitudinal archive consisting of individual records. Starting from the stock 2011 individual census data, the first step consists in checking and merging the data coming from Ministry of Interior (still necessary to obtain detailed information on the type of acquisition) with the acquisitions identified by a longitudinal analysis of the individual

variable “citizenship” in the population register. The database at the end of this step, therefore, consists of all the individuals who have acquired the citizenship included those who are not resident anymore.

5. In a second step, in order to estimate the number of the new Italian citizens (stock), the data on the acquisitions of citizenship were integrated with that from the new micro-demographic accounting information system (ANVIS). The integration between the micro-demographic accounting information system and the data on the acquisitions of citizenship makes it possible to identify the foreign resident population at birth and to observe whether or not these individuals have acquired citizenship over time, have died, emigrated abroad, or have moved on the Italian territory.
6. In this paper two regression models are used in order to study the propensity to acquire the Italian citizenship and to migrate abroad. The first analysis is conducted through a longitudinal approach. The models are described in the specific paragraphs.

III. The characteristics of new Italian citizens

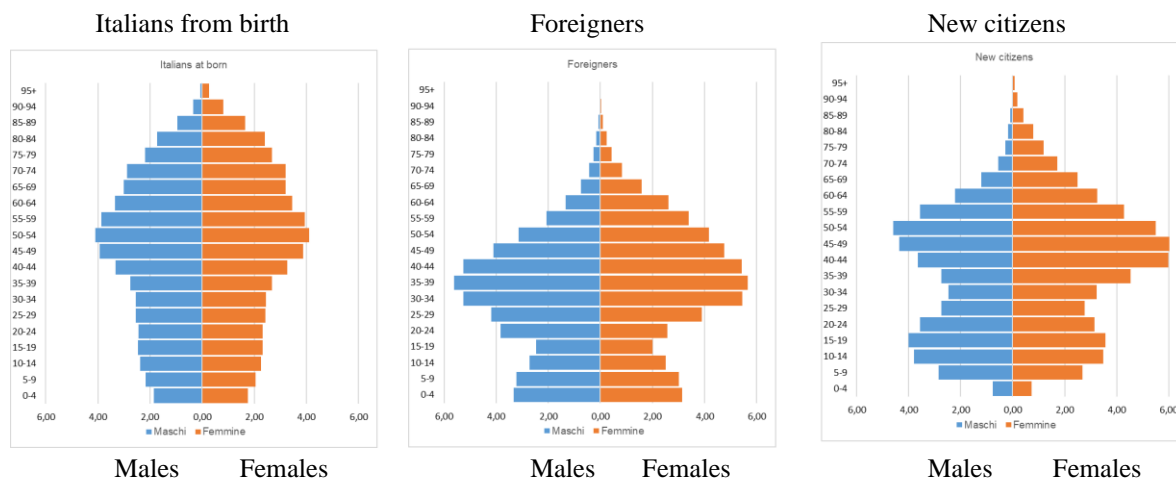
7. At the beginning of 2020, new citizens residing in Italy were over one and a half million (foreigners were about 5 million) and represent 2.5% of the total population [Istat, 2021; Istat, 2022]. They showed a significant increase in the last decade. In fact, in October 2011 (census date), they did not reach 700 thousand people and at the previous census (in 2001) they were less than 300 thousand.
8. People of Albanian and Moroccan origin are the most numerous, followed by Romanians, Brazilians, Indians, Argentines, Peruvians, Tunisians, French and Macedonians.
9. These first 10 citizenships of origin cover only half of the new citizens living in Italy: they represent an extremely complex and heterogeneous universe. It is to consider that the estimations do not include only the immigrants and their children, but also the relatives and descendants of Italian emigrants abroad (many from Brazil and Argentina) who have settled in Italy and have applied for citizenship (Table 1). It should also be emphasized that some citizenships of origin that are particularly important among foreigners, lose relevance in the ranking of new citizens. At the basis of this evidence there are different reasons among which the lesser interest in acquiring an Italian passport for the EU citizens (Romanians) or the greater constraints imposed by legislation of some countries of origin (Chinese citizens).
10. With regard to demographic characteristics, in 56% of cases the new citizens are female, the average age is less than 40 years (36.5 for men and 41.7 for women) with a share of under 20 closed to 22%, on the opposite side those over 60 who do not reach 15%. The new citizens show an age structure between that of foreigners and that of Italians from birth (Fig.1). A population therefore not negligible in terms of number and which could present interesting peculiarities from the point of view of behaviours.

Table 1 New citizens distinguished according to the first 20 previous citizenships and some characteristics

Former country of citizenship	V.a. (thousands)	% by citizenship	Acquisit. x 100 foreign.	% acquis. < 2012	% by marriage	% born in Italy
Albania	215,6	14,2	50,1	16,0	12,4	29,9
Marocco	199,4	13,1	47,6	19,7	15,7	37,2
Romania	92,4	6,1	7,9	34,0	31,5	14,9
Brazil	58,7	3,9	116,0	50,0	25,1	1,7
India	44,4	2,9	28,5	17,9	8,8	30,4
Argentina	39,1	2,6	391,8	85,8	20,7	1,2
Perù	37,5	2,5	39,4	31,1	24,3	18,6
Tunisia	37,1	2,4	38,4	31,2	17,3	39,5
France	33,3	2,2	105,5	97,3	34,9	2,4
North Macedonia	28,9	1,9	49,2	10,3	9,2	34,1
Ukraine	28,6	1,9	12,1	47,5	42,5	5,5
Germany	27,6	1,8	74,0	96,5	39,8	4,6
Russia (Fed.)	27,3	1,8	66,7	66,2	44,8	2,1
Egypt	27,1	1,8	20,3	39,5	21,2	36,2
Senegal	26,4	1,7	24,3	8,5	10,6	32,7
Moldova	25,5	1,7	18,1	19,4	31,6	13,1
Pakistan	25,5	1,7	20,7	5,4	7,7	33,2
Poland	24,2	1,6	26,7	67,0	53,7	8,9
Ecuador	23,2	1,5	30,5	21,9	24,6	19,6
Philippines	21,1	1,4	12,7	29,2	20,7	46,5
Other countries	474,1	31,3	31,0	56,5	29,9	18,1
TOTAL	1.516,6	100,0	29,1	40,0	23,9	22,1

Source: Istat, 2021

Figure 2 Demographic structure of Italians from birth, foreigners, and new citizens. Italy, beginning 2020



Source: Istat 2021

IV. The propensity to acquire the citizenship

11. Using a regression model it has been possible to measure the propensity to acquire the Italian citizenship on the basis of different individual characteristics. The citizenship of origin - even in presence of the same other characteristics such as age, educational qualification, sex, access to dual citizenship, etc. - has a very strong influence on the propensity to acquire citizenship. It is worth remembering that citizenship summarizes the characteristics of the migration model.
12. In order to conduct the analysis on a group of foreigners with the same "risk" to acquire the citizenship, and considering that one determining factor for becoming Italian is the duration of residence in Italy, it was decided to apply the logistic regression model to the cohort of foreigners (aged over 14 years) who entered Italy in 2002 and still present in the 2011 census; it is a total of almost 155,000 foreigners, coming from 179 countries. The logistic regression model used has as a dichotomous dependent variable "citizenship acquired / citizenship not acquired" and considers as predictors the following 13 variables relating to demographic and social characteristics: 1) sex (females vs males); 2) age groups (at the census: 15-24, 25-34, 35-44 years vs 45 years and over); 3) type of family (at the census: couple without children, couple with children, other vs single-member family); 4) educational level (at the census: middle school, diploma of secondary school or degree vs primary school or no license); 5) country of citizenship at birth (Romania, Ukraine, Morocco, Moldova, China, India, Other vs Albania); 6) dual citizenship in the country of origin (recognised vs not recognised); 7) non-EU membership (non-EU citizen vs EU citizen); 8) parents born in Italy (at least one vs none); 9) presence in Italy on 1 January 2020 (yes vs no); 10) type of presence (continuous vs discontinuous); 11) interprovincial mobility (no vs at least one interprovincial migration); 12) place of residence (at the census: North-West, North-East, Center vs South); 13) Working condition (at the census: employed, housewife, other condition vs unemployed).
13. The caveat is that in the case of the variables referring to the Census and which over time may have undergone undetectable changes such as the education, employment and family conditions.
14. The regression model was performed with a variable selection technique called backward elimination.
15. The results show that at the two opposite extremes are collocated the Indians with the largest propensity to become Italian and the Chinese with the least (Table 2). As it was imaginable, foreigners from non-EU countries have a greater willingness to acquire citizenship than EU citizens. People from countries that recognize dual citizenship are more inclined to become Italian than those who come from countries that do not recognize this option. From the point of view of individual characteristics, women and younger people show a greater inclination to become Italian citizens than men and people aged 45 or older. Furthermore, a higher level of education is associated with a greater propensity to acquire citizenship, as well as having a job. With regard to family conditions, those who live in couples and, in particular, in couples with children, have a greater inclination to apply for citizenship than foreigners that live alone.
16. People residing in the northern regions, particularly in the North-east, acquire more frequently an Italian passport than foreigners residing in the South of Italy. But it is among the residents of Central Italy that the propensity is lowest. In the South, acquisitions by descent play an important role in rising the number of acquisitions of citizenship.

Table 2 Results of the logistic regression model on the probability to become Italian citizen for the cohort of foreigners over 14 years who entered Italy in 2002 (point estimation and range of the confidence interval)

	Point estimation	Range 95%	
Centre vs South	0,948	0,904	0,994
North-east vs South	1,358	1,298	1,420
North-west vs South	1,082	1,034	1,131
Other typology vs one person	1,862	1,776	1,953
couple with children vs one person	2,594	2,484	2,709
Couple without children vs one person	2,775	2,637	2,920
Other condition vs not employed	1,231	1,165	1,301
Housewife vs Not employed	1,274	1,209	1,341
Employed vs Not employed	1,414	1,355	1,476
secondary school/degree vs primary school or nothing	1,976	1,892	2,063
middle school vs primary school or nothing	1,372	1,313	1,432
at least one parent born in Italy: Yes vs No	9,914	8,936	10,998
15-24 years vs 45 years and more	1,921	1,830	2,017
25-34 years vs 45 years and more	1,323	1,279	1,369
35-44 years vs 45 years and more	1,329	1,283	1,376
Interprovincial mobility: Yes vs No	1,242	1,200	1,285
Continuative presence in Italy: Yes vs No	1,436	1,296	1,591
Still present 1 gen 2020: Yes vs No	1,383	1,334	1,433
Eu citizen: Yes vs No	3,836	3,618	4,067
multiple citizenship in the country of origin: Yes vs No	1,350	1,296	1,407
Other countries vs Albania	0,961	0,924	1,000
Ukraine vs Albania	0,365	0,339	0,392
Romania vs Albania	0,735	0,684	0,789
Moldova vs Albania	0,675	0,635	0,717
Morocco vs Albania	1,234	1,174	1,296
India vs Albania	2,099	1,942	2,269
China vs Albania	0,043	0,036	0,051
Female vs male	1,538	1,496	1,580

a) All variables are significant (limit: 5%).

Source: Istat data analysed in Strozza, Conti, Tucci, 2021.

V. Acquisition of citizenship and international mobility

17. The new statistical system implemented by Istat makes it possible to measure this population of new Italians and to study its main demographic and social characteristics. In this work we want to take a further step forward, comparing the recent international migration of foreigners and new Italians with a longitudinal approach. The basic question is if the acquisition of citizenship is still today an indicator of stability in Italy, as often indicated in the literature. Some scholars have highlighted how recently an important share of Italians who emigrate is made up of people born abroad [Bonifazi 2018; Strozza and Tucci 2018]. It is therefore natural to ask whether and how people who have acquired citizenship contribute to this phenomenon. It must be considered that freedom of movement within the European Union changes the

perspective and meaning of the acquisition of citizenship. In the European context, in which national borders do not constitute a barrier to travel between EU countries, the acquisition of citizenship of a Member State is increasingly taking shape of an access to European citizenship. It may therefore be interesting to observe whether in the years following the economic crisis of 2008, the acquisition of Italian citizenship represented for some new Italians a factor in moving abroad, probably in countries with a better economic situation.

18. The data of the 2011 census, linked to those of the acquisitions of citizenship that occurred after the census date and up to 2019, show that 856 thousand among the 4 million and 28 thousand foreigners residing as of 9 October 2011, have acquired the Italian citizenship. Therefore, it will be possible to observe the propensity to leave Italy by the members of the following three specific resident population groups: Italians by acquisition at the 2011 Census, foreigners who acquired citizenship after the 2011 census and those who have remained foreigners until 2020; in addition, the model considers also the reason at the basis of the acquisition of citizenship.
19. Non-Eu adult citizens belonging to these population groups are observed over eight years (from the date of the census to the end of 2019). The units of analysis are all adults with a foreign citizenship at birth of a non-EU country, resident at the 2011 census date. A logistic regression model has been used to evaluate the relationship between the probability of leaving Italy and the citizenship status by comparing the behaviour of foreigners and new citizens. Migration choices, as it is well known, change on the basis of individual and family characteristics. A multiplicity of economic, social and cultural, subjective and contextual factors generate complex projects of territorial mobility. The information collected at the 2011 census makes it possible to take into account several characteristics that could be related to the propensity to leave the country of both foreigners and those who have acquired Italian citizenship.
20. A total set of nine independent variables has been considered: 1. sex (women vs men); 2. age classes (at the 2011 census date: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44 years vs 45 years and over); 3. type of family (at the 2011 census date: single-family, couple with children, other vs couple without children); 4. Level of education (at the 2011 census date: secondary license, diploma or degree vs. no license or primary school); 5. country of citizenship at birth (Albania, Moldova, Ukraine, Morocco, Tunisia, Philippines, India, Ecuador, Peru, Other vs China); 6. country of birth (Italy vs abroad); 7. acquisition of Italian citizenship (before the census by marriage, before the census for another reason, after the census by marriage, after the census for another reason vs foreigner); 8. place of the residence (at the census: North-West, North-East, Centre vs South); 9. working condition (at the 2011 census date: unemployed, housewife, other condition vs. employed). A backward elimination variable selection technique was used and all the variables of the initial model were significant and used to estimate parameters and odds ratios.
21. According to the results of the logistic regression model, males show a higher propensity to emigrate (Table 3). The age groups in which the propensity to move is greater are those of young adults, people who were 25-34 years old at the 2011 census date. Moroccans, Indians and Tunisians turn out to be quite mobile, while Filipinos, Albanians and Peruvians are the most stable foreign communities in Italy. As widely highlighted in the literature, those who already have a migratory experience show a greater propensity to move: those born abroad, in other words immigrants, leave Italy more frequently than so-called natives. The economic and family conditions are also aspects that are not secondary at all. In fact, those who are employed at the time of the census have a lower propensity to emigrate abroad and the children, as well as the couple, are confirmed as stabilizing factors. As regards the education, those with a diploma or a degree do not show a slight different propensity than those with a lower level of education. The

proposed analysis actually confirms that the acquisition of citizenship is an indicator of stability in the area. As a matter of fact, those who had already acquired Italian citizenship, show a lower propensity to emigrate than those who remained a foreigner. However, a change in attitude could be glimpsed over time. In fact, those who acquired citizenship after the census have a lower inclination to emigrate than foreigners, but a greater propensity than those who became Italian before the census survey, both in the case of acquisition by marriage and for other reasons. This is probably a sign that the acquisition of citizenship, in a context such as the European one in which freedom of movement is guaranteed to passport holders from one of the EU states, is taking on a different meaning, broader than in the past, and that international migrations are often less definitive than one would like to believe.

Table 3 Results of the logistic regression model on the probability to emigrate abroad between 2012 and 2019 for non-Eu born foreign adult residents at the 2011 Census (point estimation and range of the confidence interval)

Variables ^(a) / modalities	Point estimation	Range 95%	
		min.	Max
Sex			
- Female (ref. Male)	0,760	0,753	0,767
Age classes (ref: 45 years and more)			
- 18-24 years	0,941	0,929	0,954
- 25-34 years	1,129	1,118	1,141
- 35-44 years	1,060	1,050	1,071
Type of family (ref. couple without children)			
- Couple with children	0,930	0,919	0,942
- One person	1,168	1,151	1,185
- Others	1,051	1,037	1,066
Level of education (ref. primary school or nothing)			
- middle school diploma	0,982	0,971	0,993
- Secondary school diploma or degree	1,002	0,991	1,013
Country of citizenship at birth (ref. China)			
- Albania	0,613	0,601	0,625
- Ukraine	0,915	0,895	0,936
- Morocco	1,173	1,151	1,196
- Moldova	0,908	0,886	0,930
- Tunisia	1,332	1,297	1,368
- India	1,319	1,288	1,351
- Philippine	0,478	0,464	0,493
- Peru	0,741	0,720	0,762
- Ecuador	0,928	0,901	0,955
- Others	1,387	1,364	1,411
Country of birth: Italy (ref. Abroad)	0,894	0,862	0,929
Place of residence (ref. South and Isles)			
- North-West	1,367	1,349	1,385
- North-East	1,578	1,557	1,599
- Centre	1,386	1,366	1,405
Working conditions (ref. Employed)			
- Not employed	1,468	1,450	1,486
- housewife	1,559	1,540	1,578
- Others	1,774	1,755	1,793
Acquisition of Italian citizenship (ref. Not acquired)			
- Acquired before Census for marriage	0,381	0,372	0,389
- Acquired before Census for other reasons	0,535	0,527	0,543
- Acquired after the Census for marriage	0,762	0,749	0,777
- Acquired after the Census for other reasons	0,777	0,768	0,786

(a) All variables are significant (limit: 5%).

Source: Istat data analysed in Strozza, Conti, Tucci, 2021.

22. A second migration cannot be considered exclusively as the conclusion of a failed experience, but can be seen as a second or further phase of a complex process. Especially in a context in which the so-called circular migrations are also spreading and in which the citizenship of a European country becomes the "passport" to other destinations. This also explains why

residents of the northern regions, particularly those of the North-east, have the highest propensity to leave the country. It might seem counterintuitive given that these are the territories where the level of integration should be higher. However, these are also areas where the lower distance with other European countries and the absence of a border for those who have obtained an Italian passport favours emigration.

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VI. Concluding remarks

24. At the end of analysis, we would like to propose some general reflection and discussion points:
25. Integrated and longitudinal database allows more reliable and comprehensive analysis for monitoring the demographic and social dynamics regarding the population with a foreign background. The case of "new Italian citizens" is emblematic and it shows how the integration of data coming from administrative sources is crucial to provide new information about the increasing complexity of migration phenomenon and integration process of foreigner citizens.
26. From a statistical point of view, should be stressed the importance of distinguishing the new citizens from the nationals at birth to monitor the integration processes of those who have acquired the citizenship and have a realistic picture of the population and its dynamics. This issue draws attention to the need to define an adequate target population that can be monitored in time and space. It has already been pointed out that it is not at all appropriate to identify immigrant populations on the basis of the legal definition of citizenship [Haug et al. 2002]. In fact, if the integration process is monitored only for people with foreign citizenship, the resulting picture may be misleading. The example of international emigration from Italy clearly points out the importance of considering the demographic dynamics of the "new Italians".
27. The analysis points out how the acquisition of citizenship in the European context is changing its meaning and it could be useful a discussion about the use of "acquisition of citizenship" as an indicator of definitive settlement in a specific country. In general, we have to reflect about the fact that some extremely efficient indicators in the past could have partially lost their explanatory capacity or - in any case - have partly changed their meaning.
28. In general, the research projects carried out underline the importance to exploit administrative data and also the need to strengthen the cooperation between the National Statistical Institute, other administrative bodies and the Universities in order to improve the availability and the quality of data.

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