

THE ITALIANS RESIDENT ABROAD IN 2022: MAIN DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS ON THE BASIS OF THE PREVIOUS PERMANENT POPULATION CENSUS¹

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Abstract. In December 2023, the Permanent Census of Population and Housing published data on the stock of the Italian population residing abroad in 2022. To identify this population figure, in addition to the sources used to determine the count of the population residing in Italy in the same year, two administrative sources, constantly updated, were integrated: the Registry of Italians Resident Abroad (AIRE) of the Ministry of the Interior and the Consular Registers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This novelty represents a valuable resource for better understanding the phenomenon of Italians abroad. The aim of this study is to analyse the stock of Italians habitually residing in Italy in 2021 and recorded as residents abroad in 2022. In particular, both Italians by birth and new fellow citizens are considered, also in relation to the country of destination. Based on characteristics collected in the Census, such as education, occupation, economic activity and family typology, different demographic and social profiles will be identified and compared. This study is a preliminary analysis on the topic of Italians abroad, aims to exploit the potential of the information available with the Permanent Census of Population.

1. Introduction

In December 2023, the Permanent Census of Population and Housing published updated data on the Italian population residing abroad in 2022 (ISTAT, 2023). This publication represents a significant innovation for ISTAT, not only for the specific aggregate of Italians abroad, which has always aroused great interest in relation to our migratory history, but also because it constitutes a first attempt to harmonize data relating to the Italian population as a whole, including both residents in Italy and those abroad. The aim of this study is to delve into the main demographic and socio-economic characteristics of a specific subgroup of Italians abroad, consisting of individuals who were registered in Italy in 2021 and residing abroad in 2022.

Furthermore, the mobility of 'new' citizens who have acquired Italian citizenship is of particular interest for studying the migration behaviors of this group, allowing

¹ The article exclusively expresses the opinions of the authors. Flavio Biasciucci wrote subsections 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8, Gennaro Di Fraia wrote sections 1, 2 and 4, Valeria Quondamstefano wrote subsections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

for an analysis of how similar the migration dynamics of Italians born in Italy are to those of 'new' Italians born abroad. The literature emphasizes that individuals who have already made an initial migratory move tend to have a greater propensity for further relocations (Conti et al., 2008). Although the acquisition of citizenship is considered by the Council of Europe as an indicator of stabilization and integration, it cannot be ruled out that, especially in the European context, this may be followed by additional migration (Council of the European Union, 2010).

2. Data source

The estimate of the number of Italian citizens residing abroad at the end of the year is the result of integrating various administrative sources and census results related to the population usually residing in Italy. The total number of the population usually residing in Italy is determined by the Permanent Census of the Population, which harmonizes the data on Italians as a whole, whether they reside in Italy or abroad. Therefore, to define the count of Italians residing abroad and to correct or integrate any inconsistencies found in the archives used, not only was the integration of the AIRE (Registry of Italians Residing Abroad) and the Consular Registers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs utilized, but also 'life signals' in Italy inferred from other administrative sources of the Permanent Census of the Population including the Population Register (ANPR), Retired, and Non-Pension Benefits Registers and the Tax Returns Registry of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, also used to identify deceased individuals².

This study analyzes the main demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Italian citizens registered in Italy in 2021 and residing abroad in 2022 (90,639 individuals). Additionally, leveraging information on country of birth and citizenship acquisitions (as of the 2021 Census), the study seeks to highlight the main differences between four demographic groups: Italians since birth born in Italy, Italians since birth born abroad, acquired Italians born in Italy and acquired Italians born abroad. An increasing number of foreign citizens become Italians due to long-term residence in Italy (at least 10 years for non-EU citizens, at least 4 for EU citizens), through being minor children of a parent who has become Italian, through marriage to an Italian citizen, or by being born in Italy and residing [there] continuously until the age of 18, thus choosing Italy as their country of citizenship. Additionally, under the principle of *ius sanguinis*, descendants of Italian emigrants born abroad have the right to acquire Italian citizenship. In the analyzed population, Italians since birth born in Italy constitute over two-thirds, with 60,436 individuals,

² See <https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/SCHEDA-NOVITA-CENSIPOP-2022.pdf>

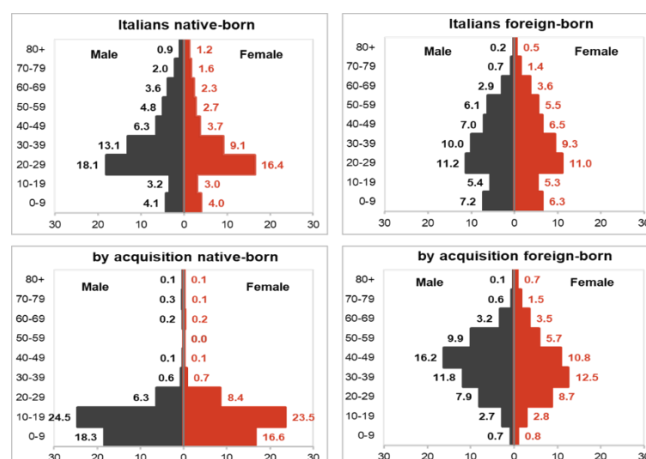
followed by 13,284 Italians since birth born abroad, 11,972 Italians by acquisition foreign-born and 4,947 Italians by acquisition native-born. Based on characteristics recorded in the Census, such as educational level, occupation, economic sector, and family composition, different demographic and social profiles were identified and compared.

3. Main results

3.1. Demographic characteristics

The analysis revealed some demographic characteristics of Italians resident abroad. Specifically, of the 90,639 Italians resident abroad, 49,446 are male (54.6%), while 41,193 are female (45.5%), with a masculinity ratio of 120.0%.

The average age is 33.7 years old, the underage population accounts for 17.1%. If we consider the 4 subpopulations, we realize that the situation is extremely diverse. Italians resident abroad born in Italy account for 2/3 of Italians living abroad, have higher average age (34.2) and masculinity ratio (127.5) than the overall values, while the percentage of minors is significantly lower (13.1%). This group is contrasted with that of Italians by acquisition born in Italy (5.5% of the total number of Italians abroad). In this case the average age is 13.3 years, the percentage of minors 79.3% and the masculinity ratio 101.0%. This indicates that this subpopulation is most likely composed of the children of Italians resident abroad who were deliberately given birth in Italy and then immediately moved abroad. It is that portion of Italians residing abroad who despite being born in Italy have never lived there. Italians resident abroad but foreign born (the so-called second and third generations), account for 14.7% of Italians abroad, have an average age of 32.8 years and a masculinity ratio of 102.7%. The last subpopulation is represented by Italians by acquisition foreign-born. In this case, the average age is 40.4, minors are 5.7% and the masculinity ratio is 113.3%. All these demographic indicators emphasize that this group is, in most cases, made up of people not born in Italy who acquired Italian citizenship by marriage. To better understand the characteristics of Italians living abroad for each group, age pyramids were constructed (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Age pyramids for the four groups of Italians living abroad.

The group of Italians born in Italy is characterized by a preponderance of people (56.7%) of university age or entering the workforce (ages 20 to 39). From these data there would seem to be links between migration, education and employment. In general, 80.1 per cent are between 20 and 69 years of working age. In this group, the proportion of minors (less than 15%) and advanced ages (70 years and over less than 6%) is low. Italians resident abroad foreign-born present a more homogeneous structure, with a concentration still between 20 and 39 years old (41.5%). Just over 30 per cent (31.6%) are aged between 40 and 69. This means that the working age population between 20 and 69 years accounts for 73.1% of this group. Quite different is the age pyramid of Italians by acquisition native-born, which, as one might expect given the strong presence of minors, is crushed in the age groups between 0 and 29 (97.6%), with a peak between 10 and 19 (48.0%). Finally, the group of Italians by acquisition foreign-born show an older age structure and in particular are concentrated in the 30-59 age group (66.9%). This is the only group in which the moda of the male and female population does not fall into the same age group (for men 40-49 years, for women 30-39 years).

3.2. Household type

The study continues by going to see how the four groups of Italians living abroad are distributed in relation to family type. The following types were considered: Single, Couples without children, Couples with children, Single parent with children and Other.

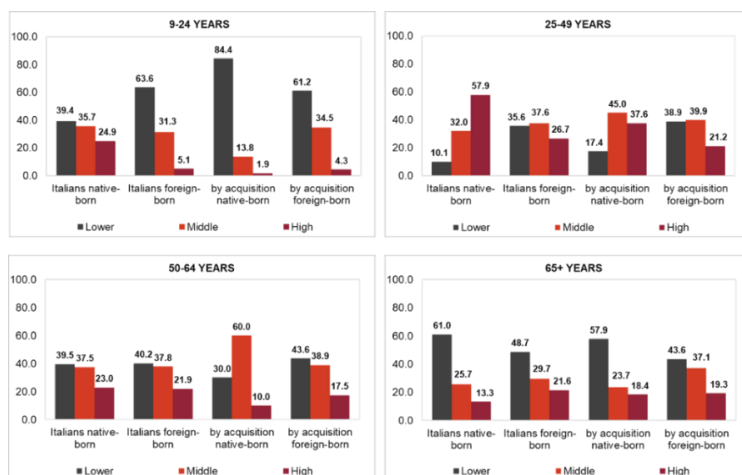
For native-born Italians, couples with children prevail (about 43%), followed by lone parents with children (about 24%) and singles (about 19%). For Italians foreign-born the most frequent family type is People single (about 28%), followed by Lone parent with children (about 26%) and Couples with children (about 21%). Italians by acquisition native-born are concentrated in Couples with children (about 63%), followed by Lone parent with children (about 21%) and Other (about 12%). The last group, Italians by acquisition foreign-born, sees Couples with children prevail (about 38%), followed by Single person (about 21%) and Lone parent with children (about 17%). The Italians native-born present a distribution very similar to that of the Italians by acquisition foreign-born, with a prevalence of Couples with children in both groups. This may indicate, once again, how the first and last groups are linked by household type (Italians resident abroad native-born in Italy are most likely the parents of Italians by acquisition foreign-born).

3.3. Educational attainment

During the period of large-scale Italian emigration (1870-1914), most emigrants came from rural areas in Southern Italy, where access to education was limited. Many Italians resident abroad was illiterate or had very low levels of education. This low level of education reflected the economic and social conditions of Italy at the time, where the educational system was still developing, and many farming families could not afford to send their children to school (Gabaccia, 2000). In recent decades, the profile of Italian emigrants has continued to evolve. An increasing number of young graduates began to resident abroad in search of better professional and academic opportunities, a phenomenon often described as a "brain drain" (Del Boca and Venturini, 2003). Our data appear compatible with such theories (Figure 2). We considered 4 age groups (9-24, 25-49, 50-64, 65+) and the division of educational attainment into low (up to middle school), medium (the high school diploma) and high (bachelor's degree and above) for the 4 groups of Italians living abroad considered. It must be kept in mind in the analysis that while for the 9-24 age group the educational attainment may still change over time, in the other 3 age groups under consideration, the educational attainment can be considered almost definitive. Among the 9-24 year olds and the over-65s, a low level of education and a very low percentage of graduates prevails strongly for all 4 groups. The greatest percentages of those with high educational qualifications are in the 25-49 age group for Italians native-born (57.9%), then for Italians by acquisition native-born (37.6%), and for Italians foreign-born (26.7%). For the 50-64 age group to prevail, again, is low education (Italians native-born, Italians foreign-born and Italians by acquisition

foreign-born). Only for Italians by acquisition native-born does a medium level of education prevail (same thing occurs for this group in the 25-49 age group).

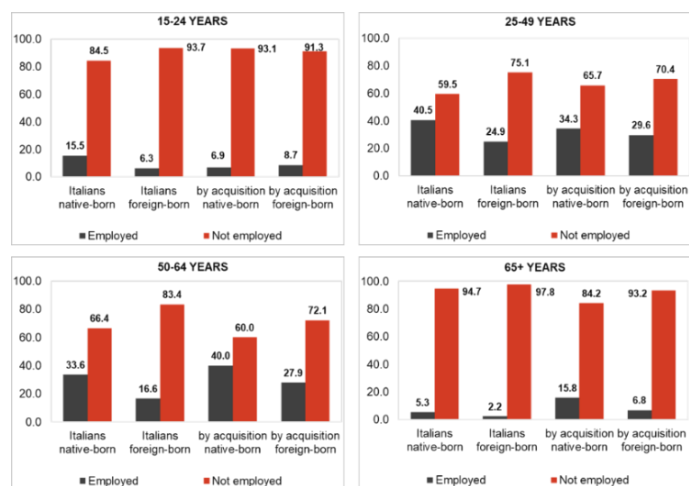
Figure 2 – Educational attainment per age class for the four groups of Italians living abroad.



3.4. Current activity status

In recent years, as with educational attainment, the profile of Italians living abroad has further diversified in terms of employment.

Figure 3 – Current activity status per age class for the four groups of Italians living abroad.



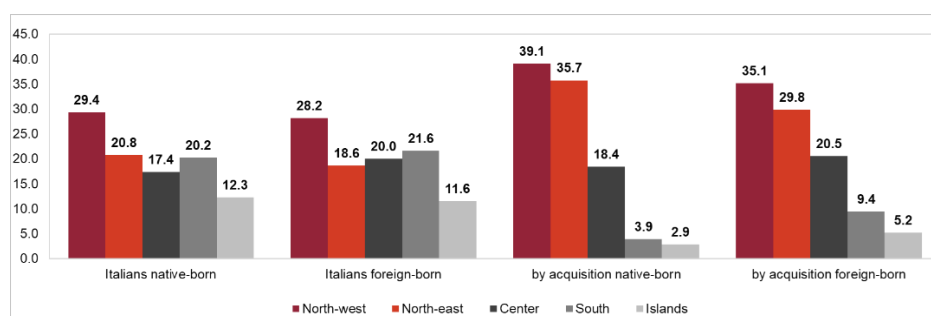
Many highly skilled professionals have emigrated in search of better working conditions. Recalling that the employment figure refers to what Italians living abroad in 2022 had in 2021 when they resided in Italy, it is clear that most of them, in any age group, were unemployed in 2021 (Figure 3).

However, while for younger and older people the unemployed account for almost all of them, with percentages even above 90 percent, among those aged 25-64 there is a fair presence of employed people, particularly for Italians foreign-born.

3.5. Territorial divisions of residence in Italy at 12.31.2021

The next step was an analysis of the departure location from Italy, examining where individuals in the studied cohort resided in Italy according to the 2021 Permanent Population Census.

Figure 4 – Territorial divisions of residence in Italy at 12.31.2021 by target group.



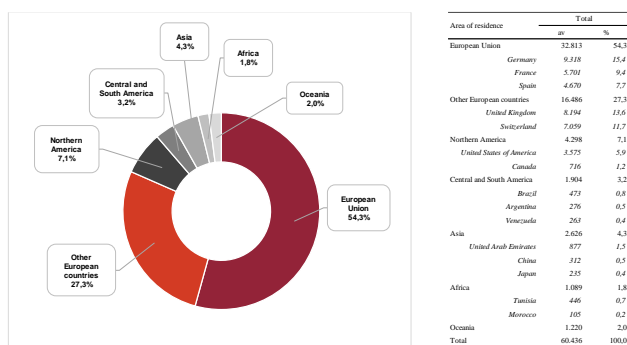
What emerges from Figure 4 is certainly the fact that these individuals mainly come from the northern part of the country; this phenomenon is particularly evident for the acquired individuals, and it is interesting to note that while the latter have very low residence percentages in the South, the same percentages for the natives reach higher levels, so much so that the South, when considered as a whole, surpasses the Center in the rankings and approaches the values of the North.

3.6. Italians native-born and geographical area of destination country

Regarding the place of residence abroad, Figure 5 shows the distribution by geographical area of residence abroad of natives born in Italy. It highlights how more than 80% of individuals prefer a European destination and, in particular, the

European Union (54.3%); there are also significant percentages of residents in North America (7.1%) and Asia (4.3%).

Figure 5 – Geographical area of residence abroad of Italians native born.

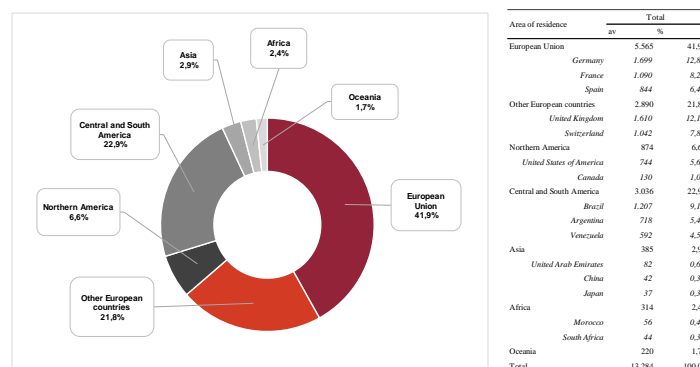


It emerges that Germany is the country most affected by this phenomenon for this target group, with a percentage of over 15%, followed in the European Union by France (9.4%) and Spain (7.7%), in the rest of Europe by the United Kingdom (13.6%) and Switzerland (11.7%), and by the United States (5.9%) in North America. It is also interesting to note the percentage of those who choose to reside in the United Arab Emirates (1.5%), the preferred destination in Asia, which is higher than that of China (0.5%) and Japan (0.4%), as well as that of countries with a history of emigration like Canada (1.2%), Argentina (0.8%), and Brazil (0.5%).

3.7. Italians foreign-born and geographical area of destination country

Natives born abroad confirm what was observed for the previous group, with a preference for European Union countries (41.9%), followed in this case by Central and South America (22.9%) and extra-EU European countries (21.8%) (Figure 6). To confirm this data, it can be observed from table by destination country how the percentages of Brazil (9.1%), Argentina (5.4%), and Venezuela (4.5%) increase significantly. For this target population, a further in-depth analysis was conducted by comparing the country of residence abroad with the country of birth.

As can be seen from Table 1, the highest percentages of those born in the same area as their current residence abroad are recorded in Central and South America with 97.6% and Africa with 86.9%. The situation is different for those residing in Europe, where approximately half are individuals born in Europe, but the other half are individuals born in Central and South America, Africa, and Asia.

Figure 6 – Geographical area of residence abroad of Italians foreign born.**Table 1** – Geographical area of residence abroad and geographical area of birth of Italians foreign born.

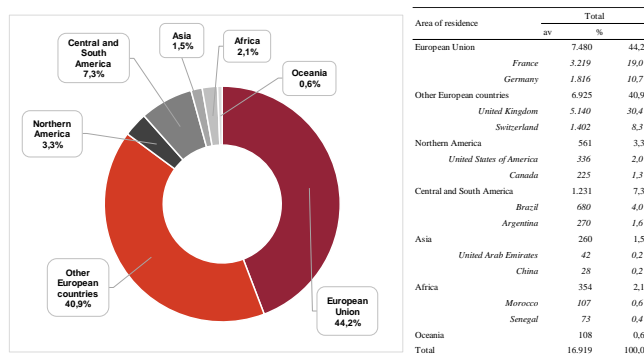
Area of residence	Area of birth							Total
	European Union	Other European countries	Northern America	Central and South America	Asia	Africa	Oceania	
European Union	45.0	7.5	1.3	33.4	2.3	10.3	0.3	100.0
Other European countries	7.0	50.4	2.3	20.8	11.6	7.7	0.3	100.0
Northern America	4.6	5.1	66.2	16.7	3.9	2.5	0.9	100.0
Central and South America	0.9	0.6	0.5	97.6	0.1	0.3	0.0	100.0
Asia	9.9	11.7	5.5	10.6	54.3	6.2	1.8	100.0
Africa	4.1	3.2	0.3	1.6	3.2	86.9	0.6	100.0
Oceania	6.8	6.8	0.9	11.4	5.0	4.1	65.0	100.0
Total	21.4	15.1	5.7	42.4	5.5	8.5	1.4	100.0

3.8. Italians by acquisition and geographical area of destination country

Italians by acquisition, in this case aggregated, are found to reside in 85.1% of cases in Europe and 10.6% in America, particularly in Central and South America

(7.3%). Among the countries of residence, the United Kingdom is the most represented with a percentage of 30.4%, followed by France (19.0%) and Germany (10.7%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7 – Geographical area of residence abroad of Italians by acquisition.



Similar to what was done for the natives, for this group the geographical area of residence abroad was compared with the geographical area of previous citizenship (Table 2).

Table 2 – Geographical area of residence abroad and geographical area of previous citizenship of Italians by acquisition.

Area of residence	Area of previous citizenship							Total
	European Union	Other European countries	Northern America	Central and South America	Asia	Africa	Oceania	
European Union	11.6	16.4	0.4	14.5	5.3	51.7	0.1	100.0
Other European countries	2.3	24.8	0.3	7.5	42.4	22.6	0.1	100.0
Northern America	2.5	13.4	27.5	18.7	29.4	8.6	0.0	100.0
Central and South America	1.1	0.6	0.2	97.7	0.2	0.3	0.0	100.0
Asia	4.6	9.2	2.3	6.9	66.2	10.0	0.8	100.0
Africa	1.7	1.1	0.0	2.3	0.6	94.4	0.0	100.0
Oceania	8.3	26.9	0.9	15.7	13.9	13.0	21.3	100.0
Total	6.4	18.2	1.3	17.5	21.8	34.6	0.2	100.0

In this case as well, the highest percentages of individuals with the previous citizenship area being the same as the residence area are in Central and South

America (97.7%) and Africa (94.4%), followed by Asia (66.2%). It is interesting to note that among those who decide to move to the European Union, more than half of the individuals had the citizenship of an African country (51.7%), while 42.4% of residents in extra-EU European countries had the citizenship of an Asian country.

4. Conclusions and future developments Steps

This study aimed to highlight the informative potential of the Permanent Population Census, which enables the analysis of various characteristics of Italians resident in Italy or abroad. Clearly, this is just a starting point in the analysis of this demographic group. Future efforts will focus on implementing new variables for analysis and attempting to reconcile stock data with flow data, similar to the reconciliation of stock data for Italians residing in Italy or abroad. Additionally, a draft law concerning the Census of Italians abroad is currently under consideration. This bill has three main objectives: to leverage the collaboration between ISTAT and the involved Ministries, to reduce the discrepancy between AIRE data and data from Consular Registry, and to improve communication regarding Italian citizens residing abroad between Italian Municipalities and Ministries.

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