# Italy

Permanent immigration to Italy continues to be significant and largely employment based. Labour immigration, largely oriented towards low-skilled occupations, is subject to annual numerical limits ("quotas") applied to employer requests for foreign workers. These quotas have been raised over the past few years to meet forecasted demand. In both 2006 and 2007 the quotas were set at 170 000, twice the 2005 figure. The 2007 quotas contained set-asides of 65 000 permits for home care workers, 14 200 for construction, 500 for transport workers, and 200 for fishermen. Another change was the 2007 requirement that employers apply on-line. About 700 000 applications were filed, of which half were for the home care worker quota. The 2008 quota – issued in December 2008 – allows for the admission of an additional 150 000 home care workers from those who applied in 2007.

Italy completely opened its labour market to citizens of the EU countries which joined in 2004. For Romanian and Bulgarian citizens, among the main nationalities of foreign workers in Italy, no real obstacles are imposed, and no visa is required. Even so, 224 000 visas for employment were issued to non-EU citizens in 2007, up from just 94 000 in 2006. In part, this was due to processing delays for applications filed in 2006. Family reunification visas rose 10 % to 89 000. Because EU citizens are exempted from permits, the number of permit holders fell from 2.4 to less than 2.1 million, of which about 1.24 million held work permits and 680 000 held family permits. The total stock of registered foreign population – which includes minors – increased by more than 17 % in 2007, to reach 3.43 million. This was largely due to an increase of 310 000 in the resident population of Romanian citizens. The registered population increased a further 12 % in 2008, to reach 3.89 million; again, the main increase was in Romanians.

Several important legislative decisions were made in 2008-2009. In 2008, stiffer penalties were applied for illegal migration, and family reunification requirements were also made stricter. In 2009, the so-called Security Law included reform of immigration law. Penalties for illegal immigration were raised again, restrictions were placed on access to public services for those with permits, and the maximum detention period was increased to from 60 to 180 days. Fees were raised, renewal of residence permits is to be conditional on integration, and a language test will be required to obtain the long-term residence permit. On the other hand, conditions were made easier for foreigners graduating from an Italian university, who now have 12 months to find a job, and employers of high-skilled foreign workers can receive pre-exemption from the labour market test.

A regularisation for domestic workers (maids and nannies) and care workers was conducted in September 2009, for anyone employed in domestic work since April 2009. Employers had to demonstrate adequate income or justify their disability, as well as pay a EUR 500 fine. The government received about 295 000 applications, fewer than originally predicted. 180 000 were for domestic workers and the remainder for care workers.

The number of asylum seekers rose almost 40% to 14 000 in 2007. The decentralised asylum application system, in place since April 2005, significantly reduced processing times and no-show rates. About 22 000 cases were reviewed in 2007, reducing the backlog. While 7% received refugee status, 47.4 % received a humanitarian stay permit. The refugee reception system expanded to provide services to about 6 300 people. In 2008, asylum applications more than doubled, to 30 000, and more than 21 000 cases were reviewed, with outcomes similar to those of 2007.

Arrests and expulsions of irregular migrants fell in 2007, as Romanian and Bulgarian citizens, who had represented a significant part of the irregular population, became EU citizens whose stay was legal. Illegal migration by sea dropped slightly in 2007 to about 20 000 unauthorised migrants intercepted along the southern Italian coast. Landings doubled, however, in 2008, and continued to rise in early 2009, leading Italy to seek closer cooperation from the authorities in Libya, from which many boats depart.

Further information:

http://www.interno.it/
http://www.istat.it/
http://www.lavoro.gov.it/lavoro/
www.solidarietasociale.gov.it/SolidarietaSociale/