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Statistics on refugees, internally displaced persons and statelessness

Between emergency and integration: a longitudinal study of asylum seekers in Italy

Note by Istat*

Abstract

In the last decade, Italy has been affected by significant flows of migration for humanitarian reasons. The presence of asylum seekers and refugees has long been considered temporary in Italy. Today, almost ten years after the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, it is clear that the issue of asylum is also a question of integration. In fact, a significant number of asylum seekers have started themselves to integrate. Consequently, it is essential focus on the integration paths of asylum seekers. The paper, based on the data of residence permits, aims to a better understanding of the trajectories of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy. The study highlights – using a cohort longitudinal approach - the dynamics that have affected these peculiar flows of migrants during the last decade (especially territorial mobility, changes of status).

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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. Data and methods

1. Istat is working to link relevant information from different administrative datasets in order to produce a new database that contains important, information on asylum seekers, refugees and related populations. This new database allows for longitudinal analysis on key topics including the stability of the presence of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy and their internal mobility. The design of the ISTAT initiative employed the definitions of refugees and related populations used by the European Regulation No 862/200722, which are aligned to the Refugee Convention and therefore also with the International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (IRRS).
2. In addition, the adoption of the international recommendations had a significant impact on ISTAT's work in this area. The IRRS' focus on variables and indicators to measure integration – including for recent arrivals – prompted a shift in understanding within ISTAT that started exploring opportunities to assess the level of integration of these vulnerable populations.
3. ISTAT has combined data from different administrative registers that include information on relevant populations. The principal source of data are the residence permits collected by the Ministry of Interior, including those granted on the basis of asylum, those granted to recognized refugees, and those granted for other humanitarian reasons¹. The second relevant database is the national population register. Recently the National Institute of Statistics has used also the data collected by the Ministry of Education.
4. In this process the cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Interior that collects data on residence permits has been essential. It will be basic also for further developments.
5. The data referring to the various years are linked through deterministic record linkage, employing unique identification codes. The linkage allows for individuals to be followed over time and to verify the continuity of their regular presence in the country. Obviously, only regular migrants can be so monitored. If the person loses his residence permit, but remains in Italy, he or she “disappears” from the residence permit dataset. The integrated and longitudinal approach also allows monitoring of changes in the status of asylum seekers. The unique code is available for about 90% of the cases. This allows for the performance of good quality analyses.

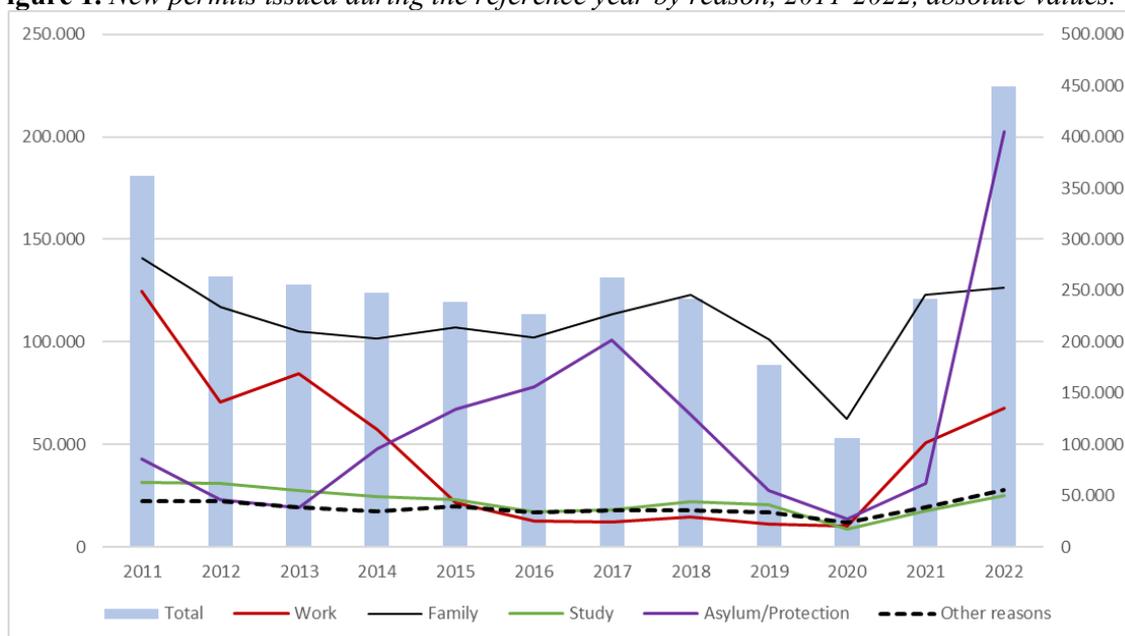
II. Recent flows and characteristics of the presence

6. The analysis of residence permits gives us a picture of the characteristics of flows and of the presence of migrants in Italy for the reason of the permit. A total of 3,074,746 permits were issued in Italy between 2011 and 2022, of which 23.4% were for reasons connected to asylum (Figure 1).
7. In the last decade there has been an unprecedented contraction of flows for work reasons and a substantial stability of those related to family reasons (with the well-known exception of 2020, in the period of COVID19), considering that the latter flows are the most consistent.

¹ The residence permit dataset does not include all asylum applications submitted in the year because there are delays in registration. However, it is the only individual dataset on “asylum” for which it is currently possible to work with record linkage techniques.

8. Analysing the flows of migrants arriving in Italy for international protection, we observe that the number of asylum seekers entering in Italy has experienced various fluctuations over the years. After an increase in 2014, there was a significant peak in arrivals in 2017. The Covid pandemic then led to a drastic decrease in the overall number of arrivals. After the crisis due to the pandemic, we can observe an increase. During 2022 the flows of migrants arriving from Ukraine were the most important, but during 2022 also other asylum seekers from other countries arrived in Italy. Above all, there were Bangladeshis (9,616 residence permits) and Pakistanis (8,396 documents). In third place were Egyptians with almost 5,000 permits for reasons related to asylum. These three citizenships, and Ukrainians covered approximately 53% of permits issued for reasons of asylum or international protection in 2022. In 2022 the Nigerians were the fifth citizenship with 3,576 permits.

Figure 1. *New permits issued during the reference year by reason, 2011-2022, absolute values.*



Source: Istat, 2023

Table 1. Forms of protection for migrants in Italy

Asylum seekers: *People that have a founded fear of being persecuted in their country of origin due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or belonging to a certain social group and have applied for international protection (waiting for a decision).*

Refugees *people that have applied for international protection and have been recognised as refugees on the basis of the Geneva Convention on refugees (1951) and its subsequent Protocol*

Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection *are people who despite not being refugees, risk a serious threat in their country of origin (sentencing to death, torture, inhumane or degrading treatment, risk of death due to armed conflict). See page 27 for further information.*

Beneficiaries of temporary protection: *Temporary protection is an exceptional measure to provide immediate and temporary protection in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx of displaced persons from non-EU countries who are unable to return to their country of*

origin. The 2001 Temporary Protection Directive provides a tool for the EU to address such situations. The Temporary Protection Directive, which was adopted following the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, was triggered for the first time by the Council in response to the unprecedented Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 to offer quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Beneficiaries of other forms of protections: *the permit for humanitarian reasons or special protection protects the subject from expulsion or refoulement to a hostile country, where the foreign citizen risks being persecuted for reasons of race, sex, sexual orientation, citizenship, religion, political opinion, and personal and social conditions. At the same time, these grounds are protected in all situations where the foreign national must be extradited to a State where there is a fear that he or she might be subjected to inhuman treatment, torture, or violation of human rights. Special protection, as regulated by Law 173/2020, categorically excludes the possibility of the foreign citizen's removal from the national territory when this implies a violation of the right to respect for one's private and family life: in particular, the Commission must consider family ties, integration into Italian society, the duration of his stay in our country and, finally, also cultural, or social ties with the Country of origin.*

9. About the stocks of refugees and asylum seekers, according to the data referred to residence permits, at the beginning of 2023 there were 350,345 people holding a residence permit based on a form of protection: 30.2% were recognised refugees, 15.2% asylum seekers and 54.6% migrants under other forms of protection: above all Ukrainians under temporary protection. Among the ten principal countries of citizenship (Table 1) are included: Ukraine – with almost 155 thousand permits for protection- is the first country, Nigeria (32,022 permits) and Pakistan (24,132 permits). The specific reason of protection varies for the different citizenships, according to the different duration of stay of the communities in Italy and to the different forms of protection granted for different situations (for example the “special” permit for temporary protection for Ukrainians). It is to clarify that the process for obtaining the status of refugee requires long time, sometimes years. Ukrainians are almost all under temporary protection (94,1%). Nigerians are in many cases refugees (52.1%), but the flows from this African country are still arriving so there are also asylum seekers (21.6%). The flows from Pakistan and from Bangladesh towards are recent and consequently the percentages of refugees are low: 42.4% and 11.0%; instead the two countries of Indian subcontinent register high percentages of asylum seekers. Many migrants arrived from Pakistan and Bangladesh have permits issued for other forms of protections. Flows from Mali, Afghanistan and Somalia slowed down in recent years, consequently for these citizenships very high percentages of refugees are registered and low percentages of asylum seekers.

Table 1. Number of people under protection by citizenship (principal 10) and type of protection, absolute values and percentages, Italy, 1° January 2023.

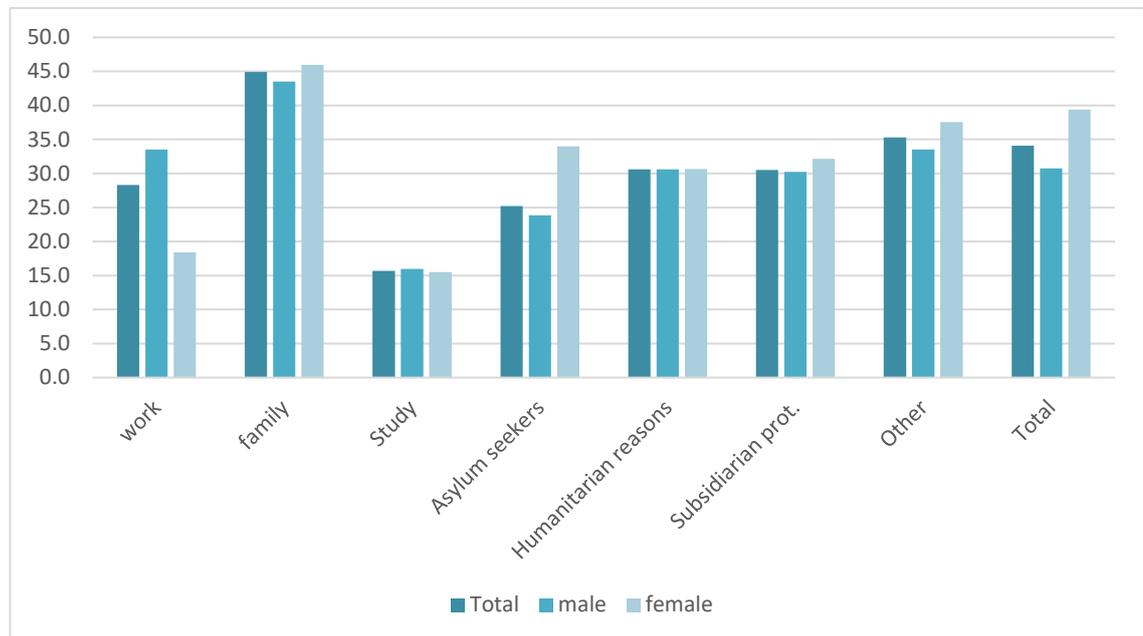
Country of citizenship	Absolute number	Percentage	Reason of the permit			
			Refugees and subsidiarian protection %	Asylum seekers %	Temporary protection %	Other forms of protection %
Ukraine	154,621	44.1	1.7	0.8	94.1	3.4
Nigeria	32,022	9.1	52.1	21.6	0.0	26.3
Pakistan	24,132	6.9	42.5	40.6	0.0	16.9
Bangladesh	17,117	4.9	11.0	63.3	0.0	25.7
Mali	12,814	3.7	79.2	4.5	0.0	16.3
Afghanistan	11,633	3.3	93.9	5.6	0.0	0.5
Gambia	6,961	2.0	34.3	20.1	0.0	45.7
Somalia	6,871	2.0	95.1	4.2	0.0	0.7
Senegal	6,510	1.9	33.6	18.9	0.0	47.4
El Salvador	5,803	1.7	67.7	21.8	0.0	10.4
<i>Others</i>	<i>71,861</i>	<i>20.5</i>	<i>53.3</i>	<i>26.6</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>18.9</i>
Total	350,345	100.0	30.2	15.2	41.8	12.8

Source: Istat, 2023

III. A stable presence? Longitudinal analysis of residence permits

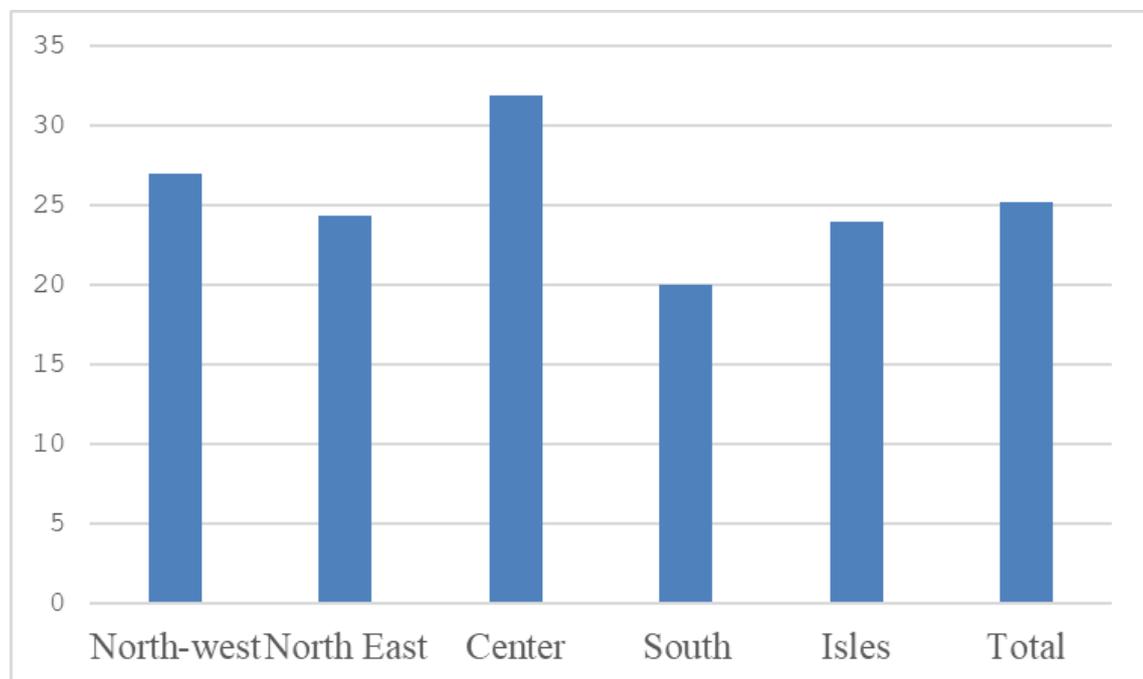
10. The analysis carried out on people that received for the first time a residence permit in Italy for some form of protection in 2017 show that these of flows are more transitory and those which are more likely to stabilise on Italian territory. Considering the cohort (those who entered Italy for the first time in the same year and in this case entered in 2017) record linkage operation between datasets verified their presence six years after the issuance of residence permits (1st January 2023).
11. The cohort is constituted by 259 thousand new comers, among these we find 86,289 asylum seekers and 12,498 migrants that obtained other forms of protection. At the beginning of 2023 the 34.1% of this cohort has still a valid residence permit. The percentage of long-term stayers is – of course – larger among migrants arrived for family reasons (44.9). It is particularly low for students (15.7). The long-term stayers represent the 28.3% of workers, the 25.2% of the asylum seekers and the 29.7% for people under other forms of protection.
12. Even if women are vulnerable migrants, in general they show a higher propensity to stability, especially among asylum seekers (Figure 2). The propensity to settle is lower for asylum seekers arriving in the South of the country and in the Isles (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Immigrants arrived in Italy in 2017 by presence after 6 years (01-01-2023) by reason of the permit and sex (percentages).



Source: Istat, 2023

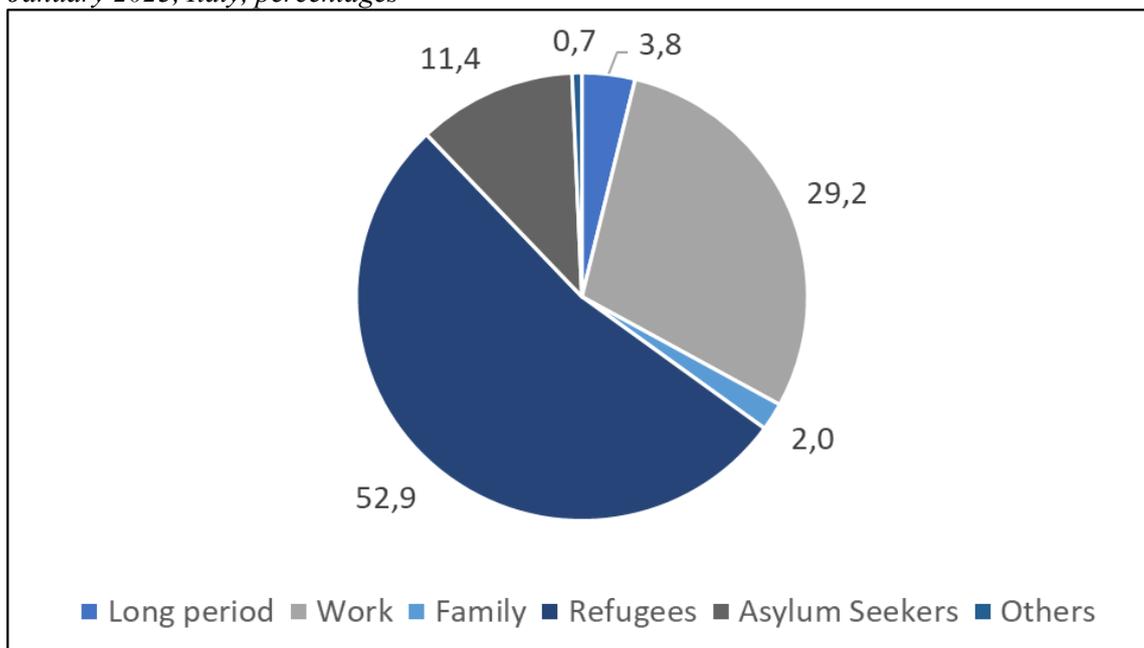
Figure 3. Asylum seekers arrived in Italy in 2017 present on territory after 6 years (01-01-2023) by territorial area of the first permit issued (percentages).



Source: Istat, 2023

13. Focusing on the immigrants entered in 2017 and still present after 6 years, it is also interesting to observe that among the ones arrived as asylum seekers only the 52.9% obtained a residence permits as refugee or for subsidiary protection (Figure 4). The 29.2% at the beginning of 2023 hold a permit for work reason. The 11.4% has still a permit for asylum.

Figure 4. *First permits for asylum seekers issued in 2017 for reason of the permit registered at 1st January 2023, Italy, percentages*



Source: Istat, 2023

14. The cohort entered in Italy in 2017 shows a high mobility on the Italian territory, among the ones still present at the beginning of the 2023 the 18.8% live in a different province from the one in which the first permit was issued. The percentage is higher than 30% for people arrived as asylum seekers. The mobility of asylum seekers is a common feature studied in many different European countries and we can consider it, in some cases, a second step – after the decision to stay in the host country – towards integration (Haberfeld and others 2019; de Hoon; Vink, Schmeets, 2020; Mossaad and others; 2020).
15. The South and the Islands, although being important entry areas into Italy, retain migrants arriving in the territory to a lesser extent. In these geographical areas, not only are the percentages of those settling in Italy lower, but additionally, many of those who remain move to other regions of the country. In the South only the 74,8% of asylum seekers entered in 2017 and still present in 2023 have remained in the area, in the North west the percentage of stable asylum seekers enter in 2017 is more than 91%. In the Isles the percentage of asylum seekers settled in the region is smaller: less than 54%. In the South, only 74.8% of asylum seekers who entered in 2017 and were still present in 2023 remained in the area (Table 2)
16. A simple attractiveness index representing the balance between arrivals and departures of asylum seekers (considering only internal movements) between 2017 and 2023, relative to the total initial arrivals in 2017, highlights the attractiveness of the North and the repulsion of Isles and South (Figure 5).

Table 2. *Asylum seekers arrived in Italy in 2017 and still present at the beginning of 2023 by areas of arrival (2017) and area of presence in 2023.*

Areas of arrival in 2017	Presence in the stock					
	North-west	North-east	Center	South	Isles	Total
	absolute values					
North-west	5,726	255	167	107	28	6,283
North-East	259	3,652	130	78	21	4,140
Center	235	193	4,329	203	32	4,992
South	411	320	379	3,537	80	4,727
Isles	239	158	176	179	865	1,617
Total	6,870	4,578	5,181	4,104	1,026	21,759
	percentages					
North-west	91.1	4.1	2.7	1.7	0.4	100.0
North-East	6.3	88.2	3.1	1.9	0.5	100.0
Center	4.7	3.9	86.7	4.1	0.6	100.0
South	8.7	6.8	8.0	74.8	1.7	100.0
Isles	14.8	9.8	10.9	11.1	53.5	100.0
Total	31.6	21.0	23.8	18.9	4.7	100.0

Source: Istat, 2024

Figure 5. *Internal attractiveness/Repulsion index for asylum seekers entered in Italy in 2017 by different territorial areas (2017-2023).*



Source: Istat, 2024

IV. Linkages with other source and perspectives

17. At present, Istat is working not only to longitudinally analyze data on residence permits for asylum-related reasons but also to link data from different sources to expand the dimensions of observable integration.
18. A first linkage has been made with the resident population register (“Anagrafe”). It turns out that the proportion of those registered in the “anagrafe” is 60.5%.
19. The first results of the linkage with data from the Ministry of Education indicate a limited presence of asylum seekers and refugees in the Italian schools and universities.
20. Istat intends to continue on the path of data linkages, relying on collaboration with ministries that hold interesting databases, particularly with the Ministry of the Interior. A recent agreement should soon allow for the processing of asylum applications data, not just residence permit data.
21. At the same time, Istat is working on an innovative research project with Sapienza University of Rome. Within the project, numerous analyses have been conducted, including regression models, to study migrants' propensity for territorial stability and mobility based on their characteristics. Some of the results obtained are available in English in the paper entitled “*Beyond the emergency: characteristics and behaviour of refugees and asylum seekers in Italy*” published in the *Rivista Italiana di Economia, Demografia e Statistica* in 2024 and edited by O. Casacchia, C. Conti, C. Pangallo and F. M. Rottino. Another work with updated data will be presented at *The^{5th} Scientific Meeting of the Italian Statistical Society* at the University of Bari Aldo Moro in June 2024.

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