



THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN ITALY

Migrant population annual report
Executive summary



20
22

Curated by the General Directorate for Immigration and Integration Policies of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Annual Reports on the main foreign communities in Italy investigate and analyse the presence in Italy of the largest populations of non-EU migrants: Moroccan, Albanian, Chinese, Ukrainian, Indian, Filipino, Bangladeshi, Egyptian, Pakistani, Moldovan, Sri Lankan, Senegalese, Tunisian, Nigerian, Peruvian and Ecuadorian.

A key factor also in the 2022 edition is the contribution of the Institutions and Bodies that provided the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies with the necessary information, subsequently processed by the ANPAL Servizi Integration Services Area. Sincere thanks are due to ISTAT – National Institute of Statistics, INPS – General Statistical Actuarial Coordination, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of University and Research, the Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture; CeSPI, the CGIL, CISL, UIL, UGL trade union confederations and U.O. Data Science Applications – ANPAL Servizi Studies and Research Division. The financial inclusion section was curated by Daniele Frigeri, Director of the National Observatory on Financial Inclusion of Migrants.

The unabridged volumes of the 2012 – 2022 editions of the Reports on the Main Foreign Communities in Italy are available, in Italian and in the main foreign languages, in the “Documents and Research – Reports by the Immigration and Integration Policies DG” area of the portal www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it and in the "Studies and Statistics" area of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies website - www.lavoro.gov.it. A statistical annex is also available at the same addresses, containing additional information with respect to the reports, or with insights on the existing analysis and a comparison between the main nationalities.

The 2022 edition of the National Reports on the Main Foreign Communities, the translation of the overviews into the main vehicular languages and the Monitoring Report were produced by the “Services for Integration Policies” Area of ANPAL Servizi, in the framework of the project “START-Support to Integrated Multiannual Programming on Employment, Integration and Inclusion”.

The Chinese community in Italy

The origin of Chinese immigration to Italy dates back to the late 1920s, when the first citizens of the Republic of China, as it was then known, chose to settle in Milan. Due to the socio-political changes taking place in the Asian country at that time, known for its closure to the outside world, the flows to Europe were interrupted until the late 1970s, when the government of the People's Republic of China started a more open policy in relation to emigration of its citizens. Chinese immigration in Italy – and more generally in Europe – is defined by the geographical origin of the settlers, namely the southern part of Zhejiang province and, in particular, the cities (and area) of Wencheng, Qingtian and, above all, Wenzhou: most of the Chinese nationals residing in Italy come from this area of China, once known for its high poverty levels but now one of the most important provinces of the country, having achieved fourth place in the national economy in 2021¹. Over the years, migrants from Zhejiang have brought with them a winning entrepreneurial model made of small family run sole proprietorships, a type of enterprise is a marked distinction of the Chinese community, the second largest in Italy in terms of the number of non-EU sole proprietors.

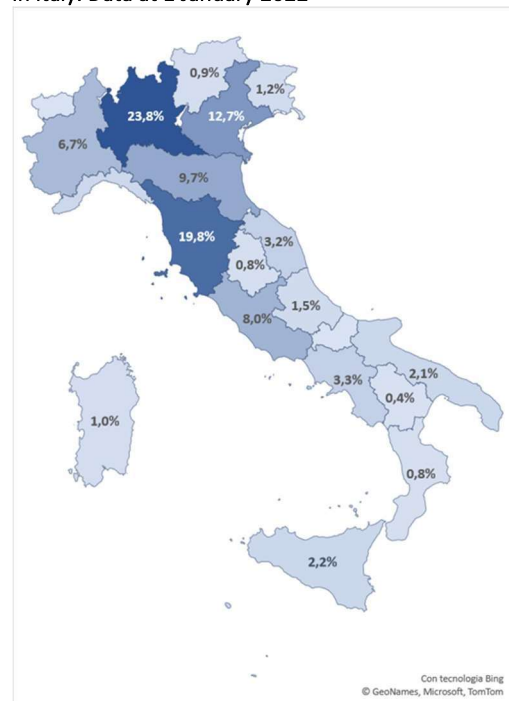
In socio-demographic terms, the Chinese community is the third largest of all non-EU communities, with 291,185 legal residents as of 1 January 2022² (8.2% of the non-EU population in Italy). The community's numbers grew by around 4% with respect to 1 January 2021, versus +5.2% for non-EU nationals overall.

In terms of age composition, the presence of young people is greater than in the non-EU population as a whole: 40% of the community is under 30 (versus 37.3%), while almost one Chinese immigrant in four in Italy is a minor (24% versus 20.9% overall). The Chinese community therefore has a low average age (33) and a nearly equal gender balance (50.1% of the community are women).

In terms of geographical distribution, Chinese residents are primarily located in northern Italy, albeit with a lower concentration than for non-EU citizens as a whole (57% of the community versus 61.6% for non-EU citizens). The leading region of settlement for the community is Lombardy (around 24%), while Veneto is third (with an incidence of 12.7%). The community has a strong presence in Tuscany, the second largest region in terms of Chinese immigration: almost 58,000 people or around 20% of the total number of Chinese nationals residing in Italy (8.4% for the non-EU population overall). The Chinese presence in Emilia-Romagna is also significant (almost one in ten Chinese nationals legally residing in Italy is in the region), while around 11% of the community resides in the south.

Despite the migration seniority of the community in Italy, residence permit data reveal a level of stabilisation, steadily increasing but still immature: long-term residents are just under 65% (around 66% for all non-EU immigrants), although this is 0.5% lower than in the previous year. Among short-term residence permits there is a clear predominance of work-related reasons, with a share of 62.4%. This fact is a strong characteristic of the Chinese community (unlike most non-EU communities, for whom family reasons prevail).

Distribution of the Chinese population legally residing in Italy. Data at 1 January 2022



Source: Anpal Servizi SpINT Area analysis of ISTAT data

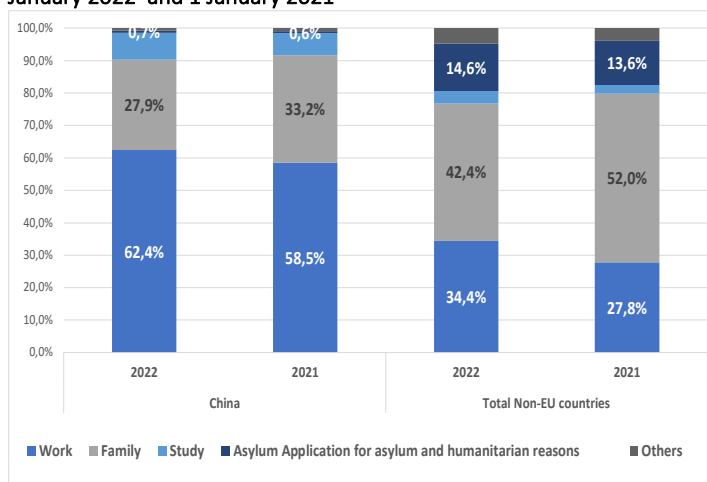
¹ <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/chinas-2021-gdp-performance-a-look-at-major-provinces-and-cities/>

² The source for data on legal residents is ISTAT.

In 2021, after the drastic drop recorded in 2020 due to the movement restrictions introduced globally to counter the spread of the SARS-COV 2 virus, there was a general increase in the issue of new permits, also due to the illegal labour emergence provision (legislative decree 34 of 2020) that allowed the regularisation of non-EU citizens already present in the country: the 8,686 residence permits issued to Chinese nationals in 2021 account for 3.6% of the total, up by 83.7% versus 2020.

New admissions for family reunification – the first motivation with 36.3% of the total – increased by about 64% compared to 2020, while work permits accounted for 30.5% of the total, with an exponential rise (+1,489.2%, for the reasons illustrated above). Finally, the Chinese immigrant community is distinguished by a large number of arrivals for study reasons: almost 30% of newly arriving Chinese citizens come to Italy to study, this incidence being unequalled among the other main non-EU nationalities; suffice it say that Chinese nationals who entered Italy for study reasons in 2021 were around 15% of all non-EU students. This high concentration also emerges from university education data: the 8,053 Chinese students in Italian universities are more than 9% of all non-EU undergraduates.

Short-term residence permits by type and citizenship (v%). Data at 1 January 2022 and 1 January 2021



Source: SpINT Area analysis of Anpal Servizi on ISTAT-Ministry of the

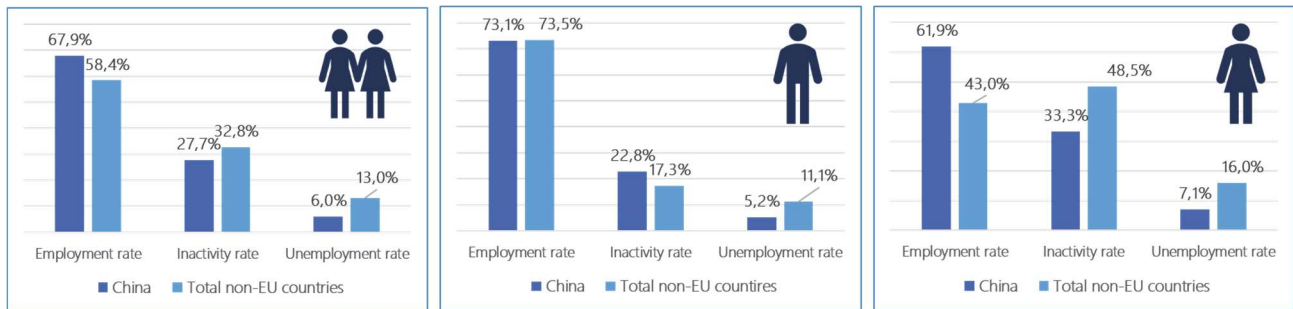
Chinese migration to Italy can be clearly identified by analysing job market trends³, which reveal a marked propensity for the commercial sector (30% of the community's workforce) and the hospitality sector, which employs around 28% of all Chinese workers in Italy. The industrial sector in the strict sense is also very significant, providing employment for around 28% of the community's workers.

An analysis of the main labour market indicators reveals better employment performance than that recorded for the non-EU population overall: the employment rate is 68% (compared to 58.8% recorded for the wider non-EU population), the inactivity rate is 27.7% (around 33% for the non-EU population), while the unemployment rate stands at 6%, versus 13% for the non-EU population. Gender analysis shows a high level of participation of women in the community: the gap between male and female employment levels is small, with employment rates above the non-EU average for both men and women. The employment rate is around 73% for men (slightly lower than the 73.5% figure for non-EU men), while it is 61.9% for women (43% for non-EU women), and the inactivity and unemployment rates are significantly lower than the respective averages.

Despite the high share of Chinese university students, the community has a lower level of education among the workforce than the non-EU average: the share of Chinese university graduates is around 5% (versus 10.5%), high school leavers total 18.2% (32.8% for non-EU citizens as a whole), while the remaining 77% have a middle school diploma at most.

³ Labour market data are from ISTAT RCFL source as of 1H 2022

Main labour market indicators by gender and citizenship (v.%) H1 2022



Source: SpINT Area analysis of Anpal Servizi on RCFL - ISTAT microdata

In terms of occupational types, *clerical, sales and personal service* jobs prevail (61.2%), skilled manual work accounts for 28% of the community's workers, unskilled manual work for 6.5%, and *managers and professionals in the intellectual and technical fields* accounted for 4.2%.

The community's prominence in the business sphere is significant, where it ranks second among non-EU communities in terms of the number of sole proprietorships (second only to the Moroccan community): there were 51,926⁴ Chinese sole proprietors as at 31 December 2021, or 13.2% of non-EU entrepreneurs in Italy, reflecting a slight fall of -1.4% versus the prior year. 47% of Chinese sole proprietors are women, placing the Chinese immigrant population in third place for female business ownership among the main non-EU communities. The regional distribution of enterprises led by Chinese citizens can be partially matched with the territorial distribution of the community: with Tuscany (21% of Chinese individual entrepreneurs), Lombardy (around 20%) and Emilia-Romagna (9.5%) as the leading business regions. A breakdown by province shows that 10.8% of Chinese sole proprietors are in Milan; followed closely by Prato (10.7%), with Florence in third place with 7.6%. In the business world, the importance of commerce – retail and wholesale – is also confirmed. With a share of 35.3%, this is the predominant sector with 10% of non-EU sole proprietorships in the commerce sector being run by Chinese nationals. The second largest investment sector for Chinese companies is manufacturing, the sector of more than a third of all Chinese sole proprietorships: this is the community's most characteristic sector, with up to 56% of non-EU sole proprietorships being owned by Chinese immigrants. The hospitality sector follows, with a share of 14.2%: these enterprises account for 30.6% of non-EU businesses operating in the same sector.

The high proportion of people employed in the Chinese community is also reflected in the levels of use of some welfare measures⁵: the community's incidence is high among wage subsidy recipients, to the point that one out of ten non-EU recipients of these measures is Chinese; the percentage rises to almost 20% for redundancy fund in derogation (CIGD), the figure being justified by the large number of Chinese-owned businesses, especially family concerns, that were forced to cease trading during the pandemic. Conversely, the community's incidence among recipients of pensions and family welfare measures (parental leave, family allowances, etc.) is very low: the only parameter of note is the 1,133 Chinese maternity leave recipients, representing 4.5% of the total number of non-EU recipients of this benefit.

⁴ Source: Unioncamere as at 31 December 2021

⁵ Source: INPS – General Statistical Actuarial Coordination as at 2021

