



# THE SRI LANKAN 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 2021 – 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](http://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it) and in the 'Studies and Statistics' area of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies website – [www.lavoro.gov.it](http://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, with 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 Sri Lankan community in Italy

Sri Lankan immigrants formed one of the first foreign communities to emerge in Italy starting from the second half of the 1970s. The first community members, whose migration was likely facilitated by contacts between Catholic institutions in the two countries, were women, who came to fill the labour gap in the personal services sector. These women were also among the first representatives of foreign labour in the area of domestic and care work in Italy. Starting in the 1980s, the civil war between the ethnic Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority weakened the island's already fragile economy and boosted outward migration flows. From this time on, also Sri Lankan men started to arrive in Italy. In the 1990s the community became more balanced in terms of demographics and gender thanks to family reunifications, which were to become the foundation for full integration and establishment of many foreign communities.

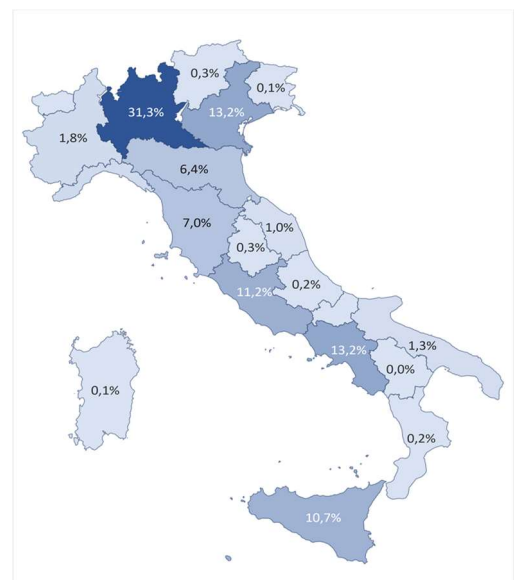
In socio-demographic terms the Sri Lankan community is eleventh among non-EU communities, with **102,906 legal residents** as of 1 January 2022<sup>1</sup> (2.9% of the non-EU population in Italy). The community grew by around 3% with respect to 1 January 2021, compared to +5.2% for non-EU citizens overall.

The Sri Lankan community in Italy is characterised by the marked presence of minors, constituting the main age group with an incidence of about 23%, higher than the non-EU population overall (just under 21%). The more than 23,000 Sri Lankan minors represent 3.2% of non-EU minors in Italy as of 1 January 2022, this figure to be viewed in relation to the growing presence of families and the high birth rate. Another characteristic of the community is a higher incidence of older age groups compared to non-EU immigrants overall: one in four Sri Lankans (26.2%) are 50 or older (the figure for non-EU residents overall is 23%). It follows that the Sri Lankan community has a slightly higher **average age** (37) than the general non-EU community and now presents a moderate **gender imbalance** in favour of the men (approximately 53% of the community are men).

**Geographical distribution** of the Sri Lankan community displays a high concentration in northern Italy, particularly in Lombardy (the first region in terms of numbers), which hosts almost one third of Sri Lankan immigrants (31.3%), compared to just over a quarter of non-EU citizens overall. Second in terms of the presence of Sri Lankan immigrants are two regions - one in the north and one in the south - with identical percentages: Veneto and Campania each host 13.2% of the immigrant population. The community is also highly concentrated in Lazio (11.2%) and Sicily (10.7%), reflecting its fairly widespread presence nationwide.

The community displays a high level of stabilisation, also due to the length of migration to our country; in fact, **data on residence permits** show a high proportion of **long-term residents**: 69.4%, which is four percentage point higher than the figure for non-EU nationals overall. Among **short-term residence permits**, family reasons are prevalent (around 53%), with an incidence more than 10 percentage points higher than that recorded for non-EU citizens overall (42.4%), for whom they still represent the prevalent motivation; this further confirms the level of consolidation of the Sri Lankan community in Italy. The community did however show a slight drop in family reunifications in 2021 (-0.5%). Also, in almost half of cases, residence permits for family reasons are awarded to minors (46.6%).

**Distribution of the Sri Lankan population legally residing in Italy. Data as at 1 January 2022**

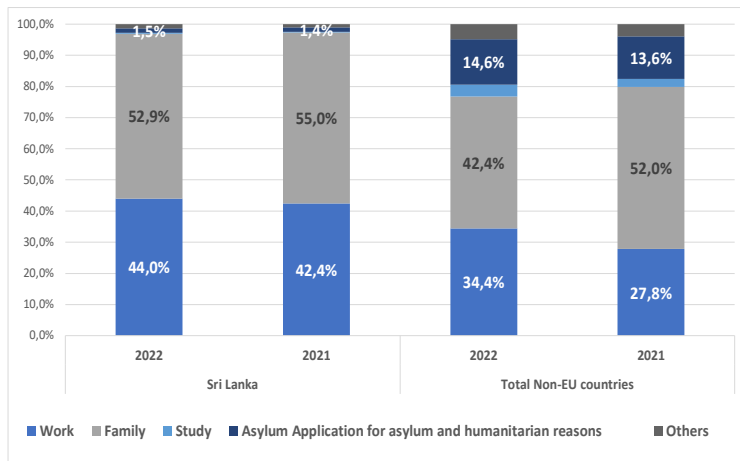


Source: Anpal Servizi SpINT Area analysis of ISTAT data

<sup>1</sup> Data on legal residents were obtained from ISTAT.

In contrast, work is the second most reason for residence, accounting for 44% of short-term residence permits, up 7.5 percentage points on the previous year. The Sri Lankan community in Italy is the sixth largest in terms of work-related immigration.

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



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

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), which allowed formalisation of the positions of non-EU citizens already in the country: the 2,767 residence permits issued to Sri Lankan citizens in 2021 are 1.1% of the total, an increase of around 65% versus 2020. Arrivals for family reunification – the first motivation with 77% of the total – increased by more than 42% compared to 2020, while work permits accounted for 16.5% of the total, with an exponential increase (+601.5%, for the above-mentioned reasons). Also, admissions linked

to the possession or request of a form of protection (political asylum, international protection, special cases) increased compared to 2020 (+74%) and accounted for 3.4% of permits issued to community nationals.

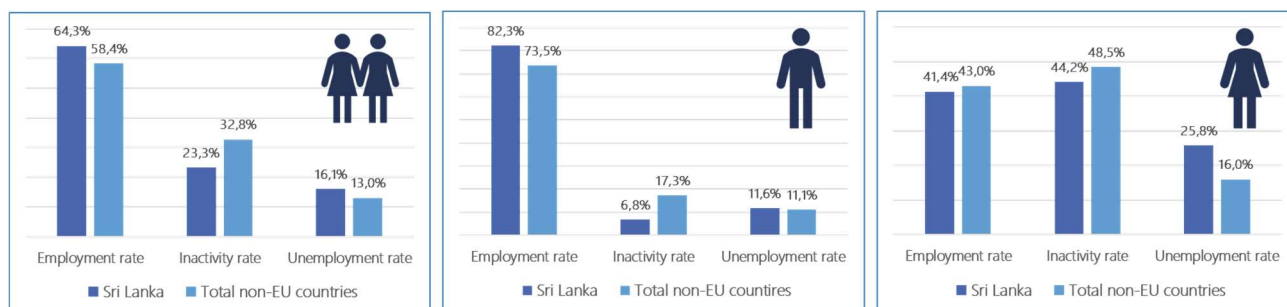
The characterisation of Sri Lankan migration in our country is made particularly evident by an analysis of **labour market data**<sup>2</sup>, which highlight the significant insertion of the community into the sphere of Public, Social and *public, social and personal services*, providing jobs for 57% of the community's working population. This is followed by the hospitality sector (15.4%) and that of *transport and other business services* (8% of Sri Lankan workers).

An analysis of the main labour market indicators reveals overall improved occupational performance than recorded for the non-EU population as a whole, clearly linked to the degree of industry specialisation: the **employment rate** is **64.3%** (compared to 58.4% the non-EU population overall), the **inactivity rate** is **23.3%** (for the non-EU population overall this indicator is around 33%), while the **unemployment rate** is **16.1%**, i.e. higher than the figure recorded for non-EU nationals considered globally (13%). This general situation should however be interpreted in conjunction with the specific situation of women in the community, whose employment status is worse than that of non-EU women in general. In fact, there is a **large gap** between the **male employment** rate (around 82.3%) and the **female employment** rate (41.4%): the latter is lower than the non-EU average (43%), just as - speculatively - unemployment is almost 10 points higher for Sri Lankan women than for the non-EU female population as a whole. The only better than average indicator was inactivity (44.2% vs. 48.5%).

The community does not have a high **level of education** (the share of university graduates is 6.2%, compared to 10.5% for non-EU citizens overall), but has carved out a dedicated place on the Italian labour market thanks to its specialisation in manual labour. In terms of **occupational types**, *unskilled manual work* remains the predominant type of work for the community, involving almost 59.4% of employed Sri Lankans, while 14% of the community's workers perform *skilled manual work*. About a quarter of job-holders in the community are *clerical, sales and personal service workers*, the remaining 1.5% are *managers or professionals in intellectual and technical fields*.

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

<sup>2</sup> Labour market data were provided by ISTAT RCFL at H1 2022.



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

The community's activity in the **entrepreneurial sphere** is less significant, where it ranks 13th – among non-EU countries – in terms of the number of sole proprietors: in fact, there were **3,814**<sup>3</sup> holders of sole proprietorships of Sri Lankan origin as of 31 December 2021, or 1% of non-EU entrepreneurs in Italy, this number having increased compared to 2020 (+6%). 38% of sole proprietorships in the community operate in the sector of *trade and transport*. The second largest investment sector for Sri Lankan companies is *Business Services*, with an incidence of 18%: these companies represent 2.8% of the total non-EU sole proprietorships in the sector. It should be noted that Sri Lankan sole proprietorships in the construction sector account for about 9% of the community, despite the residual nature of the sector among workers in the community.

The high proportion of people from the Sri Lankan community employed in *Services* is also reflected in the levels of use of several **welfare provisions**<sup>4</sup>. The community is in fact little affected by wage supplementation measures - such as ordinary and extraordinary redundancy funds - while it shows a higher incidence (4%) among non-EU recipients of *ordinary solidarity fund allowances*, i.e. instruments aimed at ensuring protection for workers during the employment relationship in cases of reduction of work hours or suspension of work, regardless of the sector concerned, for those sectors and companies that do not benefit from the ordinary redundancy fund (CIGO) or the extraordinary redundancy fund (CIGS), such as in the *Services* sector. Among non-EU social employment insurance (NASPI) recipients, 2.8% are Sri Lankan, while the incidence is lower for the various forms of pensions in our system: Sri Lankan IVS (invalidity, old age, survivors) pension recipients do not reach 2% of the total of non-EU recipients. A further sign that the level of integration of the community remains immature with respect to the welfare system can also be seen in family assistance and in the specific case of *the maternity benefit*<sup>5</sup>, an indication of job market integration of the community's women which, as we have seen, is not yet fully completed: in this case, 1.7% of non-EU female recipients are Sri Lankan. As far as the Sri Lankan community is concerned, there are 12,344 households benefiting from Basic Income (Reddito di cittadinanza) or a Basic Pension (Pensione di cittadinanza) (around 5.5% of non-EU recipients).

**Remittances** to Sri Lanka, amounting to 234.4 million euro in 2022, represent 3% of the total volume of remittances sent from Italy to the rest of the world. A flow of resources that grew by 50% between 2016 and 2020, but has contracted significantly in the last two years to return to 2016 levels. This figure is in sharp contrast to the average of the other communities present in Italy, which may be a sign of a lower possibility of support for families of origin linked to the lower income capacity of Italian immigrants of this nationality.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Unioncamere as at 31 December 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Source: INPS (National Social Security Institute) - General Statistical Actuarial Coordination as at 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Otherwise known as 'compulsory abstention allowance', this is a form of income support in lieu of salary and is paid to female workers for maternity leave and childbirth for a total of 5 month.

