



# THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN ITALY

Annual report on the presence of migrants  
*Executive summary*



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23

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, Ukrainian, Chinese, Indian, Bangladeshi, Egyptian, Filipino, Pakistani, Moldovan, Sri Lankan, Senegalese, Nigerian, Tunisian, Peruvian and Ecuadorian.

A key factor also in the 2023 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 Integration Services Area of Sviluppo Lavoro Italia. 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 the Data Science Applications B.U. - Studies and Research Division of Sviluppo Lavoro Italia. 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 – 2023 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 website [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 and a comparison between the main nationalities.

The 2023 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 Sviluppo Lavoro Italia, in the framework of the project “START-Support to Integrated Multiannual Programming on Employment, Integration and Inclusion”.

## The Chinese community in Italy

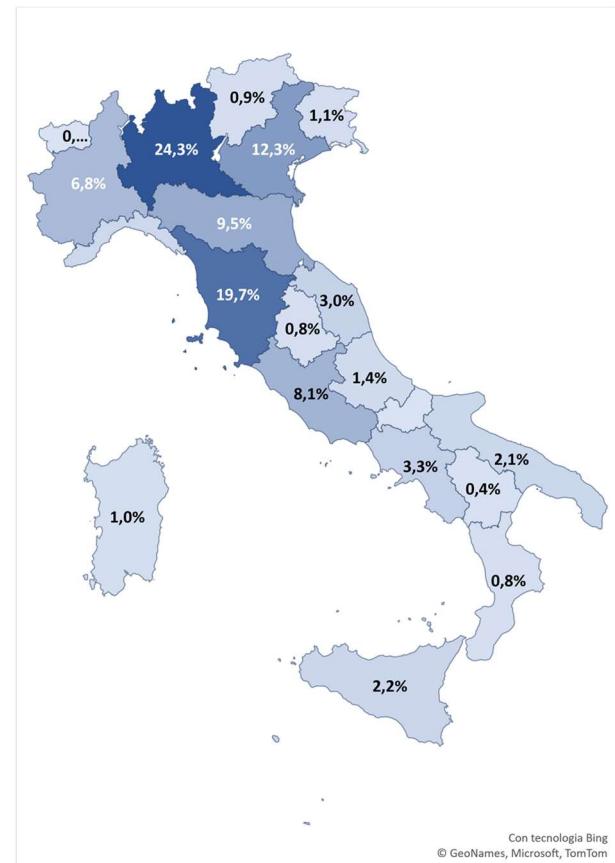
As at 1 January 2023, there were **284,495** Chinese legally residing<sup>1</sup> in Italy, accounting for 7.6% of all third-country nationals. This figure places the community in **fourth** position among the main non-EU citizens in numerical terms. Contrary to the general trend of non-EU settlements (+4.7%), the Chinese community recorded a 2.3% decrease compared to the previous year<sup>2</sup>.

The Chinese population is concentrated in the north of the country, where around 57% of the community is located. Two of the top three regions of Chinese settlement are located in the North: Lombardy, the first region, receives 24.3% of Chinese citizens in Italy (for non-EU citizens as a whole, the share rises to around 26%), while Veneto, the third region, hosts 12.3% of the community. What characterises the Chinese community in Italy, however, is its presence in Tuscany, the second region of settlement for the legally residing Chinese population, which is home to almost a fifth of the community (19.7% vs. 8.3% of non-EU citizens). Central Italy, precisely because of this strong presence in Tuscany, hosts almost a third (31.6%) of the total Chinese community in Italy. The community's presence in Lazio is also significant (around 8%). Its presence in the south, on the other hand, is lower than the non-EU average: just over one in ten Chinese legally resides in a southern region.

The Chinese population in Italy has an almost perfect gender balance: women represent 50.5% of the community, men the remaining 49.5%. No other non-EU community, among the top 16, can boast such a gender balance, in itself an indication of a strong local rooting.

The Chinese community in Italy has an unbalanced age distribution towards younger age groups: compared to the non-EU population as a whole, the incidence of the under-30s is higher, accounting for almost 40% of the community, compared to around 37% for non-EU nationals as a whole. As far as the incidence of over-50s is concerned, they account for just over a fifth of the community, compared to a higher 23.5% for the non-EU population as a whole. Minors account for 22.8% of the community, a higher percentage than for non-EU citizens as a whole. What characterises the Chinese community is the presence of very large families: **32.1% of Chinese households in Italy are made up of 5 to 7 people, against approximately 22.7% for the non-EU population as a whole**; as far as smaller households are concerned, only 7.4% of Chinese families are made up of couples (vs. 12.6% for non-EU citizens), while 9.3% are represented by single-person households (vs. 16.2% for non-EU citizens)<sup>3</sup>.

**Distribution of the Chinese population legally residing in Italy.**  
Data as at 1 January 2023



Source: Processing by SpINT, Sviluppo Lavoro Italia, based on ISTAT data

<sup>1</sup> Statistics on legally residing non-EU citizens include all foreigners from non-EU countries who are in possession of a valid residence document (national residence permit or long-term EU residence permit). Not all legally resident foreign citizens are included in the total count of residents in Italy: the statistical source employed therefore also includes foreign nationals who for whatever reason have yet to qualify for official residence in Italy.

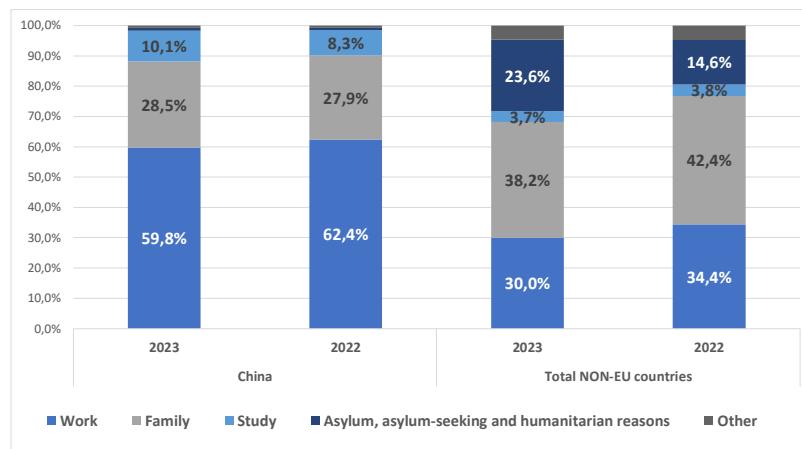
<sup>2</sup> This figure is most likely linked to acquisitions of Italian citizenship, which - as is well known - leads to a reduction in the statistics, since those who become Italian are no longer counted as foreigners.

<sup>3</sup> Source: RCFL ISTAT - Year 2022.

In 2022, **10,503 Chinese citizens entered Italy**, up 20.9% over the previous year<sup>4</sup>. The predominant reason for entry for Chinese nationals is study, which accounts for almost 39% of the community total: permits issued for this reason to Chinese nationals account for 16.2% of all study permits. Indeed, also due to the significant role played by Chinese students in academia, the community ranks first in terms of the number of entries related to this motivation. This is followed by work (around 32%), and family reasons, which account for just over a quarter of the total number of new permits (26.5%)

The analysis of the types of residence permit held by Chinese nationals shows a high level of stabilisation: **the share of long-term residents<sup>5</sup> within the community on 1 January 2023 is 65.2%**, over 5 percentage points higher than that recorded for non-EU nationals as a whole.

**Short-term residence permits by type and citizenship (v%) Data as at 1 January 2023 and 1 January 2022**



Source: Processing by SpINT, Sviluppo Lavoro Italia, based on ISTAT-Ministry of the majority of Chinese citizens holding long-term residence permits. Moreover, the presence of often large family units further confirms the community's deeply rooted settlement in Italy.

As far as the Chinese community in Italy is concerned, there is no prevailing gender-based profile - also in view of the almost perfect balance between men and women analysed above - but the majority of the community's employees are clerks/salespeople employed in trade, hospitality or industry (mainly manufacturing).

The Chinese population in Italy is well integrated in the labour market, performing better in employment terms than third-country nationals as a whole. The **employment rate** is **66.3%** (vs. 59.2% for the non-EU population as a whole), the **inactivity rate** is **30.1%** (vs. 32.7%), while the **unemployment rate** stands at 5.2% (vs. 12%). As in the previous year, the Chinese community remains the one with the lowest unemployment rate in 2022.

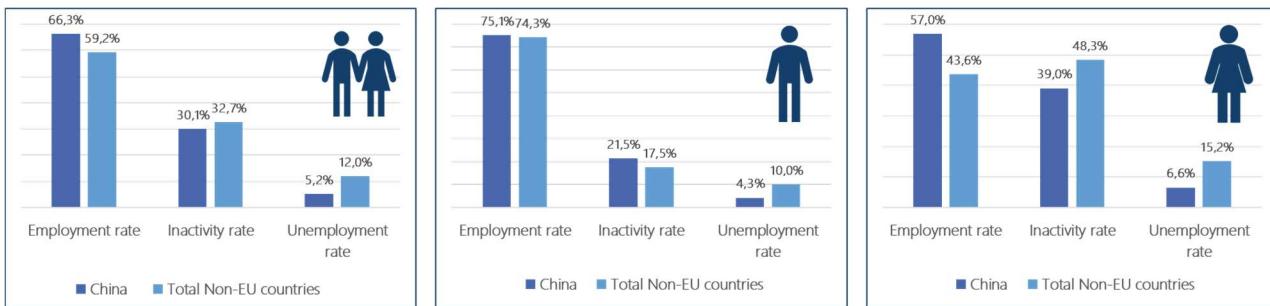
The community shows a decidedly higher employment rate for women than non-EU women as a whole (57% vs. 43.6%), confirming the high presence of Chinese females on the Italian labour market.

Among the reasons for permit renewals, work-related reasons prevail, with an incidence of 59.8% compared to 30% for the non-EU population as a whole. These are followed by family reasons (28.5%), with an incidence that is almost 10 percentage points lower than that recorded for non-EU nationals as a whole (for whom they are the predominant reason). An analysis of demographic data and residence permits reveals a specific pattern to Chinese migration to Italy. A good level of stabilisation emerges, with the presence of often large family units further confirming the community's deeply rooted settlement in Italy.

<sup>4</sup> The increase recorded for the non-EU population as a whole was 85.9%, a figure that can be linked both to the war in Ukraine, which led to the entry of about 148,000 citizens fleeing the Eastern European country (mainly with temporary protection permits), and to the regularisation of citizens already present in the territory based on Italian Leg. Decree 34 of 2020, whose applications were largely examined in 2022.

<sup>5</sup> A long-term EU residence permit may be issued to foreign nationals who have held a valid residence permit for at least five years, provided they can prove that they have a minimum income of no less than the social allowance calculated annually.

## Population (15 years and over) and main labour market indicators by gender and citizenship (v.%) Year 2022



Source: Processing by SpINT, Sviluppo Lavoro Italia, based on RCFL - ISTAT microdata

With regard to the distribution of employed people of Chinese origin across different economic sectors, a prevalence is registered in the *Trade* sector, which employs around 30.3% of the community's employees (vs. around 11% for non-EU workers as a whole). The second sector is *Industry in the strict sense* with an incidence of 29.4% (20% for non-EU workers), immediately followed by *Hotels and restaurants*, where just over one Chinese worker in four is employed (11.4% for non-EU workers): as is well known, the Chinese community is strongly rooted in the restaurant sector, as confirmed by an analysis of the community's enterprises. Some 9% of Chinese residents in Italy are employed in *Other public, social and personal services*, compared to 23.3% for non-EU nationals. *Transport and other business services* and *PA, education and healthcare* account for 2.9% and 2.2% of Chinese employment respectively, while those employed in the primary and construction sectors are residual (0.3% and 0.1% of the total). Compared to 2021, a 5.5% decrease in employment in the Trade sector and a mirror 5.5% increase in the Hospitality sector should be noted.

The Chinese community is strongly rooted in the entrepreneurial sphere, also in view of its migration history. Indeed, the Chinese community **ranks second in terms of the number of sole proprietorships**: as at 31 December 2022, the number of sole proprietors of Chinese origin was 51,562, or 13.2% of the non-EU entrepreneurs in Italy. Compared to the previous year, the number of Chinese entrepreneurs decreased slightly by 0.7%, in line with the change recorded for non-EU nationals as a whole. The majority of sole proprietors belonging to the Chinese community are men (52.8% of the total), while women (24,312) account for just over 47%. However, the Chinese community ranks third among the sixteen communities analysed in terms of female sole proprietors and holds the record for the highest number of female entrepreneurs. In the entrepreneurial sphere, the **community's channelling towards the trade** sector is confirmed, with more than a third of Chinese sole proprietorships operating in this sector. What characterises Chinese companies, above all, is a strong level of investment in manufacturing, in which sector 33% of Chinese sole proprietorships operate: Chinese manufacturing companies account for a resounding 55.6% of the total number of non-EU-owned companies in this sector.



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