

Linguistic diversity among foreign citizens in Italy

Years 2011- 2012

Romanian is the most common mother tongue among foreign residents in Italy: almost 800 thousand people speak Romanian from early childhood (21.9% of the foreign citizens aged 6 and over). Other prevalent mother tongues are Arabic (spoken by over 475 thousand people, 13.1%), Albanian (380 thousand people) and Spanish (255 thousand people), that is the mother tongue of people from the Andean states of South America.

Foreign citizens who speak Italian since childhood are 4.5%, equivalent to 160 thousand people aged 6 years and over. 16.8% of Italians mother tongue are Albanians, 12.1% are Moroccans, and 11,1% are Romanians. Among people under 18 years, at least one out of four is an Italian native speaker. 8.1% of foreign citizens (aged 6 years and older) speak Italian from early childhood in addition to another language considered as mother tongue.

Among people 18 years and over, at least 17 foreign citizens out of 100 attended Italian language courses in Italy. Arabic mother tongue foreigners attended Italian language courses more than other foreign citizens (23%).

Italian is the most spoken language at home for 38.5% of the foreigners aged 6 years and over. Among women the percentages reach 45.7%, compared to 29.7% of men. It is very common to speak Italian at home (47.3% versus 36.8% of adults) mainly among children and teen agers (6-17 years).

The Chinese speak Italian in the three most important social contexts less than other foreign citizens do: 9.5% of Chinese speak Italian at home (compared to 38.5% of total foreign population), 30.8% speaks Italian with friends (in comparison to 60% of the total) and Italian language use at work concerns 51% of them (compared to 91.3% of total foreign population).

39.2% of foreign people do not have any difficulties with Italian language neither in reading nor in writing or in understanding nor in speaking, compared to 60.8% who face some difficulties with Italian language. A most complete Italian language skill is declared among Serb-Croat-Bosnian-Montenegrin mother tongue foreign citizens (47.6%), among Albanian mother tongue (43.4%) and Romanians (42.7%). On the contrary, lower levels of Italian language skills are declared among other mother tongue foreign people as the Chinese (18.5%), the Ukrainian (30%) and Arabic mother tongue people (32.4%).

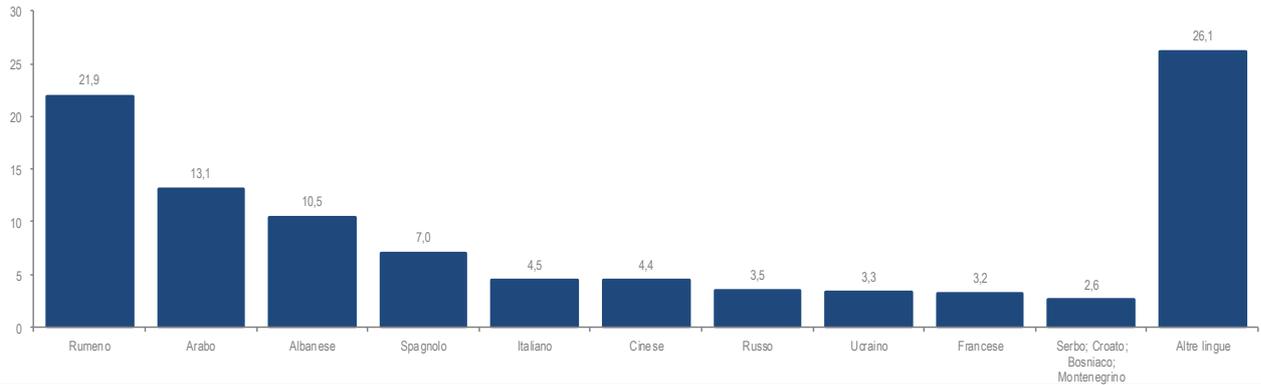
63.8% of foreign citizens (aged 6 years and over) do not have any difficulties in understanding Italian language, as well as 62.5% are able to speak Italian. 50.2% are good at writing such as 41.6% in reading.

37.5% of foreign citizens have at least some difficulties in understanding TV news in Italian. 39% have difficulty in interacting with Italian mother tongue people by phone or to understand or to be understood at public offices.

Among foreign citizens who arrived in Italy before the age of 16 there are high rates of people who do not have any difficulty in reading (73.3%) and in writing in Italian (71.8%). Otherwise, more than half of foreigners who arrived in Italy at the age of 35 and over have difficulties in speaking and in understanding Italian (52.2% and 55%).

FIGURE 1. FOREIGN CITIZENS AGED 6 AND OVER BY MOTHER TONGUE (LANGUAGE SPOKEN FROM EARLY CHILDOOD).

Years 2011 to 2012. Percentages by mother tongue.



For more detailed information please refer to the Italian version

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Glossary

Foreign citizens: people born in Italy or abroad who have foreign citizenship or are stateless.

European Union citizens (UE): citizens from Austria, Belgio, Cipro, Danimarca, Finlandia, Francia, Germania, Grecia, Irlanda, Lussemburgo, Olanda, Portogallo, Regno Unito, Spagna, Svezia, Estonia, Latvia (Lettonia), Lituania, Malta, Polonia, Repubblica Ceca, Slovenia, Slovacchia, Ungheria, Romania, Bulgaria.

Non-EU citizens: citizens of countries outside the European Union and stateless persons.

Cohort of years of stay in Italy: citizens arrived in Italy in a given year or period.

Mother tongue: language spoken from early childhood by six years old.