

Households with foreigners: indicators of economic distress 2009

In 2009, Istat carried out for the first time the “Income and living conditions” survey on a sample of 6,000 households resident in Italy with at least one foreign member. The survey, which was funded by the Ministry for Labour and Social Policies, made use of the same methodological tools used for the survey “Income and living conditions - EU-SILC¹” (questionnaires², survey techniques, methods of correction, imputation and integration of data, etc.), collecting a series of socio-economic information that is completely comparable. The picture of households with foreigners provided by this survey may therefore be compared with that of households made up exclusively of Italians obtained from the EU-SILC survey, which was also carried out in 2009.

This note sets out the main (provisional) results with reference to the most significant characteristics of households with foreigners, living conditions and distress indicators (economic difficulties, material deprivation, etc.).

Main results

At the end of 2009 the number of foreign citizens in Italy was 4,235,000, or around 7 per cent of the total population, while households with at least one foreign member totalled 2,074,000 (8.3 per cent). In addition, the number of mixed households (made up both of Italians and foreigners), as a share of the total number of households with foreigners – an indicator of the degree of integration into the indigenous community – was 22.6 per cent.

Households with foreigners reside mainly in the North-west of Italy (32.9 per cent), in the Centre (27.3 per cent) and in the North-east (24.3 per cent) and are made up of younger individuals compared with households consisting exclusively of Italians (with an average age of 30, as against 43). In addition, although the average size of these households differs little from that of all-Italian households (2.44 as against 2.38), they consist more frequently of single people (35.5 per cent as against 30.9 per cent) and households consisting of five or more members (9.1 per cent, as against 4.7 per cent).

Most households with foreigners live in rented or sub-let accommodation (in 58.7 per cent of cases, compared with 16 per cent of households consisting exclusively of Italians), and 23.1 per cent own their accommodation (as against 71.6 per cent of Italian households). Nearly one household in five has at its disposal accommodation occupied free of charge or under a usufruct arrangement (compared with 12.5 per cent), made available by an employer in over 60 per cent of cases.

Compared with exclusively Italian households, households with foreigners find themselves more frequently in *conditions of severe housing deprivation*, i.e. in overcrowded conditions³, combined with at least one severe housing problem⁴ (in 13.3 per cent of cases, compared with 4.7 per cent). Households

¹ European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions.

² To facilitate work in the field, the survey questionnaires have been translated into the 10 languages most commonly spoken by foreign citizens who are resident in Italy.

³ In accordance with the methodology currently used by Eurostat, a dwelling is considered overcrowded when it does not have an adequate number of rooms available, defined as

- one room for the household;
- one room for each couple;
- one room for each member aged 18 and over;
- one room for every two members of the same sex between 12 and 17 years of age;
- one room for every two members aged up to 11, regardless of sex.

⁴ The following are considered problems regarding housing conditions: no indoor bathroom, no bath or shower; damaged roofs, ceilings, windows or floors; damp on walls, floors, ceilings or foundations; inadequate lighting.

of foreigners, nevertheless, less frequently report problems regarding their area of residence (for example 12.3 per cent complain of pollution as against 21.1 per cent of Italian households); this would seem to suggest that their expectations regarding the living conditions to be achieved in Italy are not as high as those held by Italian households, and in any case preferable to those experienced in their country of origin.

Households with foreigners own a more restricted number of durable goods than households consisting exclusively of Italians. The gap is small for goods such as refrigerators, televisions, telephones and washing machines (over 90 per cent of households have them), although their use is frequently shared with other households. The availability of a car (61.2 per cent, compared with 78.9 per cent) and of a dishwasher (22.8 per cent, as against 42.3 per cent) are much less common.

*Conditions of material deprivation*⁵ regard around one third of households with foreigners (34.5 per cent) as opposed to 13.9 per cent of households consisting exclusively of Italians. The gap is more significant in the regions of the North and the Centre compared with the regions of the South. In addition, among households with foreigners the intensity of deprivation is more marked: 53.4 per cent of deprived households are *severely deprived*⁶, as against 43.2 per cent of Italian households.

Almost a quarter of households with foreigners (23.4 per cent) find themselves in arrears with the payment of bills, compared with 8.3 per cent of Italian households. Of those living in rented accommodation, over one household in four (26.3 per cent) reported being in arrears with the payment of the rent (as against 10.5 per cent of Italian households). In addition, households with foreigners more frequently find themselves in difficulty meeting everyday essential expenses (for example, 28.1 per cent did not have money for essential clothing items, compared with 15.9 per cent of Italian households) and unable to face unexpected financial expenses of 750 euros⁷ (64.9 per cent, as against 31.4 per cent).

In situations of difficulty, households with foreigners were able to count on some form of economic help (during the 12 months prior to the interview) in 24.7 per cent of cases, compared with 14.5 per cent of exclusively Italian households. Finally, among the households that had received help, the Italian ones were more frequently helped by parents or parents-in-law (in 58.8 per cent of cases), while households with foreigners more frequently received help from their network of friends (in 41.5 per cent of cases).

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⁵ In accordance with Eurostat definitions, the summary indicator of material deprivation is represented by the percentage of households characterised by at least three of the following types of deprivation: 1) not being able to face unexpected financial expenses of 750 euros; 2) not being able to afford paying for one week annual holiday away from home; 3) being in arrears with payments (utility bills, rent, mortgage or debts other than mortgages); 4) not being able to afford an adequate meal (meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian equivalent) every second day; 5) not being able to keep home adequately warm; not being able to afford: 6) a washing machine, 7) a colour TV, 8) a telephone, or 9) a car.

⁶ Severe material deprivation is defined as the combined presence of at least four of the nine deprivation items described previously.

⁷ The threshold for unexpected financial expenses, updated in each edition of the “Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)” survey, is established according to the at-risk-of-poverty threshold observed in the survey conducted two years previously, converted to a monthly scale and rounded.