

# Scirocco - Kurzinfo aus Italien

## 05.06.2026: Economically Welcome, Politically Undesirable: The Italian Migration Paradox

Half a million work visas — alongside an increasingly restrictive migration policy and rhetoric: under Giorgia Meloni, Italy exemplifies a tension that is far from new, but rather part of a longer-standing European logic of selective migration, one that has become particularly visible under her government. While the administration continues to criminalize irregular migration and obstruct civilian sea rescue operations, it simultaneously opens pathways for [legal labour migration](#). Faced with labour shortages and a demographic crisis that poses an existential threat to the [country's economic stability](#), Italy remains deeply dependent on immigration. This creates an ambivalence within the Italian migration context that reveals a fundamental paradox: people migrating to Italy are categorised and treated differently. While some are actively recruited to counter labour shortages and economic decline, others are deliberately excluded, criminalised, or abandoned to precarious conditions.

### *1. Italy's Demographic Situation*

Recent data published by the national statistics institute ISTAT (2025) paints a serious picture of Italy's demographic situation. The birth rate has fallen to a historic low of [1.14 children per woman](#). In 2025, 355,000 births were recorded against 652,000 deaths. The fact that the total population nevertheless remains relatively stable at around 59 million inhabitants is solely due to migration. Without a positive migration balance of approximately 296,000 people, [the population would have declined](#) dramatically over the past year. Italy is now the oldest country in the EU, with a median age of 49.1 years. Particularly alarming is the projected decline of the population aged 15–64, [which is expected to shrink by more than one fifth \(over 20%\) by 2050](#). This demographic contraction poses a severe threat to both economic growth and the sustainability of the pension system.

### *2. Labour Market: Structural Dependence on Migrant Labour*

The Italian economy has long become structurally dependent on foreign labour. According to the Ministry of Labour's annual report, migrants already [accounted for 10.5% of total employment in 2025](#) (approximately 2.5 million people). In certain sectors, their importance is considerably higher:

- Collective and personal services (including care work): 30.9%
- Agriculture: 20%
- Hotels and restaurants: 18.5%
- Construction: 16.9%

Particularly in the field of elderly care, an article published by *Il Foglio* in December 2025 estimated that by early 2026 approximately [72.2% of care workers](#) would be people with a migration background. Overall, demand for migrant labour is increasing significantly across numerous sectors of the economy. Nevertheless, [54.7% of industrial and service companies report difficulties](#) finding sufficient staff, despite planning to hire more than one million migrant workers in 2024 alone.

It must also be acknowledged that a significant proportion of migrant workers are employed

without regular residence or employment status. This illustrates the extent to which key sectors of the Italian economy rely on often invisible and legally insecure migrant labour — a dependence that simultaneously creates conditions for exploitation.

### 3. Government Strategy: Massive Visa Expansion Despite Hardline Rhetoric

In an effort to stabilise the labour market, the Meloni government announced plans to issue nearly [500,000 new work visas for non-EU citizens](#) between 2026 and 2028. These visas are to be allocated through the so-called *Decreto Flussi*, which regulates annual entry quotas for foreign workers. This follows a previously approved quota of more than 450,000 visas for the period 2023–2025.

The OECD further emphasises that the government has accelerated administrative procedures, for example [through the digitalisation of contracts and the reduction of waiting](#) periods for labour market tests to only eight days. At the same time, access for highly qualified workers through the EU Blue Card system, as well as for digital nomads, has been facilitated. Economic associations such as Coldiretti have explicitly welcomed these measures, as sectors such as agriculture and food production are becoming increasingly dependent on migrant labour.

### 4. The Gap Between Quotas and Reality

Despite these increases, think tanks and public institutions continue to criticise the fact that quotas for legal immigration [remain insufficient](#). Demand for labour significantly exceeds the number of available visas. This becomes particularly visible during the so-called “Click Days”: on these days, companies may submit online applications for work visas, yet applications consistently exceed available quotas within an extremely short time frame. The [Osservatorio Conti Pubblici](#) even estimates that Italy will require at least ten million immigrants by 2050 in order to halt population decline and maintain its current population size.

Reduced to its core, this is precisely the paradox upon which Italy’s positioning and narratives surrounding migration appear almost contradictory: politically and rhetorically, Italy combats a form of migration upon which it is simultaneously economically and socially dependent. Immigration functions as a demographic shock absorber, yet its effects are increasingly diminishing due to both the ageing of migrants already living in Italy and the emigration of young Italians.

Without a further expansion of legal migration pathways and more effective integration policies, the country’s public finances and social cohesion risk further destabilisation under the pressure of the demographic crisis. At the same time, debates surrounding labour migration and declining birth rates reveal the extent to which migration in Italy is often viewed primarily through an economic lens — and instrumentalised accordingly. [Statements such as those made by Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani](#), who argued that regular migration is necessary to counter labour shortages and declining birth rates, demonstrate that migrants frequently become visible only when they are considered economically necessary.

What often disappears from public discourse, however, are the people themselves and the violence produced by this system: people who die or go missing on their journey to Europe; children arriving without their parents or families being torn apart; and those who, after arrival, live in bureaucratic uncertainty and social isolation because they do not fit



into the “right” category of migrant. The consequences of these restrictive dynamics include the non-recognition of qualifications and university degrees, restricted or absent work permits, and additional structural barriers that ultimately push many individuals into exploitative and informal employment relationships. Remarkably little attention is paid — both politically and socially — to these people and their lived realities in Italy.

It is precisely here that the disconnect between dominant European migration narratives and social reality becomes evident. Migration is not only controlled but also strategically instrumentalised: people in vulnerable situations are treated as economic resources while simultaneously being denied dignity, security, and political visibility. They are expected to help Italy overcome its demographic crisis, yet when it comes to guaranteeing protection, rights, and a dignified life for people in need, many are ultimately left to fend for themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> The report does not explicitly specify who is included in this category; it is therefore assumed that it refers to all individuals without Italian citizenship.