

INTERNATIONAL TALENT AND EMPLOYMENT TRENDS: ITALY'S JOB MARKET IN TRANSITION

ABOUT UNI-ITALIA

Uni-Italia is a recognized non-profit Association, jointly founded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Ministry of University and Research, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education and Merit, Italian Trade Agency, and the Conference of Italian Rectors (*CRUI*), that promotes the **Study in Italy** abroad, the attraction of international students and researchers to Italian Higher Education Institutions and supports the internationalization of academic cooperation.

To pursue its scope, Uni-Italia implements government initiatives and programs and organizes national and international conferences to create a fruitful dialogue based on the exchange of experiences regarding policies on student international mobility and academic cooperation.

Uni-Italia has a widespread presence in **Third Countries** throughout manifold Centres, that actively organize and participate in Education Fairs organized by the local or international subjects. The Centres are located within the diplomatic structures and Italian Cultural Institutes in the following countries: **China** (Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Canton); **India** (New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore); **Indonesia** (Jakarta); **Iran** (Tehran); **Morocco** (Rabat, Casablanca) and **Vietnam** (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang). This last centre works as **regional hub** for other countries such as: Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Philippines, Laos, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea. Uni-Italia has an **EU Liaison Office** in Bruxelles to multiply and strengthen the participation in European networks. In Italy, the association offers support to foreign students, facilitating their integration into the social, academic, and cultural fabric of the country and organizes networking events to ensure a fulfilling educational experience.

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Introduction by Alessandro De Pedys, Director General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy - Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI)

I am delighted to introduce this study produced by Uni-Italia on *International Talent and Employment Trends: Italy's Job Market in Transition*. A natural continuation of the publication *International Students in Italy: Main Features and Economic Impact*, released in 2023, this study analyses the significant contribution of international students to the Italian job market not only in economic terms, but also as a source of innovation, skills, and cultural diversity.

In today's globalized world, higher education plays a key role in the development of national economies and the integration of communities. Italy, with its unique cultural heritage and academic excellence, is an attractive hub for international students from all over the world. Their impact extends far beyond university campuses, significantly contributing to the growth of human capital and the competitiveness of our country on a global scale.

This study explores the educational and career paths of international students, highlighting their added value to the Italian productive structure. It also addresses some of the challenges our system must still overcome to fully harness the potential of this valuable resource.

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is fully committed to supporting both the internationalization and the attractiveness of the Italian higher education system as an essential tool for promoting intercultural dialogue and sustainable development. International students open new bridges and opportunities of collaboration with their country of origin, and their positive impact on the Italian job market is a tangible demonstration of what they can achieve.

In this perspective, scholarships represent a crucial tool to attract foreign talents in the Italian academic system. This is why this year we have significantly increased our offer of scholarships in favour of international students, notably African ones. Our goal is for our universities to become formative hubs of future international leaders.

I would like to thank Prof. Francesco Profumo, President of Uni-Italia, for his ongoing commitment to promoting the internationalization of the Italian higher education system and for producing this important study. I am confident that the data and insights contained in these pages will provide valuable input to anyone seeking to better understand this phenomenon and contribute to shaping a future strategy in this crucial field.

Introduction by Gianluigi Consoli, Director General for Internationalization and Communication - Ministry of University and Research (MUR)

The Ministry of University and Research (MUR) is pleased to present this national study on International Talent and Employment Trends: Italy's Job Market in Transition, which highlights the crucial role of internationalization in Italy's higher education system and job market. International students contribute not only to cultural exchange and innovation in our universities but also bring valuable skills and perspectives that strengthen Italy's economy and workforce.

In its mission to promote Study in Italy and showcase Italian academic institutions globally, Uni-Italia supports higher education institutions in attracting and enrolling international students. This initiative, driven by the Ministry of University and Research's substantial commitment and investment in the University and AFAM Institutions, has positioned Italy as a premier destination for students and researchers pursuing both high-quality education and career opportunities.

The study emphasizes how international students' educational experiences translate into skills that enrich Italy's job market, providing growth opportunities for companies and institutions alike. It also addresses some challenges that the university system and job market face in optimizing this valuable resource.

As the Directorate General for Internationalization and Communication, we are dedicated to advancing policies that boost the presence of international students and support their integration into the job market. Their contributions represent an invaluable opportunity for Italy's future, enhancing both our human capital and our cultural openness and exchange.

Introduction by Francesco Profumo, President of Uni-Italia

It is with great pleasure that I present the first national study edit by Uni-Italia on *International Talent and Employment Trends: Italy's Job Market in Transition*, that marks another step forward in our journey of analysis on the importance of international students in Italy. This study, following [International Students in Italy: Main Features and Economic Impact](#), provides a further overview of the contribution these young individuals make to our labour market, both in terms of skills and in fostering innovation and cultural diversity.

In an increasingly interconnected global context, international students represent an invaluable resource. Their role goes far beyond their period of study: many of them choose to stay in Italy, enriching the country's productive fabric with advanced skills, innovative perspectives and an open mindset towards intercultural dialogue and exchange.

I have witnessed firsthand the growing importance of internationalization within Italy's education system, as Rector and as Minister of University and Research. Uni-Italia has worked tirelessly to promote Italian higher education institutions and attract talented students from around the world, offering them access to a world-class education while fostering an environment of cultural exchange and innovation.

This study underscores the impact of international students beyond the classroom, highlighting how their presence strengthens Italy's job market, bridges skill gaps and drives innovation. It also provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead as we continue to enhance Italy's position as a global hub for education and professional growth.

The findings of this study not only validate the work we have done so far, but also offer a clear path forward for policymakers, academic institutions, and businesses to better integrate international students into Italy's labour market. Uni-Italia remains committed to supporting these efforts, ensuring that Italy continues to be recognized as a destination for academic excellence and a thriving job market for talented individuals from around the world.

1. Introduction

The national study on **"The Impact of International Students on the Job Market"** aims to understand how international students integrate into the Italian labour market after completing their academic studies in Italy. This study builds on the growing presence of international students in Italy, recognizing their potential contribution to the society, the economy and the workforce of the country.

The study evaluates the career paths of international students, and analyses the national policies aimed at retaining these students in the Italian labour market. In Europe there is a growing demographic crisis and Italy as well needs international students to ensure the future developments and the survival of its academic institutions. Encouraging these young people to stay in the country, during the studies internationalize the classes helping also native students and after graduation become essential, as they bring diverse skills and perspectives to the national labour market and help counterbalance the aging population.

Therefore, the study seeks to understand how Italian universities retain international students by providing them with the necessary skills and opportunities for effective integration into the country's economic and social fabric.

The survey administered to academic institutions provides a valuable starting point for understanding the landscape of international student retention. The universities and AFAM (*Higher Education for the Fine Arts, Music and Dance*) institutions that responded provide data on the post-graduation paths of international students currently available. Future enhancements to national-level tracking mechanisms will better inform targeted policies that not only boost retention but also celebrate the diverse talents that international students bring to Italy.

2. Sector Policies: Initiatives in the Italian Landscape

In recent years, the Italian government has undertaken a series of initiatives aimed at attracting an increasing number of international students and researchers to the country, recognizing the strategic value of internationalizing the Italian higher education system. These initiatives are part of a broader policy aimed at strengthening Italy's image as a centre of excellence for academic study, leveraging a centuries-old academic tradition, an invaluable cultural heritage, and a growing commitment to innovation, research, technological development, and sustainable growth.

Among these initiatives is the activation of an interministerial working group, which includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Ministry of University and Research, the Ministry of Education and Merit, and the Ministry of Culture, with the participation of Uni-Italia. The establishment of this interministerial working group stems from the need for a collaborative effort by all actors involved in promoting and internationalizing Italian educational system, aimed at designing, streamlining, and systematizing concrete initiatives to attract and train international talent both in Italy and globally.

The interministerial working group, adopting an evidence-based approach, seeks to maximize existing and potential synergies in the field of education: initially, among the involved Ministries; and subsequently, among the various levels of the Republic (State, Regions, Metropolitan Cities, Provinces, and Municipalities) as well as in the relationship between institutions and Italian civil society (foundations, businesses, Civil Society Organizations, etc.).

Following a multi-level approach aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (*SDG 4: 'Provide inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'*) defined by the 2030 Agenda, the scope of the working group encompasses the Italian educational system holistically, advancing along two main paths: attracting international talent to Italy and internationalizing our educational model.

2.1 Initiatives to attract international talent

By providing international students with top-quality education, Italy not only promotes the cultural, scientific, and technological development of their countries of origin but also contributes to creating the next generation of global leaders in these fields.

One important element is the administrative facilitation put in place to simplify the pre-enrolment process and obtaining a student visa. The Italian government has established

preferential channels for non-EU citizens who wish to enrol in study programs in Italy, also by strengthening the Uni-Italia network, which carries out, among other things, guidance and support activities for those students interested in starting a higher education path in Italy.

The Ministry of Universities and Research considers of vital importance the role, within the European and global context, of the internationalization of the tertiary education system and student mobility, which are elements that can guarantee full educational success and provide a more complete and adequate preparation for students. The main goal is to consistently support and sustain the process of internationalization of the Italian academic system, making it more competitive and more responsive to the needs of the world of work at the national and international level.

An additional essential feature to ensure that all efforts of the stakeholders are directed towards a common goal is the development of the *Strategy for the Internationalization of the Italian Higher Education System, 2024-2026*¹. The document is built on the experience gained from the previous 'Strategy for the Promotion of Italian Higher Education Abroad'² and takes into account the priorities indicated by the Minister of University and Research and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, as well as the investments financed through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (*PNRR*), to encourage collaboration and agreements with foreign higher education institutions. Their objective is to finance projects aimed at strengthening the higher education system, both university and AFAM, within the time frame set by this strategy, in line with the work program outlined in the *PNRR*.

The Transnational Education (*TNE*) notice and the Internationalization of Artistic, Musical, and Dance Institutions – AFAM target both Italian Higher education Institutions. Universities aim to fund transnational educational initiatives with a total budget of 50 million euros, while the over 80 million euros for the sector of Artistic, Musical, and Dance Institutions (*AFAM*) encourage their internationalization by funding specific projects.

Both promoted initiatives represent the beginning of a desirable long-term pathway that will enable the Italian higher education system, as a whole and through the enhancement of its level of internationalization, to play an increasingly significant role in the global context.

To further encourage the attraction of international students, Italian institutions have implemented cooperation agreements with numerous countries, especially in the Euro-

¹ <https://www.mur.gov.it/sites/default/files/2024-09/Strategia%20Internazionalizzazione%20MUR%202024-2026.pdf>

² https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2017/04/strategia_fsi.pdf

Mediterranean region, Asia, and Latin America. Through bilateral agreements, exchange programs, and joint projects, Italy has managed to develop a network of relationships that facilitates student mobility to its universities, not only for obtaining academic degrees but also for short-term experiences such as cultural exchanges and summer programs.

The introduction and promotion of university programs entirely or partially offered in English, provided by many institutions within the Italian higher education system, make more accessible to students from non-Italian-speaking countries and allowing them to start and/or continue their academic careers in our country for either a short or long period. These courses have also been associated with the offering of innovative programs that include subjects and skills in demand in the current and future job market, as well as study paths that integrate competencies from related areas to prepare graduates for complex and dynamic work scenarios.

At the same time, the government has invested in strengthening the international promotion of its academic system, with the aim of making Italian academic institutions more visible and competitive on a global scale. Through participation in internationally renowned networking fairs, such as NAFSA³ and EAIE⁴, with a national pavilion "Uni-Italia Study in Italy" supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Ministry of University and Research. The aim is to improve the academic cooperation and mobility with other countries facilitating contacts between Italian and foreign institutions and establishing bilateral or multilateral agreements.

In this context, it is also important to mention the Italian participation in the *Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM)*⁵, that supports high-level integrated transnational study programmes at Master

³ NAFSA (*Association of International Educators*) is the largest organization in the world dedicated to international education and student mobility. Founded in 1948 in the United States, initially to promote international student exchanges, NAFSA now supports educators, institutions, and organizations involved in the field of academic internationalization.

NAFSA organizes one of the largest international conferences dedicated to global education, attracting thousands of participants from around the world. This event provides networking opportunities and updates on trends and policies in the field of international education.

⁴ The EAIE (*European Association for International Education*) is the leading non-profit organization in Europe dedicated to promoting the internationalization of higher education. Founded in 1989, the EAIE focuses on developing the skills of professionals working in the field of international education and creating a network of institutions and individuals that promote academic cooperation on a global scale.

The main event organized by the EAIE is its annual conference, one of the largest in the world in the field of higher education internationalization. This event attracts thousands of participants from around the globe, offering training sessions, discussions, panels, and networking opportunities among professionals and educational institutions.

⁵ https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/erasmus-mundus?#footnoteref1_nig7wmo

level delivered by an international consortium of higher education institutions from different countries worldwide and, where relevant, other educational or non-educational partners with specific expertise and interest in the concerned study areas and professional domains.

EMJMs are programmes of excellence and contribute to the integration and internationalisation of *the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)*.

As of September 2024, according to the EMJM website catalogue⁶, the European country with the highest number of EMJMs is France (104), followed by Spain (92) and Italy (74). These initiatives, combined with those that will be outlined below and the historical and cultural appeal of Italy, are contributing to strengthening the country's position as an outstanding destination for higher education at the international level.

2.2 Scientific Diplomacy

Scientific Diplomacy can be a tool for dialogue and collaboration between countries, especially in areas of common interest such as the environment, health, energy, food security, and technology. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation⁷ is promoting the internationalization of Italian research and scientific diplomacy as essential tools for developing cooperation between Italy and the rest of the world.

Maintaining competitiveness in increasingly complex global markets requires the constant application of new technologies to production processes to make innovative, high added value products. This leads to an increasingly careful use of resources in this sector, as an investment in the growth of the country, especially in the most innovative sectors, with positive effects on the economy and trade.

Italy has developed various initiatives to strengthen its position in the global context, thanks also to the Network of Scientific Attachés⁸ abroad, located in embassies and consulates in several countries, including the United States, Japan, China and various European states, responsible for promoting scientific cooperation between Italian and foreign institutions, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, students, and researchers.

⁶ https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/scholarships/erasmus-mundus-catalogue_en

⁷ <https://www.esteri.it/en/diplomazia-culturale-e-diplomazia-scientifica/cooperscientificatecnologica/#:~:text=The%20Ministry%20of%20Foreign%20Affairs,the%20rest%20of%20the%20world.>

⁸ <https://www.esteri.it/it/diplomazia-culturale-e-diplomazia-scientifica/cooperscientificatecnologica/reteaddettiscientificitecnologici/>

Bilateral Scientific cooperation agreements and Multilateral Collaborations with many countries around the world. At the multilateral level, Italy is involved in specific working groups of international organizations such as UNESCO, OECD (*Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*), and the European Union, promoting the use of science to address global challenges.

Through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy supports research and innovation in scientific and technological fields, fostering partnerships between universities, research centres and Italian and foreign businesses.

Italy is a significant player in European research programs, such as Horizon Europe and participates in major international scientific projects, such as CERN (*European Organization for Nuclear Research*) and ESA (*European Space Agency*), positioning the country as a key partner in strategic scientific fields.

Italian scientific diplomacy is also a component of the country's soft power, which refers to the ability to influence international relations through culture, education and science. By promoting science, Italy enhances its image and builds trust-based relationships with other countries, grounded in constructive collaboration in areas of common interest. This approach proves particularly effective in areas where political dialogue may be complicated, using science as a common language.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation supports also Italian archaeological, anthropological and ethnological missions abroad, which extend chronologically from prehistoric times to medieval times and geographically from the Greco-Roman world to the Near, Middle and Far East, Africa and Latin America.

A commitment in favour of intercultural dialogue and development policies which takes the form of a scientific and study activity of great importance, accompanied by the training of local operators and the transfer of technologies in some sectors, such as restoration and protection of cultural heritage, in which Italian excellence is recognized internationally.

Traditionally, reported the Ministry, the area with the greatest number of Italian missions is the Mediterranean and the Middle East; in fact, it is in this area, and more precisely in Greece, that the Italian School of Archaeology in Athens was founded in 1909 with the aim of conducting archaeological research in Greece and in the areas of the Hellenic civilization, as well as to train scholars in various historical and archaeological sectors. The Italian School of Archaeology in Athens is the point of reference in Greece for Italian archaeological missions operating there.

Alongside traditional excavation missions, other projects have also been developed over the years to provide training for experts on site, to transfer knowledge and to teach local operators about our most advanced techniques to restore and protect cultural heritage.

These missions enhance the cultural heritage of the hosting countries and strengthen the social-economic development of the sites in which they operate, promoting greater historical awareness at local level and supporting political peace-making efforts in crisis areas.

For 2023, 279 missions were supported through the provision of grants (209) or institutional recognition.⁹

2.3 Scholarships for International Students

In order to maximize the attractiveness of our schools, universities, academies, and cultural institutions, so that all of these can become training grounds for the best international talents, the competent Ministries and involved stakeholders are working to increase, streamline, and enhance the scholarships offered collectively by the Italian System to international students who wish to study in Italy. They can also access to various types of scholarships offered by different institutions, including the Italian government, universities, regional bodies, and international organizations. Scholarships may cover tuition fees in full or reduce them, also through the availability of regional scholarships, and contribute to living costs.

The main types of available scholarships are:

a) Scholarships from the Italian Government

Offered by the MAECI, these scholarships are intended for foreign students and Italian students residing abroad (*IRE*) to attend Master's degree courses, PhD programs, research projects under academic supervision and Italian language courses. Every year the Italian Government provides scholarships to foreigners or Italian citizens living abroad to complete formal studies and or to follow bilateral and multilateral study or research programs in Italy.

Government scholarship programs, such as *Invest Your Talent in Italy*. The Program awards scholarships to international students, from selected countries, interested in attending postgraduate courses, entirely taught in English, at selected Italian HEIs participating in the program. A distinctive feature of this program is the mandatory internship at selected Italian companies, which international students must undertake. Funded by MAECI - Directorate

⁹ <https://www.esteri.it/en/diplomazia-culturale-e-diplomazia-scientifica/cultura/archeologiapatrimonioculturale/>

General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy, MUR, ITA – Italian Trade Agency, and Uni-Italia, the program aims to promote the internationalization of the Italian academic system as a centre of excellence. It also aims to stimulate synergies between universities and Italian enterprises, allowing young foreign talents to specialize in Italy and gain work experience in Italian companies participating in the Program.¹⁰

b) Scholarships from Italian Universities

Many Italian universities offer scholarships to international students as part of their internationalization programs. These scholarships may partially or fully cover tuition fees and, in some cases, provide financial support for accommodation or other expenses. Italian Higher Education Institutions also can offer academic, merit, and excellence scholarships awarded to students with a strong academic background.

c) Scholarships for refugees

Of particular importance are the scholarships offered by some Italian universities targeting students with international protection status, the Project University Corridors for Refugees UNICORE 5.0¹¹, as well as projects and scholarships adopted by many Italian universities to support student populations whose national context has been disrupted by rapid internal or geopolitical changes.

Significant actions have been taken by universities, individually and in consortia, to facilitate the entry and enrolment of students from Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Myanmar by providing them with economic, linguistic, and housing support, as well as adopting a series of procedures aimed to simplify bureaucratic procedures.

In order to implement economic facilitation policies, especially in terms of tuition fees, for international students from Less Developed and Developing Countries, the Italian Ministry of University and Research issues an annual decree listing the nationalities towards which Italian HEIs must adopt economic measures aimed at inclusivity for such students.¹²

¹⁰ Uni-Italia, International Students in Italy: Main Features and Economic Impact, 2023. <https://uni-italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/International-Students-in-Italy-main-features-and-economic-impact.pdf>

¹¹ The project University Corridors for Refugees UNICORE 5.0 is promoted by 33 Italian universities with the support of UNHCR, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Caritas Italiana, Diaconia Valdese, Centro Astalli and other partners. It aims to increase opportunities for refugees currently residing in Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to continue their higher education in Italy. (<https://universitycorridors.unhcr.it/>).

¹² Ref. note 6

Another initiative is the *Scholar at Risk (SAR)* network¹³. This network involves approximately 40 Italian institutions and over 600 institutions worldwide, with the goal of supporting threatened scholars and practitioners by collaborating with the broader SAR Network to arrange temporary research and teaching positions at higher education institutions around the world. In addition to providing academic placement assistance, SAR offers advisory and referral services to the higher education community involved in these efforts, including at-risk scholars and practitioners, SAR member institutions, affiliated partners, and prospective members looking to host a scholar or otherwise support a threatened colleague.

These initiatives align with the provisions set forth by European Union legislation, such as Article 29 of the Regulation (Eu) 2024/1347 Of the European Parliament and of the Council¹⁴, which ensures equal access to education for minors and adults granted international protection, guaranteeing them the same rights as nationals of the Member State that granted their protection. Specifically, this law secures their access to both secondary and higher education, as well as to further training or retraining opportunities.

d) Scholarships from Intergovernmental Organizations

Some intergovernmental organizations, such as the IILA (*Italo-Latin American Institute*), promote cooperation between Italy and specific countries in the fields of culture, science, technology, economic and social development. The IILA offers scholarships aimed at Latin American citizens to encourage training and specialization in Italy. These scholarships cover Master's degrees, PhDs, and specialization courses in scientific, technological, and humanities fields, and include support for short research stays, with a particular focus on projects that promote development in the recipients' home countries.

e) Erasmus+ Scholarships

As reported in the report 'International Students in Italy: Main Features and Economic Impact'¹⁵, commonly with other Erasmus+ Countries, students enrolled in an Italian HEIs can carry out study periods at foreign HEIs under the umbrella of the Erasmus Programme, making it possible for foreign/international students to study in other EU countries. This path, according to the 2022

¹³ <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/>

¹⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401347

¹⁵ <https://uni-italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/International-Students-in-Italy-main-features-and-economic-impact.pdf>

statistics from the European Commission¹⁶, was chosen by 102,101 students enrolled in Italian HEIs, while the number of students who chose Italy as a destination was 101,816.¹⁷

2.4 The Study of the Italian Language Abroad and in Italy

Incentives for the study of the Italian language, both abroad and in Italy, are structured through multiple initiatives involving educational, cultural, and governmental institutions. These tools aim not only to promote the language but also to spread Italy's rich culture.

As for studying the Italian language abroad, there are numerous opportunities for those wishing to learn the language. For example, MAECI annually offers scholarships to foreign students interested in studying in Italy. These scholarships often cover courses in the Italian language and culture, providing concrete support for those wishing to have an immersive experience in the country.

One of MAECI's main goals is to promote the spread of the Italian language and culture worldwide. A significant tool in this context is the creation of the website <https://italiana.esteri.it/>. This digital platform is designed to promote Italian as a language of culture, art, and innovation and represents a tangible effort to centralize and expand the presence of the Italian language at an international level.

The creation of the portal is part of MAECI's broader strategy to make cultural promotion more accessible, modern, inclusive, and innovative for new generations of students, scholars, and enthusiasts worldwide. Through <https://italiana.esteri.it/>, the Ministry offers a digital showcase that allows users from around the world to discover events, language courses, exhibitions, and conferences dedicated to Italian culture. This platform provides access to linguistic and cultural resources from anywhere in the world, making the Italian language more visible and appealing in a constantly evolving global context.

MAECI also promotes the dissemination of Italian culture and language by supporting the translation of Italian literary and scientific works into other languages. One of the key MAECI initiatives in this area is the Translation Grants and Prizes, which are an integral part of its strategy to promote Italian culture globally. Through support for translation, the Ministry aims to raise awareness of the richness of Italian literature and thought, fostering cultural and intellectual exchange between Italy and the rest of the world.

¹⁶ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/factsheets/2022/italy>

¹⁷ Ref. note 6

The Chairs of Italian Studies and Lectureships in foreign universities—currently 280 across all continents¹⁸—play a crucial role in promoting the Italian language and culture worldwide. Italian Studies Chairs offer academic courses dedicated to the study of Italian literature, history, and arts, educating new generations of students and researchers interested in Italy. Lectureships, on the other hand, focus on direct language instruction, often in collaboration with foreign language departments. These figures act as true cultural ambassadors, maintaining contact and interest in Italy through courses, seminars, and extracurricular activities.

The Week of the Italian Language in the World (*SLIM*) is an annual initiative promoted by MAECI, in collaboration with the *Accademia della Crusca* and other cultural partners. Since 2001, this event has been held every year during the third week of October and aims to celebrate and promote the Italian language globally.

Each edition is dedicated to a specific theme related to Italian culture and language, such as art, literature, cinema, or technology. During SLIM, embassies, consulates, and Italian Cultural Institutes organize events worldwide, including conferences, seminars, theatre performances, film screenings, and exhibitions. These activities engage students, teachers, writers, artists, and the international public, creating a unique opportunity for immersion in Italian culture.

The importance of this initiative lies in its ability to strengthen the promotion of the Italian language, not only as a means of communication but also as a vehicle for the country's culture and artistic heritage. SLIM represents a key moment to reaffirm the role of the Italian language on the international stage, promoting its study and highlighting Italy's contribution to world culture.

¹⁸ <https://www.esteri.it/it/diplomazia-culturale-e-diplomazia-scientifica/cultura/promozionelinguaitaliana/litaliano-nelle-universita-straniere/>

Table 1: *Week of the Italian Language in the World: Organized Events (Distribution by Geographic Area and Field)*

Geographic Area	2021	2022	2023
European Union	133	124	186
Europe (Extra EU)	50	75	125
America	85	92	184
Mediterranean and Middle East	58	57	91
Sub-Saharan Africa	20	19	57
Asia and Oceania	57	95	121
Total	403	462	764

Field			
Art exhibitions/Exhibits	39	15	61
Meetings/Conferences (Linguistics)	280	227	400
Shows/Projections	80	141	193
Other events (*)	4	79	110
Total	403	462	764

(*) Includes fairs, guided tours, quizzes, games, lectures.

Source: MAECI, Statistical Yearbook 2024

A key role in promoting Italian abroad is played by the 86 IIC, located in many cities around the world¹⁹. These institutes not only organize language courses but also serve as true cultural centres, promoting Italian culture through events, exhibitions, and conferences. Often, the IICs offer scholarships to deserving students to help them improve their language skills directly in Italy.

“The organization of language courses, at the end of which the IICs can issue final certificates, should be distinguished from the certification of Italian language proficiency, an activity that the MAECI has promoted to foreign audiences since the 2000s. An example of this is the agreement signed in 2013 by the MAECI with the Universities for Foreigners of Perugia and Siena, the

¹⁹ <https://iiczurigo.esteri.it/it/chi-siamo/la-sede/rete-degli-istituti-nel-mondo/>

University of Rome Tre, and the Dante Alighieri Society, which two years earlier had founded the 'CLIQ - Quality Italian Language Certification Association.' As part of this commitment, the IICs have conducted certification exam sessions, often through individual agreements with the certifying bodies. In the 2021/22 academic year, 64 IICs served as exam centres for the Italian Language Certification (*CELI*, issued by the University for Foreigners of Perugia), the Certification of Italian as a Foreign Language (*CILS*, issued by the University for Foreigners of Siena), and the Dante Alighieri Italian Language Project (*PLIDA*, issued by Dante Alighieri)."²⁰

Table 2: *Language Courses Organized by the IICs: Distribution by Geographic Area*

Geographic Area	2022		2023		Var%	Var%
	Enrolled	Courses	Enrolled	Courses	Enrolled	Courses
European Union	13,163	1,692	14,273	1,825	8.4%	7.9%
Europe (Extra EU)	3,494	479	3,465	449	-0.8%	-6.3%
America	25,842	2,551	22,956	2,433	-11.2%	-4.6%
Mediterranean and Middle East	7,091	656	12,234	1,103	72.5%	68.1%
Sub-Saharan Africa	411	87	727	106	76.9%	21.8%
Asia and Oceania	6,628	1,348	6,672	1,269	0.7%	-5.9%
Total	56,629	6,813	60,327	7,185	6.5%	5.5%

Source: MAECI, Statistical Yearbook 2024.

Internationally recognized language certifications, like CELI, CILS, and PLIDA, serve as valuable tools for retaining international students. These certifications not only enhance academic and professional opportunities but also motivate students to continue their studies in Italy, strengthening their connection to the Italian language and culture.

Moving to Italy, there are also numerous incentives within the country for those who wish to learn or improve their Italian. Italian universities regularly offer scholarships for foreign students, both for short language courses and full undergraduate or master's programs. Some universities, such as the University for Foreigners of Perugia and the University for Foreigners of Siena, specialized in teaching Italian to foreigners, offering courses that range from grammar to culture, from art to history.

²⁰ AA.VV., *L'Italiano Lingua Internazionale della cultura*, RAI Ufficio Studi, 2024.

It is important to mention the role of international agreements between Italian and foreign universities, which facilitate cultural and linguistic exchange programs. Many of these agreements allow foreign students to spend a study period in Italy, fully immersing themselves in the country's language and culture.

Many Italian universities offer summer and annual Italian language courses for international students through their University Language Centres. These centres play a key role in spreading the Italian language among foreign students and offer Italian courses at different levels, designed to meet the needs of students from various backgrounds with different language goals.

The presence of these centres also facilitates the integration of foreign students into Italian academic and cultural life, helping to create a favourable environment for learning and promoting the Italian language and culture in an international context.

Furthermore, Italian culture is one of the main motivations for many people to study the language. Italy hosts major cultural events, such as literature, cinema, art, and music festivals, which not only offer entertainment but also provide opportunities to improve Italian language skills by participating in meetings or workshops related to the language.

Private institutions also play a significant role in promoting the Italian language, both in Italy and abroad. These institutions, often specialized in language teaching, offer scholarships or financial aid and Italian courses to students of all ages and levels. Their flexibility and focus on personalized education attract students who wish to learn Italian for professional, academic, or cultural reasons.

Internationally, these private institutions are essential for foreign citizens who wish to live or work in Italy, offering them the necessary language preparation to integrate into Italian society. This support role is particularly evident in contexts where Italian is required, such as in the workplace, academia, and the arts.

The study of Italian is encouraged by a wide range of initiatives, from scholarships to free courses, language certifications, and international collaborations. These tools not only promote the language but also help showcase and appreciate Italy's cultural heritage on a global level. Finally, Italy's commitment to attracting international students is evident in its social and cultural integration policies. Numerous initiatives have been implemented to improve the welcome and integration of foreign students, such as the organization of free or discounted Italian language courses, cultural mentoring programs, and extracurricular activities that allow students to immerse themselves in local culture. Through a network of student associations and psychological support, Italy aims to create a welcoming environment that promotes the well-

being of international students and encourages their active participation in university and social life.

2.5 Policies Aimed at Retaining International Students

The positive impact of international or foreign students could also manifest in specific sectors of the labour market. A student with a Residence Permit for study purposes can indeed work part-time during their course, acquiring or strengthening both new and existing soft and hard skills.

A strong signal was given in 2023 through Law 50/2023, which removed the requirement for international students to comply with 'quotas.' Indeed, now international students completing their studies in Italy can convert their study permits into work permits without being subject to the annual quotas set by the "*Decreto Flussi*"²¹. international student can convert at any time of the year the residence permit with no numerical limitations.

The "awaiting employment" Residence Permit plays an important role in Italian policies aimed at retaining international students in the country. This type of permit allows students who have completed a course of study in Italy to stay in the country for a maximum of 12 months, during which they can seek employment. This measure is crucial as it facilitates the integration of students into the Italian labour market and serves as a significant incentive for them to remain.

Knowing that they have the option to stay in Italy after graduation to look for a job makes the study path more attractive. Many international students view this aspect as a concrete opportunity to build a career in a context with more opportunities compared to their home countries. The prospect of finding employment in Italy, where they often acquire skills and knowledge that are in high demand, greatly increases the influx of students to Italian universities.

Additionally, the policies promoting this permit are generally accompanied by support programs, such as career guidance and networking opportunities, which help students integrate into the local work culture and find job opportunities. The ability to stay in the country to look for work not only supports their integration but also enhances the human capital that international students represent for the Italian economy.

²¹ The national law on migration until 2023 foresaw a legislative measure known as "*decreto flussi*" that manages the entry of non-EU workers into the country. This decree sets the annual quotas for the entry of non-EU workers based on the needs of the Italian labour market. It encompasses various types of work permits, such as seasonal work, self-employment, or subordinate employment. The decree establishes the quotas and rules for entry, defining the requirements and criteria for admitting foreign workers into Italy.

Universities' focus on placement and the local entrepreneurial fabric is reflected in the appointment of key figures such as the Rector's Delegate for Placement and the Rector's Delegate for the Third Mission. The Placement Delegate is responsible for promoting the employment of students and graduates by establishing direct links with companies and institutions, organizing events like career days, internships, and specific training programs in collaboration with the business world. This role is fundamental in aligning the educational offerings with the needs of the labour market. The Third Mission Delegate, in their strategic role as a liaison between the academic world and the local community, could be a crucial element in promoting technology and knowledge transfer. By fostering the development of spin-offs and start-ups, this role could enhance collaboration in innovation, applied research, and socio-economic development projects. Both roles contribute to making the university not just a place of education, but a dynamic actor capable of actively interacting with the labour market and businesses.

Many Italian universities are closely collaborating with the private sector and local institutions to create internship and job opportunities for international students. These partnerships are realized through placement programs and career services dedicated to foreign students, which facilitate their access to the Italian and European labour markets. Career Services play a crucial role in helping international students stay in Italy after graduation. These services offer personalized support in career orientation, helping students understand the Italian job market, its dynamics, and the available opportunities. In recent years, Italian educational institutions have increasingly relied on platforms and portals specifically designed to connect supply and demand. Moreover, Artificial Intelligence could enhance these services by providing data-driven insights into job trends and matching students with suitable opportunities.

Through workshops, company meetings, and individual consultations, Career Services provide students with essential tools to develop key job-search skills, from writing CVs to interview preparation. They also facilitate access to internships and professional training programs, creating a tangible bridge between academic studies and entry into the Italian workforce. For international students, who often face language and administrative barriers, this support is essential for engaging with the job market and successfully integrating into the Italian professional world, contributing to the country's economic and cultural growth.

Curricular internships are a fundamental component of the university experience in Italy, offering students a practical opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge gained during their studies and easing their entry into the job market.

Curricular internships, which are an integral part of the study program, allow students to experience the dynamics of the working world firsthand while still in their academic journey. This experience helps students develop both technical and soft skills, such as time management, teamwork, and problem-solving, all highly sought after by companies. These internships, being linked to academic goals, enable students to explore professional sectors related to their studies, enhancing their understanding of career opportunities and helping them make more informed professional choices. Moreover, internships allow students to expand their professional network, creating valuable connections that could lead to future job opportunities.

As reported in '*XXVI Graduate Profile Survey 2023. Summary of the 2024 Report*'²² elaborated by AlmaLaurea²³, internships integrated into degree programs represent one of the strategic objectives for Italian universities in fostering collaboration between academia and the economic system. For years, these experiences have been a valuable asset for students in the job market, as demonstrated by studies from AlmaLaurea: those who completed a curricular internship have, all other things being equal, a 6.6% higher chance of being employed one year after graduation compared to those who did not participate in such activities.

On the other hand, extracurricular internships, which take place after graduation, offer an additional pathway into the job market by providing graduates with their first professional experience in a real business environment. These internships allow recent graduates to consolidate the skills they have already acquired, learn new ones, and experiment with different roles and sectors, enhancing their adaptability to the demands of the labour market. In an increasingly competitive job environment, extracurricular internships represent a valuable entry point for young graduates, as many companies use this tool to evaluate potential future employees.

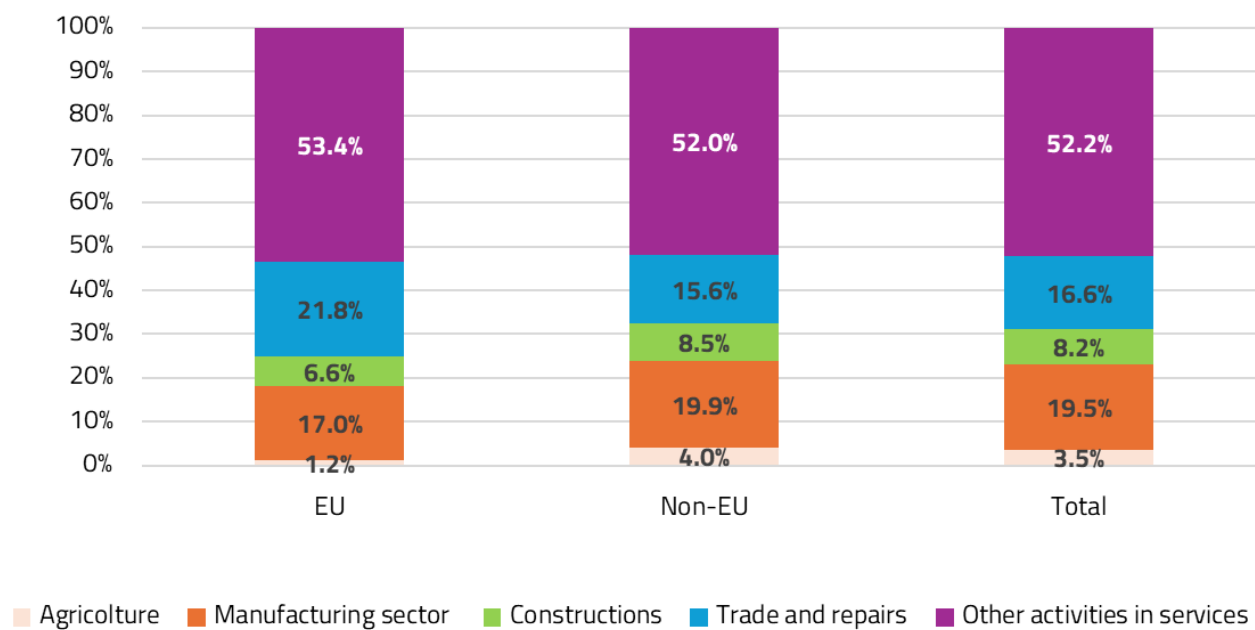
"In 2023, the extracurricular internships activated and registered by the Statistical Information System of Mandatory Communications, which involved foreign citizens, totalled 28,531, a decrease of 6.8% compared to the previous year. Of these, 4,547 involved EU citizens and 23,984 involved non-EU citizens, with a similar decrease for both groups compared to 2022.

²² AlmaLaurea (2024), XXVI Indagine Profilo dei Laureati 2023. Sintesi del Rapporto 2024. <https://www.almalaurea.it/sites/default/files/2024-06/rapporto-almalaurea2024-sintesi-profilo.pdf>

²³ AlmaLaurea is an Italian inter-university consortium established in 1999 that focuses on monitoring and analysing the labour market for graduates. By conducting surveys and publishing reports, AlmaLaurea aims to enhance the employability of graduates and bridge the gap between academic training and labour market demands. <https://www.almalaurea.it/en/about-us/the-consortium>

In 2023, the sector that absorbed the majority of the internships activated for foreign citizens was "Other Activities in Services," which accounted for 14,896 activations, representing 52.2% of the total. This was followed by the Manufacturing sector (19.5%), Trade and Repairs (16.6%), Construction (8.2%), and Agriculture (3.5%).

Figure 1: *% distribution of extracurricular internships activated by economic sector and citizenship of the individuals involved. Year 2023.*



Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, XIV Annual Report on Foreigners in the Labor Market in Italy, 2024.

The comparison between 2022 and 2023 shows a decrease in internships across all sectors, except for agriculture, which recorded an increase of 4.4% for the non-EU component and remained unchanged for EU citizens.

The decline in internships is most pronounced in the Manufacturing sector (-8.8%), in Other Activities in Services (-8.4%), and in Construction, which experienced the most significant decrease of -15.5% for the EU component. Finally, in Trade and Repairs, the decline concerns exclusively EU citizens (-3.6%)."²⁴

²⁴ Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, XIV Annual Report on Foreigners in the Labor Market in Italy, 2024.
<https://www.lavoro.gov.it/documenti/xiv-rapporto-gli-stranieri-nel-mercato-del-lavoro-italia-2024>

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in collaboration with Uni-Italia, has created the first national alumni network called *Alumni Farnesina*, to bring together all international students who have benefited from a scholarship offered by the Italian Government during their academic career. This network is aimed at those who have participated in study, training, and research programs promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and seeks to facilitate the maintenance of connections with Italy, fostering also professional and academic collaborations at an international level. The goal is to contribute to the enrichment of cultural, social, and economic relations between Italy and the communities to which the Alumni belong, to keep alive the bond between Italy and the international talents it has chosen to invest in. *Alumni Farnesina* provides a platform for exchanging experiences, and participating in events and initiatives organized by the network of Embassies, Consulates, and Italian Cultural Institutes worldwide.

The alumni portals of universities are a fundamental tool for graduates, both national and international, to maintain an active connection with the national job market. These portals provide a valuable network of connections that allow former students to access job opportunities, networking events, and professional updates specific to their fields of interest. Through these platforms, graduates can also connect with Italian companies seeking qualified talent, while staying informed about new market trends and required skills. Furthermore, thanks to being part of a solid and active community, graduates can benefit from shared experiences and advice from colleagues already established in the workforce, making it easier to enter or remain in the Italian job market.

Additional support for enhancing employability and skills development is also provided through broader national programs, such as the National Program for Youth, Women, and Work 2021-2027²⁵. Funded by the European Social Fund Plus and national resources, the National Program for Youth, Women, and Work 2021-2027 aims to promote employment and skills, support the employment of young people, women, and individuals in vulnerable situations, and modernize labour services and active policies.

The program was approved by the European Commission with Implementing Decision (EU) C 2022/9030 on December 1, 2022, and contributes to the goal of a more social and inclusive Europe through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, whose Action Plan outlines three main objectives to be achieved by 2030:

- At least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment;

²⁵ <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/pn-giovani-donne-lavoro/>

- At least 60% of all adults should participate annually in training activities;
- The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million.

The program aims to reach, engage, and motivate young people, especially those furthest from the labour market, and to provide them with concrete opportunities through a personalized pathway, starting with welcome services at regional offices, followed by specialized guidance, support, and concluding with an offer of employment, apprenticeship, internship, or training.

The actions proposed focus on engaging and empowering youth who are furthest from the labour market, leveraging territorial networks that include institutions, schools, associations, and opportunities within the social economy. This initiative provides specialized guidance, tutoring, and support aimed at activating young individuals and assisting them in their job search. Additionally, the program emphasizes training that is tailored to the specific needs of businesses, ensuring that young people acquire the skills that are most relevant in today's job market.

To enhance employability, short training courses are offered in various areas such as digital skills, green skills, language proficiency, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement, all of which serve as preparation for accessing active labour market measures. Furthermore, practical experience is facilitated through internships, apprenticeships, and opportunities for universal civil service. To encourage employment, the initiative includes incentives for hiring, business creation, and self-employment, along with support pathways designed to foster entrepreneurship. This comprehensive approach aims to equip young people with the necessary skills and opportunities to thrive in the evolving labour market.

The target audience includes young people aged 15 to 34, which encompasses not only citizens from third countries but also international students, migrants, and beneficiaries of international protection. This group consists of NEETs (*Not in Education, Employment or Training*) who are inactive and not seeking work or participating in training, young people who have just completed their education and are looking for employment, those available for work but not actively seeking it, and young individuals who are unavailable due to family responsibilities or health issues.

In addition to national programs aimed at promoting employment and skill development, Italy has also introduced specific measures to attract skilled professionals and researchers back to the country. The 'brain gain' law, for example, provides significant tax relief for teachers and researchers who transfer their tax residence to Italy, further contributing to the nation's efforts to retain and attract top talent.

3. The Job Market in Italy

In a context of progressively aging Italian population, foreigners represent a fundamental resource for maintaining the active workforce and ensuring the sustainability of the welfare system. Without a constant influx of migrants, the active population in Italy could face a drastic reduction, jeopardizing economic growth and the stability of the pension system.

Excellent analytical work has been carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, ISTAT (*National Institute of Statistics*), and sector organizations such as Unioncamere, and these will be presented in this chapter.

3.1 Current State of the Job Market in Italy

The labour market also in Italy is facing significant challenges related to an unfavourable demographic situation and a transformation of the production fabric. The '*XIV Annual Report on Foreigners in the Labor Market in Italy*' by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies highlights how immigrants play a crucial role in filling certain labour gaps where the demand for labour is steady.

"As of January 1, 2023, there are approximately 5 million foreign citizens residing in Italy, representing 8.7% of the total population. Compared to the previous year, this number has increased by 111,000 (+2.2%). The increase due to natural balance is about 43,000 individuals, while the increase due to migration balance is approximately 286,000. Additionally, 214,000 foreigners acquired Italian citizenship in 2022 (+76.9% compared to 2021).

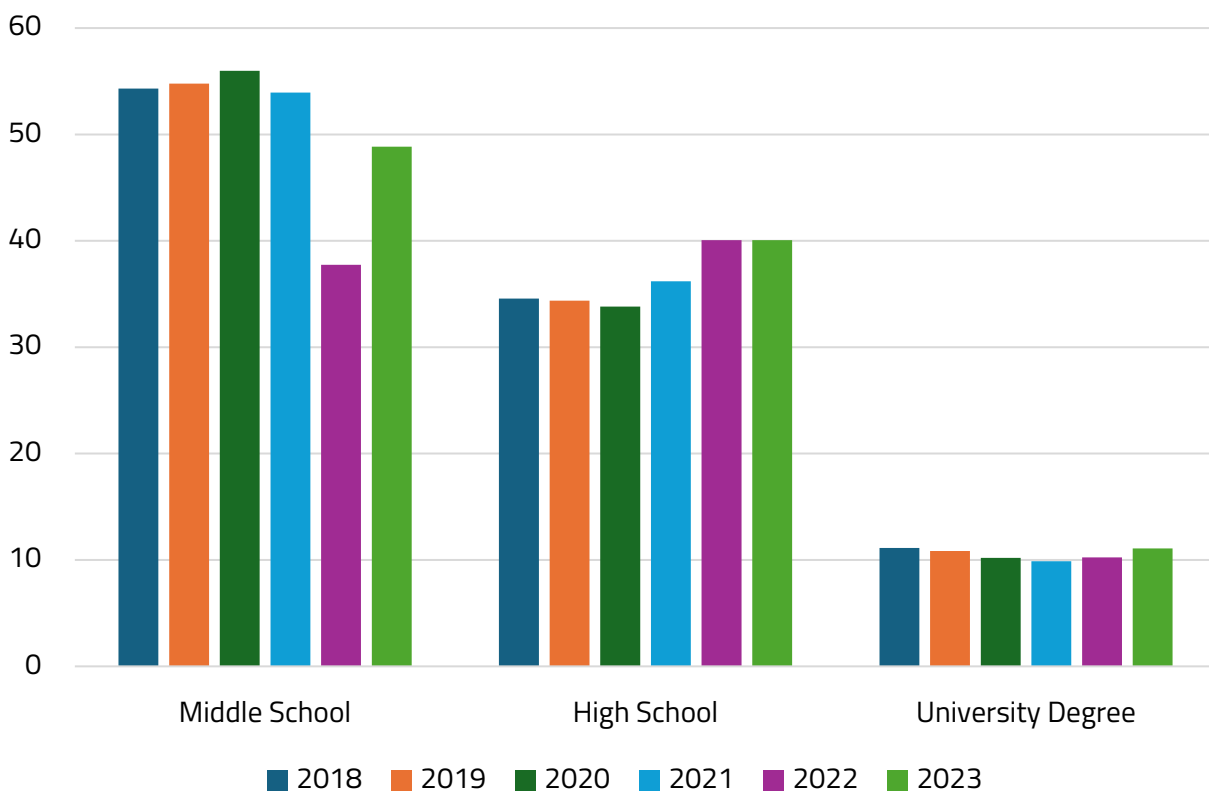
In 2022, there was a continued decrease in the number of foreign births (53,000 born, down from 57,000 in 2021), an increase in registrations from abroad (336,000, compared to 244,000 in 2021), and a decrease in cancellations for residents moving abroad (51,000, down from 64,000 in 2021).

At the beginning of 2023, there are 3,727,706 non-EU citizens legally residing in Italy, 60% of whom hold a long-term residence permit. In 2022, nearly 449,000 new residence permits were issued to non-EU citizens, representing an increase of 86.0% compared to 2021, largely due to the refugee crisis stemming from the war in Ukraine. As a result, in 2022, the predominant reasons for new entries were asylum and international protection requests (45.1%), which rose from around 31,000 to over 200,000 (+556.0%), followed by family reunification (28.1%) and work-related reasons (15.0%), both of which have significantly increased compared to 2021 (+32.2%).

Differences in labour market participation still exist between Italians and foreigners. In 2023, the employment rate for foreigners aged 20 to 64 increased less intensely compared to that of

natives (0.8 percentage points and 1.5 percentage points, respectively), continuing to diverge from the value of Italians in the same age group (65.1% compared to 66.4%). The unemployment rate, however, decreased more for foreigners (-0.7) than for Italians (-0.4 points), though foreigners still exhibit a significantly higher indicator value (11.3%) compared to natives (7.2%). The inactivity rate (ages 15-64) for foreigners (30.5%) remains lower than that of natives (33.6%), with more marked differences in the South of Italy.

Figure 2: *Foreign population by level of education (percentage compositions)*

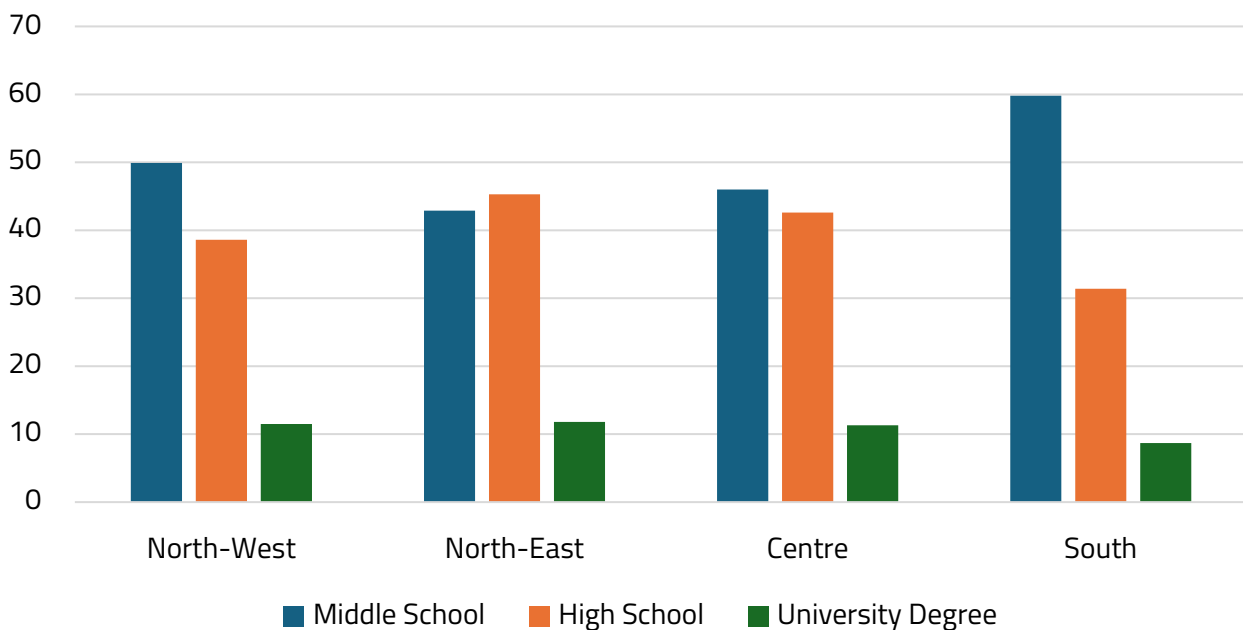


Source: ISTAT

In 2023, the education level of foreigners is still lower than that of Italians, despite improvements in recent years. Among foreigners aged 15 to 64, 48.9% have achieved at most a middle school diploma, compared to 35.6% of their Italian peers; 40.1% have a high school diploma, and 11.1% hold a university degree, compared to 44.3% and 20.1% of Italians in the same age group, respectively. The differences are more pronounced in the younger age groups and tend to decrease with age: the proportion of graduates among those aged 25 to 34 is 12.7% for foreigners

and 33.4% for Italians, while among those aged 55 to 64, the percentages are closer, standing at 11.1% and 13.4%, respectively.”²⁶

Figure 3: *Foreign population by level of education by geographical area. Year 2023 (percentage compositions)*



Source: ISTAT

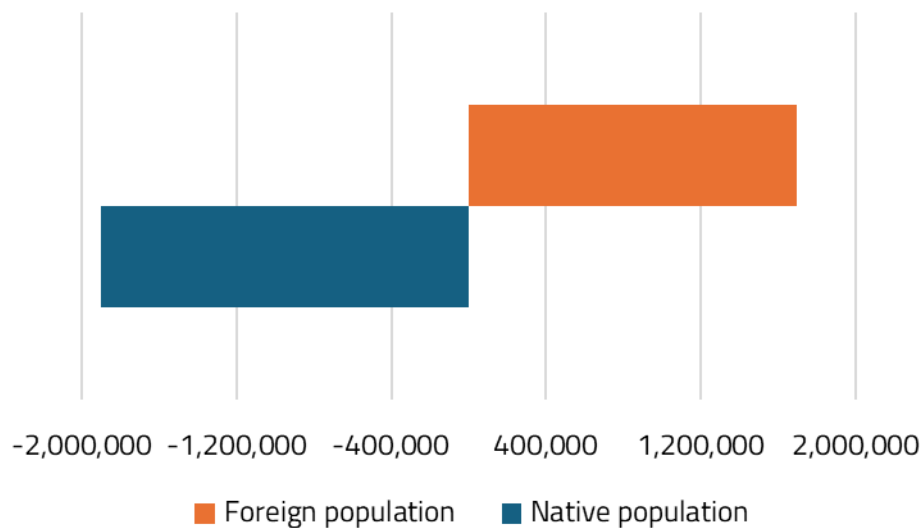
The aging of the Italian population, combined with a very low birth rate, has made foreigners a fundamental component of the workforce. While the native Italian population continues to decline, especially among the younger age groups, foreigners represent a significant portion of the total workforce in many sectors, such as agriculture, hospitality, domestic assistance, and personal services. The country is facing widespread labour shortages of—according to government estimates—about one million, across different skills levels. According to Unioncamere (*Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce*) Italy is facing shortages of college and high school graduates of about 20 percent and 40 percent, respectively. The skills needs are widespread. On the one hand, pharmacists, biologists, life scientists, and physicians are increasingly difficult to find. On the other hand, at least 100,000 workers are needed to fill the labour shortage in agriculture. To reduce the loss of highly skilled labour, remuneration and working conditions, career prospects, and business opportunities for graduates need to improve,

²⁶ <https://noi-italia.istat.it/pagina.php?L=0&categoria=4&dove=ITA>

including through reforms discussed later. At the same time, Italy also needs a pragmatic immigration policy, complemented by training and integration support. Research shows that international migration, especially of young and high-skilled people, can boost output, create new opportunities for local firms and native workers, supply abilities and skills needed for growth, generate new ideas, stimulate international trade, and improve pension and fiscal balances over the longer term²⁷.

According to the XIV Annual Report²⁸, the period from 2010 to 2024 is marked by a significant reduction in the native population (-1.9 million; -3.3%) and growth in the foreign population (+1.7 million; +45.5%). The growth rate of the foreign population—which has slowed since 2014—has allowed for a partial compensation of the decline in the native population: during this period, the total resident population decreased from 59.2 million to 59 million (-200,000; -0.3%).

Figure 4: *Growth and decline rate of native and foreign population in Italy between 2010 and 2024*



Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, XIV Annual Report on Foreigners in the Labor Market in Italy, 2024.

A positive aspect highlighted by the report concerns the growing importance of extracurricular internships as a tool to facilitate integration into the labour market. Internships provide

²⁷ Italy: Selected Issues; IMF Country Report No. 23/274; July 5, 2023 <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2023/English/1ITAFA2023002.ashx>

²⁸ Ref. note 18.

foreigners, particularly young people, with the opportunity to acquire practical skills and establish an initial contact with the Italian working world.

In 2023, internships are an important entry channel, especially for young foreigners who, through orientation and training programs, gain access to job opportunities that would otherwise be difficult to reach. However, much remains to be done to improve the effectiveness of these programs, ensuring a greater number of internships lead to stable employment.

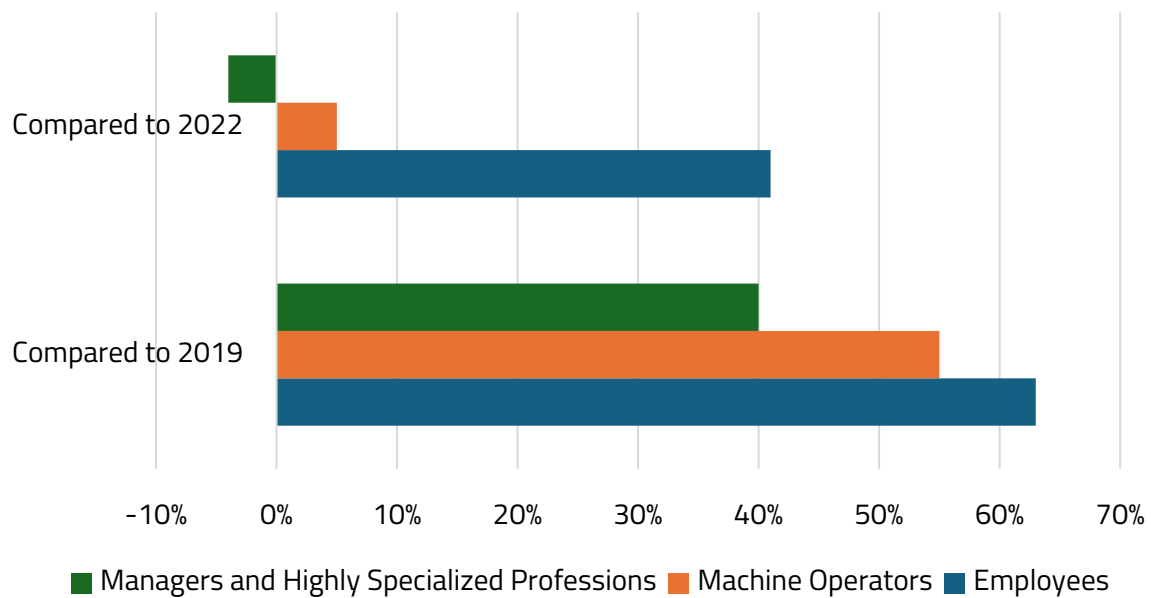
The report emphasizes the need for more inclusive policies aimed at reducing barriers to access employment, improving the recognition of professional qualifications obtained abroad, and promoting greater participation of foreigners in vocational training programs.

3.2 Professional Roles in Shortage in Italy

The Italian labour market is facing a series of challenges related to the lack of qualified professionals, with demand often exceeding supply in certain sectors. According to the '*XIV Annual Report on Foreigners in the Labor Market in Italy*', recruitment difficulties particularly affect technical and specialized sectors, where some professions are especially hard to fill.

Between 2019 and 2023, there has been a notable almost doubling in the demand for skilled workers, reaching a total of nearly 188,000 planned hires, with 30% of this number occurring in the last year alone. The demand for technical professions has increased by approximately 75% during the same period, covering over 78,000 contracts, of which 10% were added between 2022 and 2023. The third position in terms of growth dynamics (+67% compared to 2019 and around +15% compared to 2022) is occupied by qualified professions in commerce and services, which, with 285,000 entries, also represents the largest segment for foreign personnel demand (27%). The increase in demand for unskilled professions is slightly less intense (+66% compared to 2019 and approximately +12% compared to 2022), making it the second professional area for the demand for immigrant workers, with 263,000 planned contracts in 2023. Following in terms of dynamics are employees (+63% compared to 2019 and around +41% compared to 2022), machine operators (+55% compared to 2019 and around +5% compared to 2022), and managers and highly specialized professions (+40% compared to 2019 and around -4% compared to 2022).

Figure 5: *Growth and decline of foreign workers. Compared to 2019 and 2022.*



Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, XIV Annual Report on Foreigners in the Labor Market in Italy, 2024.

Analysing the most sought-after profiles in detail within each macro-group, we find that among technical professions, healthcare and nursing roles have over 15,000 entries intended for foreign personnel, representing 35.8% of total planned hires (compared to an average of 11.6% for the macro-group). Among employees, general affairs personnel stand out with around 13,000 proposed contracts, but the proportion of foreigners among total hires is low (8.5% compared to 10.5% for the macro-group). Within qualified professions in commerce and services, there are nearly 74,000 contracts for waiters (with a 17.2% share of total hires), about 59,000 positions for retail sales assistants (with a 14.4% share), and 42,000 for chefs in hotels and restaurants (with a 17.6% share), all significant in terms of entries, but with a lower representation of immigrant workers compared to the average of the relevant macro-group (17.8%). The demand for foreign personnel is, however, markedly above average for other figures within the same macro-group, such as food preparation and distribution staff (with a 43.8% share of foreign workers and nearly 29,000 planned hires), personal care attendants (with a 41.9% share and 15,000 entries), and qualified professions in healthcare and social services (with a 32.6% share and 25,000 entries).

Among skilled workers, there are 54,000 requests for foreign personnel as masons (26.2% of the total for this profession, higher than the 22.5% average for the macro-group), 17,000 electricians in civil construction (covering 18% of contracts for this profession), 13,000 mechanics and

assemblers of industrial machinery (with a share of 21.7% of the total), and 11,000 metal framework assemblers (with a share of foreign workers at 27.8% of the total). In the case of machine operators, 66,000 hires are intended for immigrant personnel as heavy vehicle and truck drivers (27.4% of total requests, higher than the 24.4% average for the macro-group) and 13,000 for operators of industrial packaging machines (with a share of 28.8%).

Focusing on educational levels, specific characteristics related to the professional structure of the demand for foreign workers emerge: around 460,000 hires require a qualification or vocational diploma, a level of education that accounts for 43.6% of the total planned entries for foreign personnel, compared to 36.3% for non-foreigners. The gap is even wider regarding the requirement for only a compulsory education level, which covers nearly 278,000 requests for foreign workers, 26.3% of the total compared to 16.7% for Italians. About 227,000 entries are linked to functions requiring secondary diplomas, corresponding to 21.4% of total entries for immigrant workers, about 9 percentage points lower than the same share for non-immigrant workers, and a similar situation is found for approximately 92,000 entries requiring a tertiary educational level (ITS Academy or degree), corresponding to 8.7% of positions allocated for foreign personnel, but in the case of Italians, the share rises to 16.2%.

When examining the skills most sought after by businesses, it emerges that, in general, the importance attributed to these skills for foreign workers is less intense compared to what is required of Italian workers, as expectations regarding the skills possessed tend to diminish for less qualified professions, which have a higher presence of foreign labour. Among the skills considered most relevant for foreign workers, flexibility and the ability to work in teams are highlighted in the top two positions (with high importance in 61.0% and 49.2% of cases, respectively).

For Italians, the two skills deemed most important are the same, with a wider gap between the two groups for the ability to work in teams (+8.1 percentage points in expectations for Italian personnel) compared to flexibility (+6.2 percentage points). The widest gap in the assessment of the relevance of skill possession between immigrant and Italian workers is reached for digital technology usage skills (-12.2 percentage points between the two groups), while the smallest gap (40.1% versus 42.2%) is observed for green skills.

3.3 Sectors with the Highest Demand for Qualified Personnel: 2024-2028

A detailed analysis of the sectors with the highest need for qualified personnel has been carried out by Unioncamere for the upcoming five-year period. Specifically, this paragraph refers to the

findings presented in '*Forecasts of Employment and Professional Needs in Italy in the Medium Term (2024-2028)*'.

The analysis of the projected demand for the period 2024-2028 by profession highlights that a significant portion of the requests—approximately 39% of the total—will involve high-profile workers, namely managers, specialists, and technicians (between 1.3 and 1.4 million units), due both to the expansion of employment and to the replacement of individuals exiting the labour market.

Table 3: *Needs for the 2024-2028 Period by Major Occupational Group*

	Total need (a.v.)*		Shares of total (%)	
	2024-2028		2024-2028	
	Positive scenario	Negative scenario	Positive scenario	Negative scenario
Total (excluding Agriculture, forestry and fisheries and the Armed Forces)	3,345,200	3,753,800	100.0	100.0
Of which:				
1. Managers	49,900	55,700	1.5	1.5
2. Specialized professions	621,100	683,500	18.6	18.2
3. Technical professions	632,200	708,100	18.9	18.9
4. Clerks	502,300	551,600	15	14.7
5. Commercial and service professions	702,800	803,100	21	21.4
6. Skilled workers and artisan	365,300	417,500	10.9	11.1
7. Machine and motor vehicle operators	208,900	236,100	6.2	6.3
8. Unskilled workers	262,700	298,200	7.9	7.9

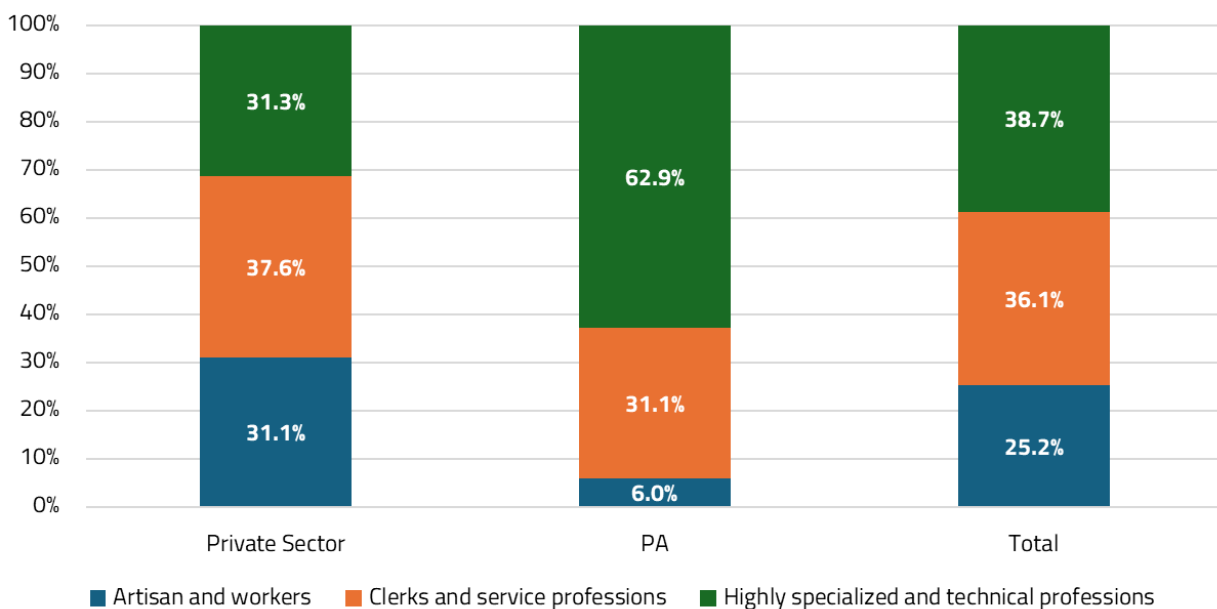
* Absolute values rounded to the hundreds. Totals may not equal the sum of individual values

Source: Unioncamere, *Forecasts of Employment and Professional Needs in Italy in the Medium Term (2024-2028)*, 2024.

The significant share of managers, specialists, and technicians in the expected demand is largely due to the needs of the public sector (which accounts for 38% on average in scenarios regarding the demand for these roles), typically characterized by highly specialized professions. However, the growing focus of companies on more specialized personnel also significantly contributes to this demand.

The weight of highly specialized and technical professions varies considerably depending on whether they are in the private or public sectors: in the former, the share is around 31%, while in the public administration (PA) it reaches almost 63% of the demand for public employees. Intermediate profiles, namely clerks and commercial and service professions, will account for just over a third of the overall demand, amounting to about 1.2 to 1.4 million workers (36% of the total), while the estimated demand for both skilled workers and machine operators will range between 574,000 and 654,000 units, representing about 17% of the total. Finally, it is estimated that the next five years will also see a demand for 263,000 to 298,000 unskilled workers, accounting for around 8%.

Figure 6: *Distribution of Occupational Needs in the 2024-2028 Period*



Source: Unioncamere, Forecasts of Employment and Professional Needs in Italy in the Medium Term (2024-2028), 2024.

Regarding specialized profiles, the most in-demand will involve specialists in management, commercial, and banking sciences, for whom a demand of approximately 112,000 to 122,000 workers is estimated, with a higher demand rate compared to the average level of specialized professions (4-4.3% vs 3.4-3.8%). The highest demand rate for this level (between 3.9% and 4.5%) is for engineers, for whom a need for 55,000 to 64,000 specialists is anticipated. Demand rates above average are also noted for the 51,000 to 52,000 doctors (3.8-3.9%), while the approximately 30,000 specialists in legal sciences have lower rates (1.9-2%).

Furthermore, among specialized professions, the professional group of training and research specialists [...] emerges, with a total of 214,000 to 235,000 workers expected over the five-year period 2024-2028, including about 100,000 primary and pre-primary schoolteachers, with a slightly above-average demand rate (3.7-4.0%), and 83,000 to 91,000 secondary and post-secondary school teachers, with a rate similar to the average rate. There will also be significant demand for other specialists in education and training, with an expected demand for 39,000 to 44,000 workers over the five years, resulting in an average annual demand rate of 3.5-3.9%. These profiles include various types of professions, particularly support teachers, teachers of artistic disciplines, foreign language teachers, as well as designers of educational activities in schools and at the corporate level (including online training).

As for technical profiles, healthcare professions stand out, such as nurses and rehabilitation technicians, for whom demand is around 151,000 to 158,000 units, with an average annual rate of 4.1-4.3% (compared to an average of 3.2-3.5% for all technicians). A higher demand rate (5.7-6.4%) is recorded for market relations technicians, particularly commercial, marketing, and purchasing technicians, for whom demand is estimated between 88,000 and 99,000 units. The other technical professions expected to have a high demand are characterized by more modest rates.

Among employees, those in secretarial and general affairs activities for companies emerge due to their high demand, with a need between 280,000 and 304,000 units, corresponding to average annual demand rates of 3.5% and 3.7%. Second in the ranking, based on demand, are customer reception and information staff, both in front-office positions and in call centres: a projected need between 84,000 and 96,000 workers, with a demand rate significantly higher than the average rate (6-6.8% vs 3.5-3.8%). Moreover, a high demand rate of 4.8-5.2% is noted for employees working in the accounting and financial operations of companies, although in this case, the absolute demand is lower (61,000 to 66,000 units).

Regarding commercial and intermediate service professions, the demand rates indicate that qualified professions in health and social services prevail (5.3-5.7%), for which 81,000 to 86,000 workers are expected. Following them are sales staff, such as store clerks and sales assistants in large distribution (4.8-5%), who also represent the largest professional group (272,000 to 285,000). Important in numerical terms but with a slightly lower demand rate than the average for the professional category (2.8-3.5% vs 3.2-3.7%) are professions in the catering sector, particularly floor staff and kitchen staff, for which demand will be between 177,000 and 222,000 units.

For specialized workers, the most significant demand, both in absolute terms and in demand rate, will be for workers in the construction sector, reflecting the expected growth in the sector: about 136,000 to 156,000 expected workers, both for the realization and maintenance of constructions, as well as for their finishing. Following are the typical profiles from the metalworking industries: on one hand, artisanal mechanics, assemblers, repairers, and machinery maintenance workers (with a demand of 58,000 to 63,000 units), and on the other, foundry workers, welders, and metal construction assemblers, with a demand of 31,000 to 36,000 units.

Among plant operators, machinery operators for earthmoving, lifting, and material handling emerge, with demand rates above the average for the professional category (4.1-4.7% vs 2.4-2.7%) but with a limited number of workers needed (20,000 to 22,000 units). The most numerous expected professional figures are motor vehicle operators, particularly heavy vehicle operators, estimated between 74,000 and 82,000 units during the five-year period 2024-2028.

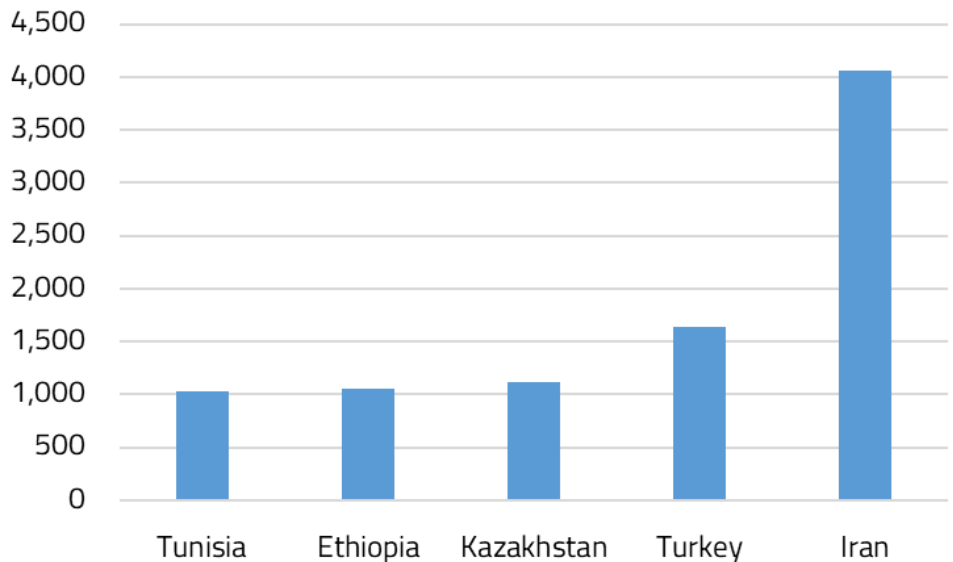
4. Results of a Survey Administered to Italian HEIs

4.1 International Students in Italian Universities: Flows

Many countries worldwide are studying how to profile international students not only during their stay, but also before their arrival in the host country and within 5 years after graduation. Italy is trying also to analyse the outcome of the investment in the attraction of the international students at national and local level. Matching data of competent ministries can help identify information about international students in Italy, as for instance, their region or country of origin, if they stay in Italy after graduation, and so on. An important starting point is considering the data provided by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, between 2019 and 2023, there has been an increase in study visas issued by Italian Diplomatic-Consular Representations abroad, rising from 21,458 to 33,109 marking an increase of almost 55%. This impressive result was achieved thanks to the investment made by several stakeholders, in term of contributions and also of activities organized worldwide. At a national level from our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and from the Ministry of University and Research, that jointly coordinated, as founding members, also the activities carried out by Uni-Italia in the promotion of Italy as a study destination. Meanwhile the Italian higher education institutions (*HEIs*) invested more in the last years in mobility, academic cooperation and so on. Looking at the data of visas issued in the last 5 years, emerged that the main increases by country

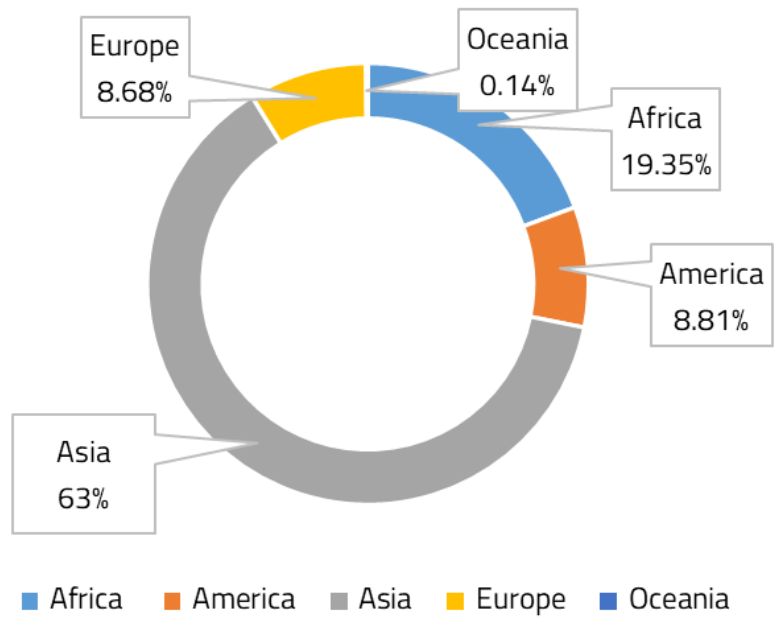
were recorded in Iran, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Ethiopia and Tunisia, while in a continent-wise analysis, significant increases were observed in Asia.

Figure 7: *Top 5 countries in terms of increase in visa type D – University Enrolment issuance*



Source: MAECI

Figure 8: *Distribution of visa type D – University Enrolment issuance in 2023*



Source: MAECI

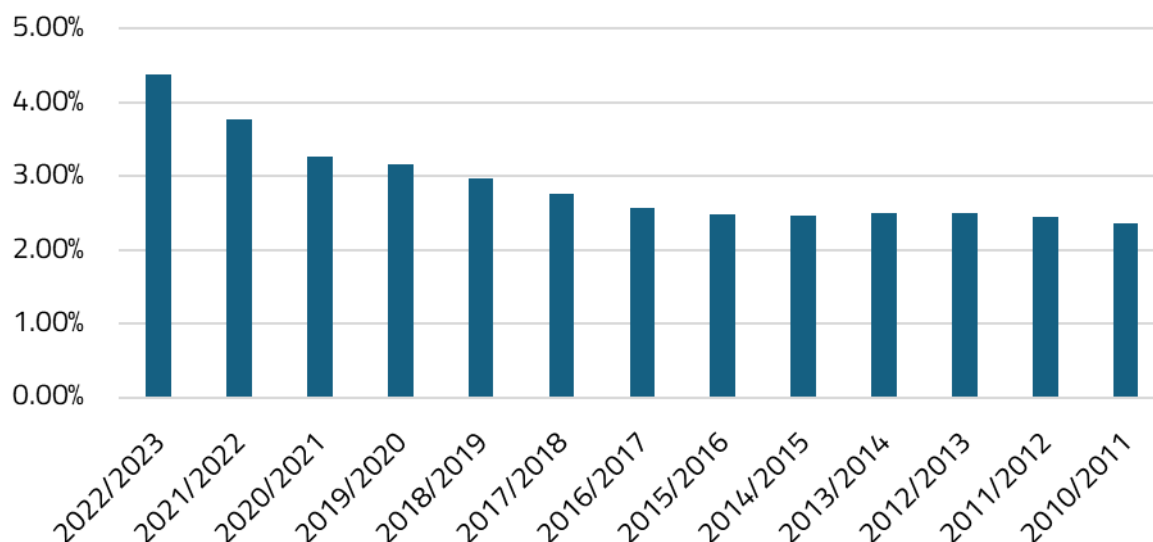
The distribution of visa type D – University Enrolment (figure 8) highlights how more than the 80% of international students enrolled in our Higher Education Institutions come from Asia (63%) and Africa (19.35%). The national-level statistics on the number of international students, as defined by the OECD²⁹, are only partially available. In the following pages, where not explicitly stated, we decided to rely on data related to the number of international students enrolled at Italian universities. In the context of the Italian Higher Education System, there has been a consistent increase in the number of international students enrolled in an Italian HEI to obtain a degree.

During the period from the Academic Year 2016/2017 to 2022/2023, Italian universities and AFAM institutions have recorded a significant increase in the number of foreign students enrolled in a bachelor's or master's degree (or equivalent level) or Doctoral level, reaching an overall increase of approximately 50%. The numbers have respectively risen from 98,015 to 148,016 foreign students enrolled, representing 5.3% and 6.8% of the total student population for the reference academic year.

During the period from the Academic Year 2018/2019 to 2022/2023, Italian universities have recorded a significant increase in the number of international students enrolled in a bachelor's or master's degree (or equivalent level), reaching an overall increase of approximately 60%. The numbers have respectively risen from 51,274 to 83,030 international students enrolled, representing 3% and 4.4% of the total student population for the reference academic year.

²⁹ According to definition stated by the Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development – OECD, international students are those who received their prior education in another country and are not residents of their current country of study.

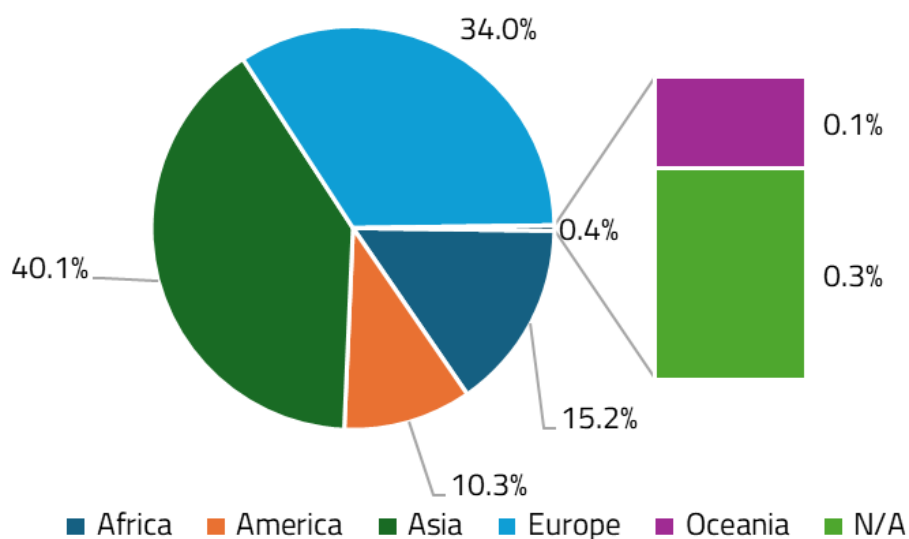
Figure 9: % of international students in Italian universities



Source: MUR – Statistical Office

By continent, the presence of students of European and Asian nationalities is predominant, accounting for 40.1% and 34%, respectively, followed by Africans (15.2%), Americans (10.3%) and Oceanians (0.1%).

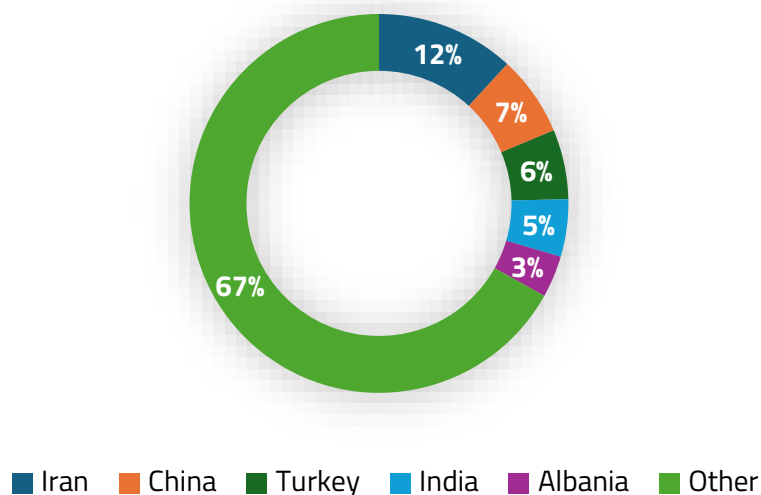
Figure 10: % of international students by continent of origin



Source: MUR – Statistical Office

The presence of European students is the 34%, while the number of Asian students is predominant due to the presence of 9,841, 5,745 and 4,146 students arriving respectively from Iran, China, and India. The top five countries of origin for international students enrolled in Italian universities are: Iran, China, Turkey, India and Albania. These five nationalities make up nearly 33% of the total number of foreign students.

Figure 11: *Top 5 nationalities of international students in Italy and their percentage of the total international student population.*



Source: MUR – Statistical Office

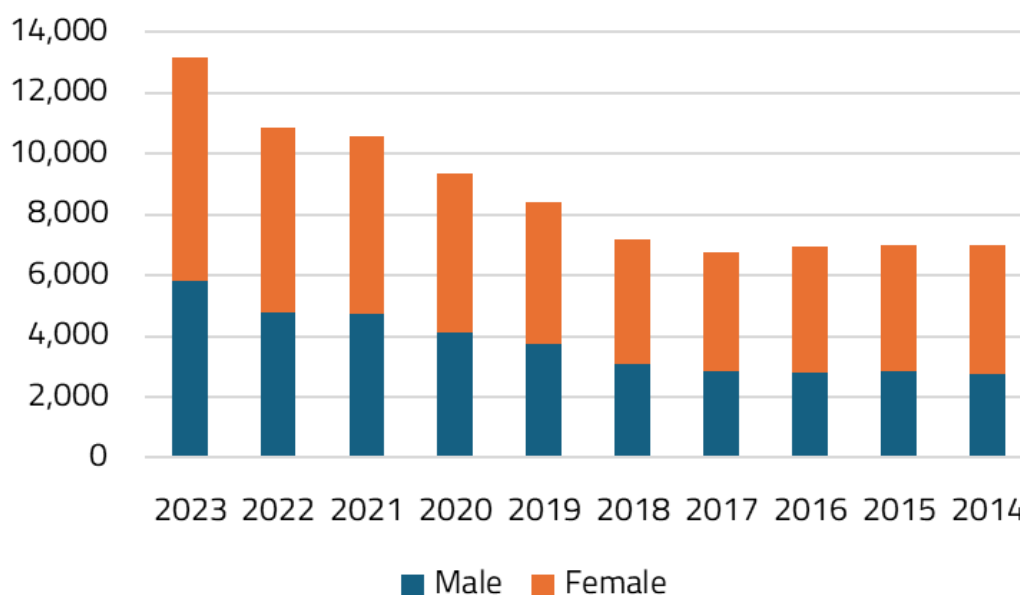
Between the academic year 2018/2019 and the academic year 2022/2023, the Italian university system recorded an increase of nearly 62% in the number of international students, rising from 51,000 to 83,000. Thanks also to the significantly increase of participation of Italian HEIs in national pavilions coordinated and incentivised with contributions from Uni-Italia.

According to data published by the Statistical Office of the MUR, the number of international students graduating from Italian universities is constantly increasing, showing significant year-over-year growth. In the calendar year 2023 alone, the number of international graduates surpassed the threshold of 13,000, a milestone never reached before and representing the highest number recorded to date. This growth trend highlights the increasing attractiveness of the Italian university system on a global level, thanks to the quality of education offered and the academic and professional opportunities that Italy can provide to students from abroad.

Another interesting aspect that emerges from the data (figure 12) is the gender composition of these international graduates. It is striking that the number of women consistently exceeds that of men. In the different years considered, the percentage of international female graduates has shown a clear prevalence, peaking at +22% in 2014 compared to men, and although this percentage has decreased, it remains positive, standing at +12% in 2023.

These numbers also suggest the importance of continuing to invest in welcoming and integration programs for international students, with particular attention to promoting the inclusion of women from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds. Italy, positioning itself as an academic destination of excellence, has the opportunity to further strengthen its global reputation in the education sector, attracting an increasing number of talents and thus contributing to an ever more international and inclusive university environment.

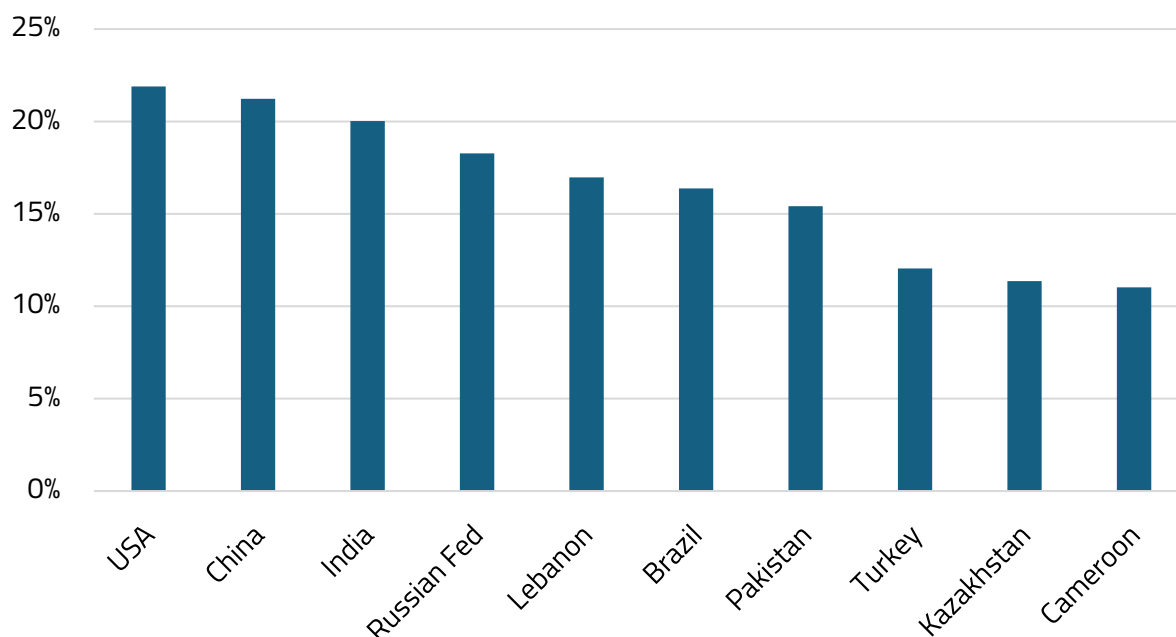
Figure 12: *International students graduating from Italian universities from 2014 to 2023 and their gender distribution.*



Source: MUR – Statistical Office

Considering only the countries of origin of international students which, in the academic year 2022/2023, recorded a number equal to or greater than 1,000 students, the following graph shows the percentage of graduates from the top 10 countries in 2023

Figure 13: *Non-European origin countries of international students with a recorded count of 1,000 or more students, relative to the number of graduates in 2023.*



Source: MUR – Statistical Office

4.2 Objectives and Methodology of the Survey

Uni-Italia, in the preparation of this study, sent a survey to Italian universities and AFAM institutions in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of international students on the Italian labour market. This study arises from the increasing presence of international students in Italian academic institutions and the need to better understand their professional paths after graduation, particularly their employment in Italy. Currently, there is a significant data gap regarding the career trajectory of these students, which the survey aimed to fill.

The survey methodology was based on a series of questions designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative information. First, institutions were asked whether they monitor the status of international graduates after obtaining their degrees and with what tools they maintain contact, such as alumni networks or post-graduation surveys. The survey also sought to obtain information about the number of international students currently enrolled and the average number of graduates each year. Respondents were asked to provide data regarding the percentage of these graduates who manage to find work in Italy one and five years after graduation, as well as the percentage of those who leave the country after completing their

studies. Furthermore, the survey aimed to understand how many continue their academic journey by enrolling in further degree courses, master's programs, or doctoral studies in Italy.

The survey also explored the services offered by universities and AFAM to international students, such as Italian language courses, both during their studies and after graduation. It inquired whether institutions have an alumni network to maintain contact with international graduates and facilitate their integration into the job market. Another area investigated was internships: the survey sought to understand what percentage of courses includes mandatory curricular internships and how effective the offices responsible for finding internships for students are. Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of internships that lead to job contracts and whether there are specific services to facilitate the employment of international graduates.

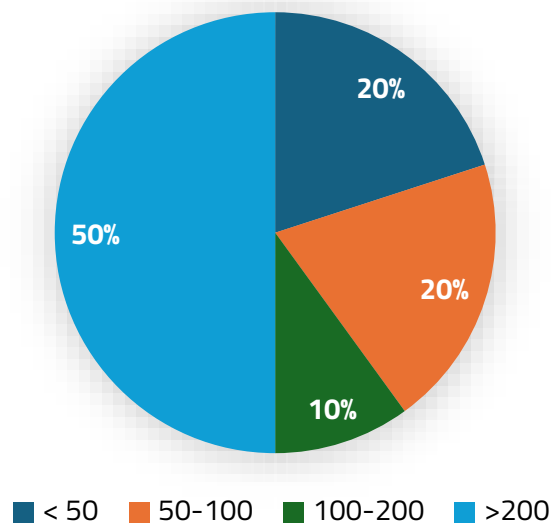
Although the survey provided an interesting preliminary overview, the data collected were not sufficient to completely bridge the existing information gap. In particular, it emerged that many institutions do not systematically monitor the employment status of international graduates, and the available information is fragmented. This highlights the need to develop a more structured and uniform monitoring system that allows for the continuous tracking of the career paths of international graduates, thereby improving the understanding of the impact these students have on the Italian labour market.

4.3 Survey Analysis and Results

The pie chart represents the responses provided by 20 Italian institutions (universities and AFAM) to the question: "*How many international graduates do you have on average each year?*" The institutions were divided into four categories based on the average number of international graduates:

- 20% of institutions reported having fewer than 50 international graduates per year.
- 20% of institutions indicated having between 50 and 100 international graduates per year.
- 10% of institutions reported an annual average of international graduates between 100 and 200.
- 50% of institutions, representing the largest segment, stated they have more than 200 international graduates per year.

Figure 14: *How many international graduates do you have on average each year?*

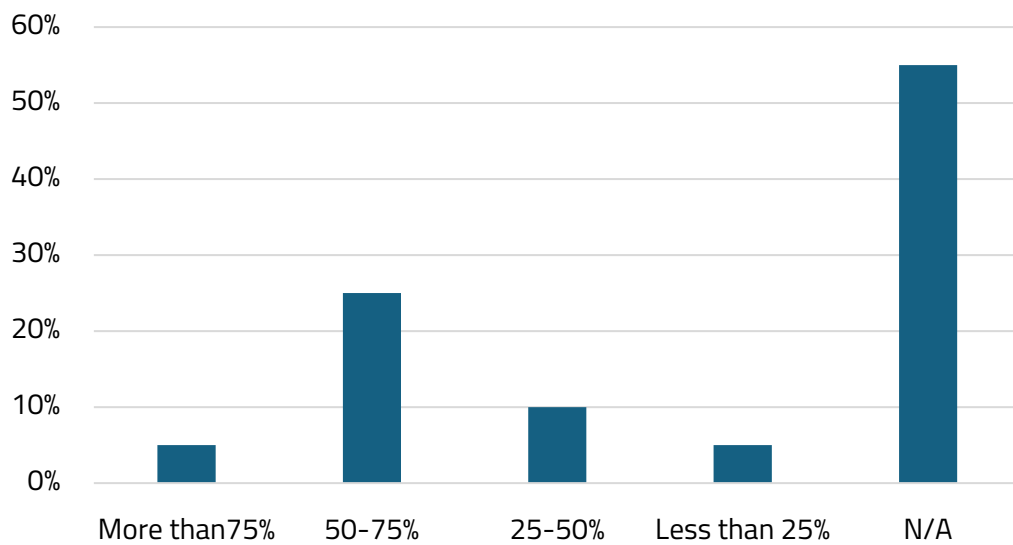


In summary, half of the institutions surveyed (50%) report an average of more than 200 international graduates per year, indicating a significant presence of foreign students at some Italian universities and AFAM institutions. On the other hand, a smaller percentage of institutions (20%) manage a limited number of international graduates (fewer than 50), highlighting a variable distribution of foreign students among Italian institutions.

The following graphs show the responses to the questions: "*What percentage of international graduates finds employment in Italy one year and five years after graduation?*" The responses are divided into different percentage ranges, reflecting the variability in employment rates among international graduates within one year and five years after graduation.

Below are the main results regarding the question about one year after graduation:

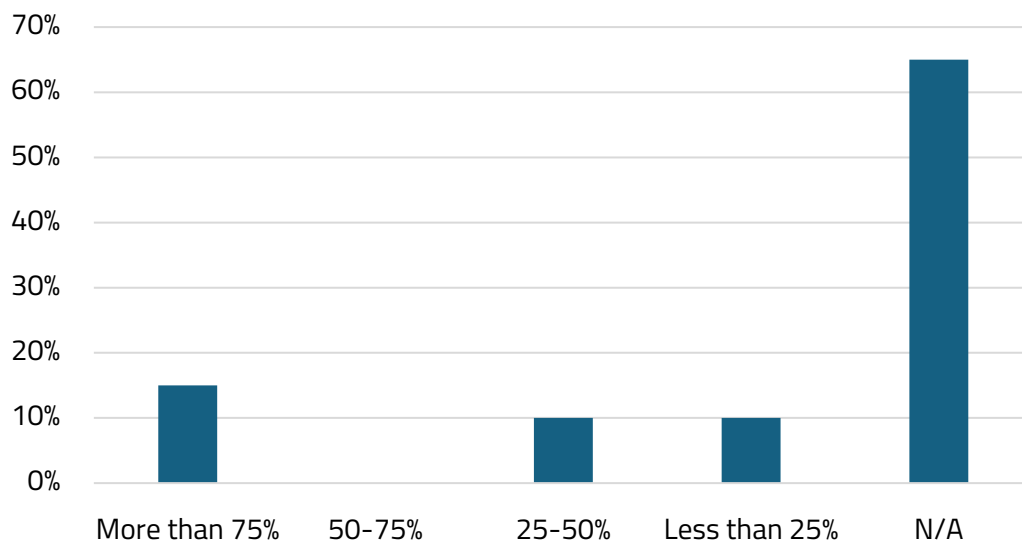
Figure 15: *What percentage of international graduates finds work in Italy one year after graduation?*



The chart highlights a variable distribution of employment success among international graduates, with six institutions reporting relatively high employment rates (over 50%). However, most institutions could not provide concrete data on the subject, because they are implementing their database as it was not available.

The following chart, on the other hand, shows the percentage of international graduates who find work in Italy five years after graduation.

Figure 16: *What percentage of international graduates finds work in Italy five years after graduation?*



The results show that:

- 15% of institutions indicate that more than 75% of international graduates find employment in Italy within 5 years of graduation, highlighting that some institutions are able to offer excellent job opportunities for their international graduates.
- 10% of institutions report that between 25% and 50% of international graduates find employment within 5 years.
- 10% of institutions indicate that less than 25% of international graduates manage to find work in Italy within this timeframe.
- The majority, 65% of institutions, marked *N/A*, meaning they did not provide information related to this question.

These results suggest that, although some international graduates find success in the Italian job market, many institutions either lack data or are unable to effectively track the situation of their international graduates in the short and long term, highlighting the need to improve the monitoring of international graduates.

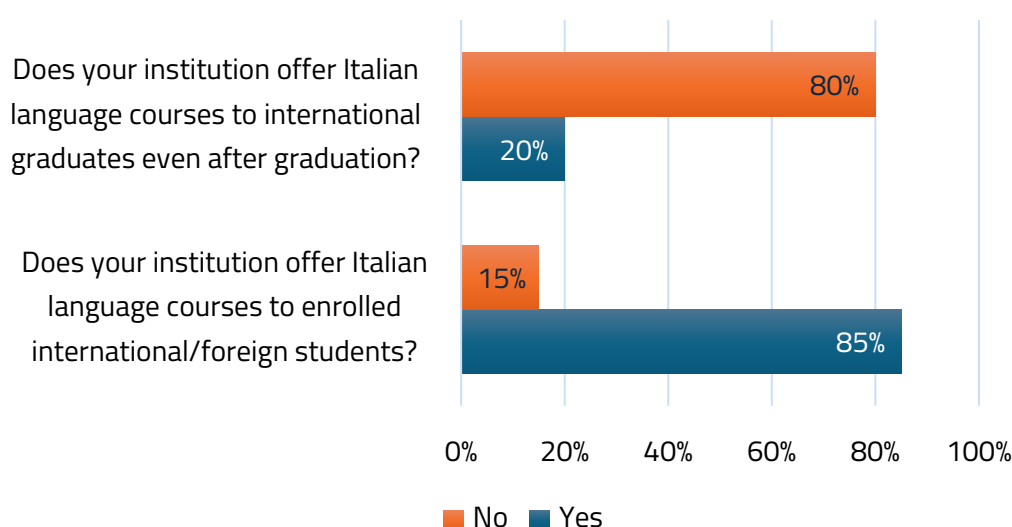
Additionally, the survey also included the following questions related to the study of the Italian language:

- *“Does your institution offer Italian language courses to enrolled international/foreign students?”*

- *“Does your institution offer Italian language courses to international graduates even after graduation?”*

The results show a wide availability of Italian language courses for foreign students, with 85% of institutions confirming they offer such opportunities, while only 15% responded negatively.

Figure 17: *Does your institution offer Italian language courses to enrolled international/foreign students? and Does your institution offer Italian language courses to international graduates even after graduation?*



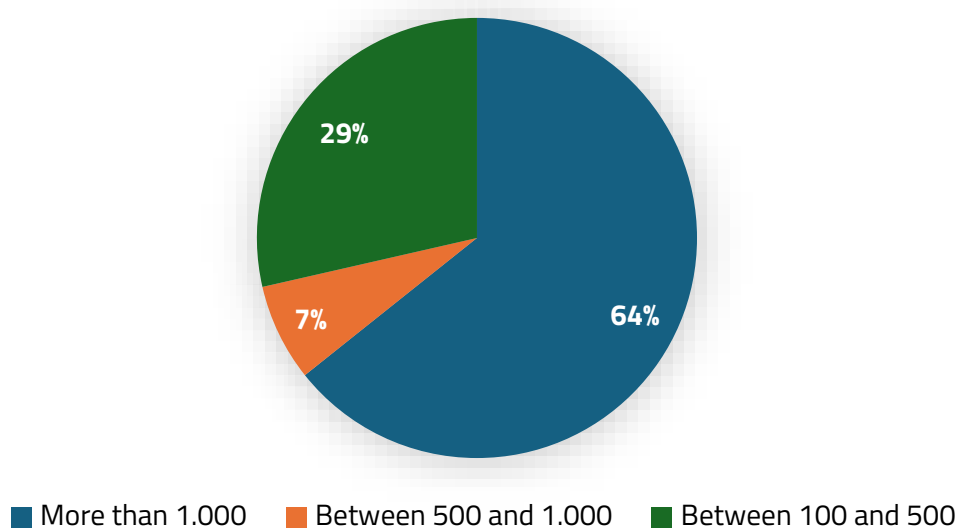
These results highlight that most institutions recognize the importance of providing Italian language courses as an integral part of the educational journey for international students. Knowledge of the Italian language is essential for various reasons. First, it facilitates integration into the academic context, as understanding and using the Italian language allows students to interact better with faculty and peers, making the university experience more inclusive and productive.

Moreover, proficiency in the Italian language enhances job placement opportunities in the local job market. Many Italian companies require a good command of the language to communicate effectively and collaborate with colleagues and clients. Learning the language also helps students better understand Italian culture, traditions, and social dynamics, thereby fostering better integration into the community.

Knowledge of Italian provides access to a greater number of academic resources, such as books, articles, and courses, which may not be available in other languages. The fact that 85% of institutions offer Italian language courses represents a significant step in preparing international students to face the challenges of the Italian job market and integrate into society. This investment in language training not only enriches the academic experience but also serves as a strategic opportunity to enhance their future professional careers in Italy. However, this percentage changes dramatically once a degree is obtained. In fact, only 20% of responding institutions offer Italian language courses to international graduates even after graduation.

Another question asked, "*Does your institution have an Alumni network?*" 70% of the institutions responded positively, while 30% stated that they do not have an active Alumni network. Among the institutions with an Alumni network, the majority (64%) reported having more than 1,000 registered members in their community, while 29% indicated having between 100 and 500 members.

Figure 18: *How many members does your Alumni network have?*

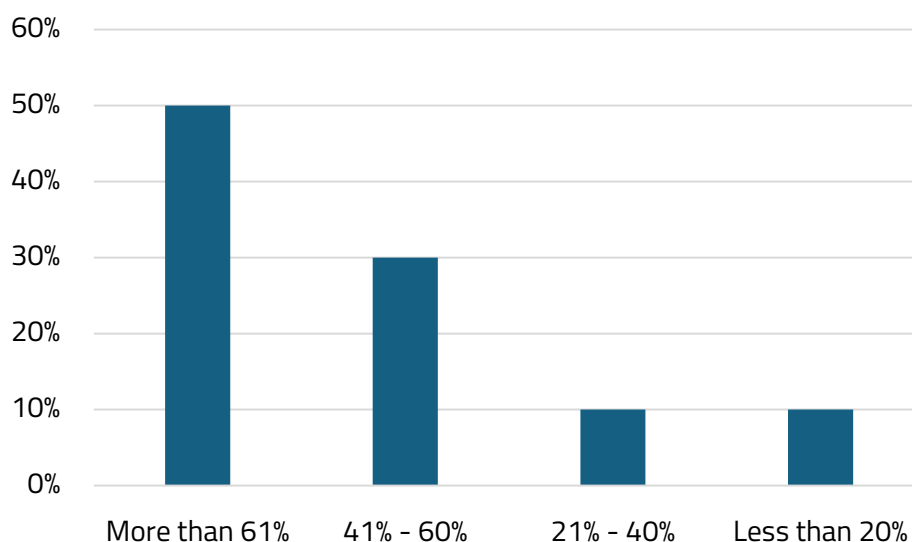


Maintaining an active Alumni network is essential for any institution, as it allows for ongoing contact with graduates, strengthening ties with former students and contributing to the construction of a lasting community. Alumni networks represent a valuable networking tool, both for the graduates themselves, who can benefit from new job and professional opportunities, and for the institution, which can gain valuable feedback, develop collaborations, and promote the growth of internationalization. Additionally, keeping in touch with former students is crucial for

promoting the institution on an international level and consolidating its reputation in the global job market.

The survey highlighted that the majority of Italian institutions offer degree programs (L, LM, or LMCU) that include internships as a requirement for graduation. In particular, 50% of the responses indicate that more than 61% of the programs require internships, while 30% fall between 41% and 60%. Only 10% of respondents reported that less than 20% of the programs include curricular internships. Furthermore, 90% of institutions confirmed the availability of offices dedicated to finding internships for students, emphasizing their commitment to facilitating access to these educational experiences.

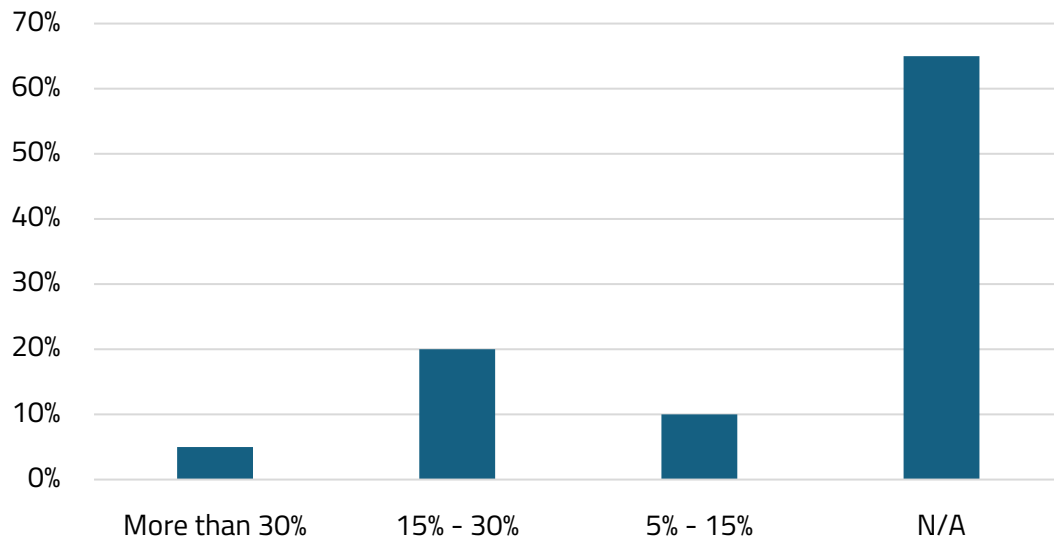
Figure 19: *What is the percentage of Bachelor's (L), Master's (LM), or Single Cycle Master's (LMCU) programs that require internships in order to graduate?*



Curricular internships are essential for all students, both international and domestic, as they provide critical practical skills and an opportunity to enter the job market. For international students, in particular, they represent an important chance to gain professional experience in Italy and establish connections with potential employers.

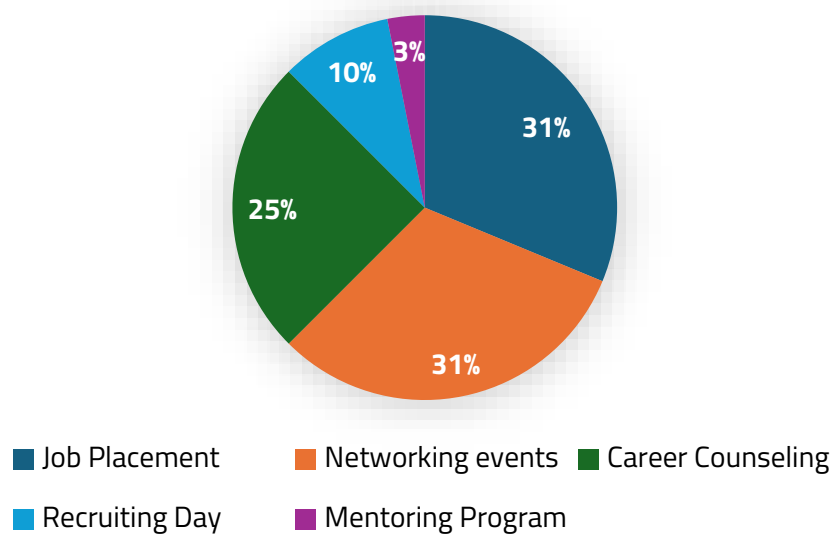
When asked, "*What percentage of these internships actually lead to job contracts?*", the results show that only a limited number of internships transition into stable employment. Twenty percent of institutions indicated that between 15% and 30% of internships lead to a job offer, while 10% reported a lower percentage, between 5% and 15%. However, a large majority, 65%, did not provide data on this matter (N/A).

Figure 20: *What percentage of these internships actually lead to job contracts?*



When asked, "*Does your institution provide specific support for the employment integration of international graduates?*", the survey recorded a nearly balance in responses, with 55% of institutions offering support and 45% not providing it. Among the institutions that do offer assistance, the most common services include Job Placement and Networking Events, provided by 10 institutions, followed by Career Counselling (8 institutions). A smaller number of institutions indicated that they organize Recruiting Days (3 institutions) or have a specific mentoring program (1 institution). These results show that, while half of the institutions provide support, the variety of options and services offered to facilitate employment integration is wide and varies among institutions.

Figure 21: *What type of support is offered?*



5. Summary Considerations

5.1 Challenges and Opportunities

International students can fill labour shortages in specific sectors of the job market, such as the hospitality industry, by working part-time during their studies and, after graduation, as highly skilled workers, contributing to reducing the labour shortages present in all OECD countries. Upon completing their studies, many international students are often seen as a population that can be integrated relatively easily. They may possess valuable knowledge of the local job market, have established networks, recognized qualifications, and a foundational understanding of the culture, customs, and language of the host country

"In fact, their outcomes in the labour market are favourable. Across the European Union, the employment rate of immigrants with tertiary education obtained in the country is 12% higher than that of those trained abroad. In Italy, the difference is similar: individuals born abroad with tertiary education acquired in Italy have an employment rate of 74%, compared to 62% for those who studied abroad and 85% for those born in Italy.

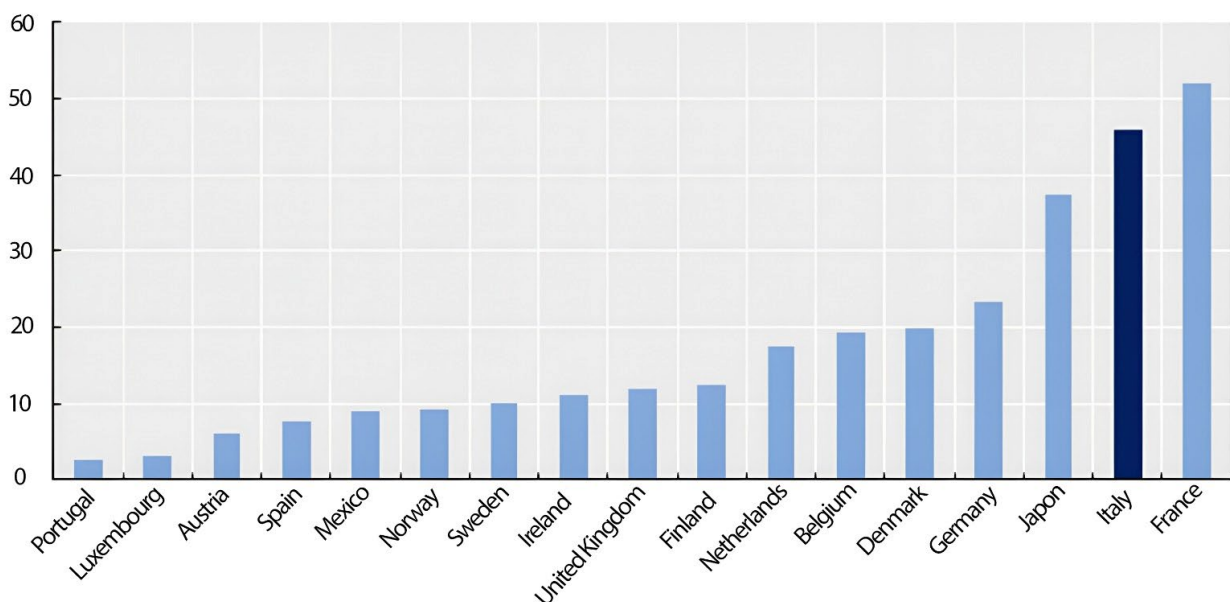
Studying in the host country also reduces the risk of overqualification. Data from European Union countries show that among all immigrants who arrived for study reasons at least five years prior and who were still in the host country in 2021, only 19% were formally overqualified for their jobs, compared to 21% of the native population. In Italy, the proportion was 23% for immigrants, slightly

higher than for those born in Italy (19%), but less than half of the overqualification rate of 49% for the foreign population with tertiary education.

Despite some advantages, Italy is not considered a major destination for international students. In the academic year 2019/20, only 3% of students enrolled in higher education in Italy came from other countries. This figure is similar to that of countries like Greece (3%) and Spain (4%), but much lower than that of leading OECD countries like the United Kingdom (20%), Australia (26%), Germany (11%), and France (9%). Furthermore, many of the students who come to Italy to study only stay for short periods, and long-term retention is low. For example, only 13% of those who arrived in 2015 for study purposes were still in Italy in 2020, while in Canada, Germany, and Estonia this percentage is 50%.

However, there is a positive note regarding the relationship between international students and employment in Italy. This is highlighted by observing the percentage of study permits that are subsequently converted into work permits compared to new work permits.

Figure 22: *Study permits converted into work permits in 2019, in relation to the work permits issued in 2019 [Compared to all new work permits in 2019, the study permits converted to work permits in 2019].*



Source: OECD (2022), International Migration Outlook 2022, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/30fe16d2-en>

In 2019, Italy was at the same level as countries like France and Japan, where over 30% of study permits were converted into work permits.”³⁰

5.2 Key Ideas for the Future

It is essential to adopt a broader perspective and rely on surveys at the European level to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon of international graduate mobility. This would enable a better understanding of the motivations and context of such mobility, as well as the characteristics of the countries that attract our graduates. Such understanding is crucial for identifying effective measures against brain drain, the low return of graduates, and Italy's limited attractiveness to foreign graduates.

The Recommendation 2017/C 423/01³¹ of the EU Council dated November 20, 2017, regarding graduate tracking, known as the *European Graduate Tracking Initiative*, proposes the implementation of a four-year statistical survey on the employment status of graduates in Europe, with the aim of obtaining comparable results at the European level. Special attention will be given to the international mobility of graduates. The initiative aims, in the medium and long term, to sustainably increase statistical information by integrating administrative data with survey data.

In this context, the *TRACED* project (*Towards Regular Availability of Comparative European Data on Graduates*) was initiated, co-funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ program and coordinated by the AlmaLaurea Interuniversity Consortium, with the support of the ISTAT and MUR.

Universities should strengthen collaboration with local businesses to design streamlined and specific study programs lasting 100 hours, co-created with companies. These highly targeted programs would allow for a more effective response to the labour market's needs by providing practical and specialized skills that are difficult to acquire through traditional university courses. An important opportunity in this context is represented by microcredentials, which are short certifications that attest to the acquisition of specific skills. These allow participants to gain formal recognition for short and modular training programs, ensuring flexibility and greater adaptability to the changing demands of the market.

³⁰ Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, XIII Rapporto Annuale. Gli stranieri nel mercato del lavoro in Italia, 2023. <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita-immigrazione/focus/xiii-rapporto-mdl-stranieri-2023>

³¹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1209\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1209(01))

Universities alone cannot always design such programs, as they require specific skills and up-to-date knowledge of business dynamics and technologies. Involving companies in defining the training content would help reduce the gap between the demand and supply of skills, improving the employability of graduates and making higher education more aligned with the needs of the local productive fabric. The adoption of microcredentials would also allow for formal validation of these skills, making them valuable both nationally and internationally. This approach would ensure flexible training paths that are immediately applicable and capable of responding to the constantly evolving economic and technological challenges.

University spin-offs represent an important resource for transferring knowledge and innovation from the academic world to the productive sector, creating a direct bridge between research and the market. It is essential that universities, together with the government, promote and enhance these initiatives through policies of financial support, tax incentives, and business incubators, so that spin-offs can grow and develop sustainably. Universities should encourage the creation of spin-offs, recognizing them not only as vehicles for technology transfer but also as opportunities for students to concretely experience entrepreneurship and innovation. In this context, international students can bring significant added value, thanks to their skills, knowledge of foreign markets, and ability to create global connections.

The presence of international students within spin-offs allows for an expansion of the company's perspective, fostering internationalization and access to global collaboration networks. To maximize these benefits, it is necessary for universities to implement policies of active integration and engage foreign students in the activities of creating and developing spin-offs. This way, innovation is stimulated, and integrated and global economic growth is promoted, contributing to strengthening the competitiveness of the Italian university and entrepreneurial system.

