



Italy

Italian Republic
Europe

Geography

Area 301,000 sq km. A long, mountainous peninsula that dominates the central Mediterranean Sea. Also two large islands, Sardinia and Sicily.

Population	Ann Gr	Density
2010	60,097,564	0.49%
2020	60,408,428	-0.06%
2030	59,549,396	-0.16%

Capital Rome 3,362,252. **Other major cities** Milano 3.0million; Napoli 2.3mill; Torino 1.7m. **Urbanites** 68.4%. **Pop under 15 yrs** 14%. **Life expectancy** 81.1 yrs.

Peoples

Italian 93.4%. Deep cultural and historical differences between the north and south and with a wide variety of regional cultures and dialects. Main groups/dialects: Italian 38.0%; Lombard 15.2%; Neapolitan/Calabrian 12.6%; Sicilian 8.3%; Piedmontese 5.4%; Venetian 3.8%; Emilian 3.5%; Ligurian 3.3%; Sardinian(5) 2.7%; Friulian 1.1%.

European 3.8%. Includes Albanian(2) 0.4%; French(4) 0.8%; Austrian 0.4%; German 0.4%; Greek 0.3%. A number of these groups have been resident for centuries.

Other 2.8%. Arab(3) 1.0%; Filipino 0.3%; Chinese 0.3%; African; many others increasing in number and diversity.

Literacy 98.5%. **Official language** Italian, but vigorous use of nine regional languages akin to Italian. **All languages** 42. **Indigenous languages** 33. **Languages with Scriptures** 8Bi 4NT 19por 1wi.p.

Economy

Highly industrialized, Italy is the world's seventh-largest economy and known for quality manufactured goods. A notable contrast exists between the affluent north and the south, where economic modernization has been limited and

where unemployment is widespread and higher. Corruption, organized crime and weak law-enforcing state mechanisms are common and discourage investment and expansion in many sectors. The world's third-largest debt.

HDI Rank 18th/182. **Public debt** 105.8% of GDP. **Income/person** \$38,996 (82% of USA).

Politics

United as a single state in 1870. Republican democracy since 1946. Known for its precarious political life, Italy has thus far had 62 governments (including reshuffles and elected coalitions) since WWII, though with an underlying social stability. Member of the EU. Some improvements have occurred since the early 1990s, when the Italian political scenario underwent a seismic shift with the "Clean Hands" operation, which exposed corruption and the influence of organized crime at the highest levels of politics and big business.

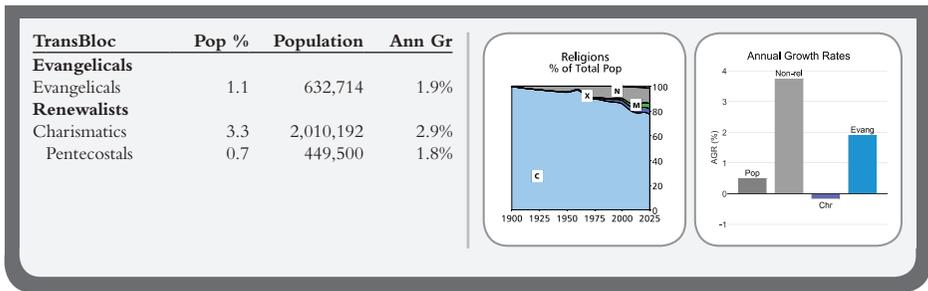
Religion

Roman Catholicism ceased to be the state religion in 1984. All religions have equal freedom before the law, but not in practice.

Religions	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Christian	82.38	49,508,373	-0.2%
Non-religious	14.13	8,491,786	3.7%
Muslim	2.60	1,562,537	4.9%
Buddhist	0.43	258,420	8.0%
Hindu	0.26	156,254	5.9%
Sikh	0.13	78,127	5.9%
Jewish	0.06	36,059	0.5%
Baha'i	0.01	6,010	0.5%

Christians	Denoms	Pop %	Affiliates	Ann Gr
Protestant	112	0.63	376,000	0.3%
Independent	21	0.44	262,000	4.0%
Anglican	1	0.02	10,000	-0.2%
Catholic	20	84.37	50,703,000	-0.1%
Orthodox	9	1.74	1,045,000	1.7%
Marginal	4	0.77	463,000	0.8%
<i>Doubly affiliated</i>			-5.59-3,357,000	0.0%

Churches	MegaBloc	Congs	Members	Affiliates
Catholic Church	C	25,480,38	99,744,50	670,000
Romanian Orthodox	O	33	265,000	530,000
Jehovah's Witnesses	M	3,090	243,000	432,000
Ukrainian Orthodox	O	7	140,000	210,000
Assem of God in Italy	P	1,200	127,820	170,000
Greek Orthodox Ch	O	10	62,500	125,000
Pente Chs Federation	I	380	31,000	62,000
Int Evangelical Ch	I	210	18,250	36,500
Albanian Orthodox Ch	O	4	17,647	30,000
Evang Chr Breth Ch	P	272	17,610	28,000
Waldensian & Meth Ch	P	151	15,597	24,800
Latter-day Saints(Mormon)	M	120	13,772	23,000
Pente Chr Congs	I	55	10,000	17,000
Other denominations[154]		2,034	245,054	500,597
<i>Doubly affiliated</i>				-3,357,000
Total Christians[167]		33,046	39,304,994	49,501,897



Answers to Prayer

- 1 Increasing acceptance of diversity** within the Church bears witness to a gradual change from the decades, even centuries, of division within Protestantism. There is a growing sense of grace and acceptance of appropriate theological differences. Widespread division, legalism, fragmentation and distrust stunted the potential impact of evangelicals, but respect and even cooperation are starting to develop.
- 2 Global awareness has grown with rising immigration.** The impact is two-fold: the presence of vibrant congregations of Eastern Europeans, Romanians, Africans, Asians and Latinos is a great encouragement to the Church in Italy, and the presence of large numbers of unevangelized peoples reminds native Italians of the need for outreach and mission at home and abroad.

Challenges for Prayer

- 1 This great and gifted nation has contributed much to the world** – legal systems (Roman law), language (Latin), culture (Renaissance, art, music) and innovation (fashion, cars). Christianity flourished here, but soon became a formalized state religion. Italy was virtually untouched by the Protestant Reformation and has never seen widespread biblical revival. The majority of Italians remain culturally Catholic but increasingly cynical about the Church. Pray for the removal of the multiple barriers that limit understanding of the gospel.
- 2 Organized crime networks** have infiltrated every level of society. Their criminal activities have influence even in local and federal governments, despite the state's attempts to reduce their power. Their income, largely from drugs and extortion/protection rackets, is such that only the government has a higher financial turnover. The Sicilian mafia and Neapolitan *camorra* are more well known but now less powerful than the Calabrian *'Ndrangheta*. Pray for those courageous enough to oppose this parasitic system draining the Italian economy. Pray for Christians to live out Kingdom values and morals when faced with difficult decisions. Pray for a transformation of Italian government, law enforcement and economy.
- 3 The Roman Catholic Church** continues to show signs of crisis. Studies suggest that, at most, 15% (but as low as 3%) of Italians faithfully practice Catholicism. The north is largely secular; in the south, a mix of religious Catholicism and folk superstition prevails. Yet at the same time, the Catholic Church is active and outgoing – it embodies Italian identity amid a fragmented political system and high immigration, as well as taking a strong stand against the onset of secularization and greater relativism. However, the numbers of attending faithful and of new priests are rapidly declining. Hoped-for renewal from the Catholic charismatic movement, while welcomed, is limited. Pray for the millions of Italians either locked in dead traditions or disillusioned by organized religion altogether; may they discover the living Christ.
- 4 Indifference to the gospel** has typified Italy for ages. Secular materialism ensnares many. Satanism is growing in various areas, Turin being one of the global centres of its activities.

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Occultism continues to be alarmingly widespread – there are more than 150,000 practicing soothsayers, prognosticators and healers, in contrast to around 50,000 Catholic priests! Eastern and esoteric spirituality are increasingly popular. Italians are more liable to dabble in an occult, New Age or pagan practice than to read the Bible. Those who do pray will often pray to Padre Pio (37%) or Saint Anthony (21%) rather than to Jesus (less than 10%). Cults are active; Jehovah's Witnesses number more in Italy than all its Protestants combined.

5 Protestantism has an 800-year history in Italy. The world's oldest Protestant denomination, the Waldensian Church, developed in northwest Italy, but for centuries was subjected to terrible persecution. Italian Catholic bishops officially apologized for this in 1997. The Waldensian Church – now part of a federation with, among others, Methodists and the mainline Baptist Union – is openly dominated by liberal theology. The broader Protestant witness is weak and divided, polarized and fragmented. Traditional Pentecostalism is strong, particularly in the south. The fast-growing and diverse charismatic churches are increasingly numerous, dynamic and holistic in their outreach. The relationship between Pentecostals/charismatics and conservatives, deeply opposed in the past, shows small and encouraging signs of progress. Strategic church planting is rare; bitter splits are still more common. Many congregations are small, insular and resistant to change and to mission. Larger congregations at times battle with superficiality, the need for discipleship and the challenge of nominalism among second- and third-generation believers. Pray for revival that breaks down barriers of individualism, mistrust and doctrinal extremes, and leads to fellowship and cooperative outreach.

6 Signs of hope for the Church. Many challenges and difficulties remain, and progress is invariably painfully slow. Some encouraging glimmers of hope, however, need to be earnestly prayed for:

- a) **Cooperation among churches.** Division and polarization have been the legacies of Protestantism, but things are beginning to change. Several different church networks are beginning to foster trust, respect and even collaboration across the denominational divide. The Evangelical Alliance works to this end, as do various network initiatives.
- b) **Evangelism and outreach.** Relational evangelism is an effective approach, as are the cell groups and house churches that often result. These and other new expressions of fellowship are increasingly popular. Also, groups such as Christ Is the Answer, Italy for Christ, the Brethren and some Pentecostals continue with larger-scale, event-based evangelism. Christian TV has an impact, but largely by promoting prosperity teachings.
- c) **Missions vision is still in its infancy.** The churches in Italy are supporting holistic projects (Compassion, AMEN, *Missione Evangelica contro la Lebbra*, *Missione Possibile*, to name a few) and developing short-term sending (**OM**, **NTM**, **WEC**, **YWAM**, **GLO**). Few Italians, however, are involved in long-term career missions whether in Italy or beyond. Italian Ministries is committed to facilitate a vision for mission and has also developed a mission agency option for interested Italians. Denominational initiatives continue. International mission groups (among these: **OM**, **YWAM**, **NTM**) operate in Italy and seek to facilitate Italians' involvement in mission. Encouraging developments among youth bring hope for the future; "9.37" is one such group.
- d) **Immigration of believers into Italy** – particularly from Eastern Europe and Africa but also from Latin America and Philippines – infuses new vitality and openness into the churches, and it opens Italians' eyes to the needs on their doorstep and abroad. It is now conceivable that the majority of evangelicals in Italy are no longer ethnic Italians. Pray that this new reality might spur indigenous churches to greater faith, cooperation and good works.

7 The challenge of Christian leadership in Italy remains urgent, since a lack of mature, qualified and gifted leaders persists. Academic and pastoral training are needs, but finance, time and lack of vision limit opportunities. Authentic servant leadership must be demonstrated, since authoritarian structures, power struggles and dependence on programmes rather than on pastoral discipling are unfortunately common. Thankfully, increasingly diverse options are available:

- a) **Full-time training institutions.** IBEI and IBI (**AoG**) offer academic degrees through residential programmes. A newly established Pentecostal faculty in the Naples area offers accredited theological degrees. There are a few shorter, residential programmes (**YWAM**/*Gioventu in Missione*).
- b) **Modular programmes** are growing quickly, especially helpful for bivocational pastors and lay leaders. Among others are *Accademia Teologica Italiana* (Aurora Mission) and *Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione*. Local training initiatives are also increasingly popular.

Pray that the various means of training would bolster pastoral leadership across the nation and, in turn, uplift and disciple the whole Church to entirely new levels of maturity.

8 The least reached sectors of the population:

- a) **More than 70% of Italy's 8,101 comuni** (communities ranging from small village to large city) are without an established Bible-believing congregation.
- b) **Many areas of Italy lack a strong indigenous evangelical presence** (specifically: Abruzzo, Friuli, Liguria, Marche, Molise, Trentino, Umbria, Valle d'Aosta and Veneto). Immigration and some very modest church growth are slowly improving the situation.
- c) **Sardinia**, a Mediterranean island with limited autonomy, has 1.67 million people and its own language and culture. Sardinia has only about 30 evangelical churches and a few Christian workers. There has been radio outreach for some years. Suspicion of outsiders, fear, vendettas, the occult and the activities of JW's all make any evangelistic outreach difficult.
- d) **The 1,850,000 students** in 94 universities remain a needy and crucial mission field. GBU (IFES) has nearly 30 groups with around 300 students and aims to eventually have 50. Agape (CCCI), Great Commission in northern Italy and a growing number of local congregations focus on students as well. In Milan alone, there are more than 175,000 students with little outreach being done – CW is one of a handful working in this context. Also, there are increasing opportunities to reach international students in Italy.
- e) **The estimated 500,000 drug addicts** have high rates of HIV infection and crime. Cocaine and sniffing solvents are the fastest-growing problems, affecting young people in particular. Evangelicals are only beginning to meet the challenge (Betel in 5 centres; Teen Challenge 2; AoG 2).

9 Unreached minorities:

- a) **Ancient minority groups** are clustered in different parts of Italy, but most have even less gospel light than the main Italian majority. These include Albanians, several minorities in the northeast, and Greeks and Croats in the south. Most have largely integrated with Italian life and culture.
- b) **Muslims**. Their numbers have grown rapidly through legal and illegal immigration to nearly 1.5 million, 70% of whom are North African. Most of the Muslim population are concentrated in cities of the north. META is involved in reaching them and mobilizing the churches to do the same.
- c) **Romani (Gypsies)**. Many have recently flooded into Italy, becoming the latest immigration challenge for Italian authorities. While their treatment by authorities is sometimes poor and harsh, as are their living conditions, a high proportion are involved in illegal activities. Pray for outreach to this group, since they have shown great responsiveness to the gospel in other Western European nations.
- d) **Illegal immigration** is a major challenge on many fronts. Italy functions as a gateway into the EU, and many people brave the dangerous sea crossing in overcrowded boats to get there, some dying along the way. This desperation fuels and funds organized crime in Italy and abroad and drains the resources of the government. Increased xenophobia in some parts is another side effect. Pray for illegal immigrants who find themselves in Italy; may they discover spiritual freedom and richness in Jesus Christ.

10 **The need for expatriate workers** has not diminished, but it has changed. Helping the existing Italian Church mature, expand and reach out, as partners and with a servant attitude, is now needed. Attrition is traditionally high here, often due to inadequate preparation, entrenched opposition and relatively low fruitfulness. Some significant groups (and a number of expatriates) in the country are CB/CMML/EoS, **TEAM, Avant**, *Missions-gesellschaft*, Campus Missions International. Italian Ministries is a field-based mission, started in 1998, that has a positive impact in further enabling foreign workers.

11 **Literature and Bible distribution** have not had a wide impact due to Italians' reluctance to read. There are about 15 Christian bookshops, including CLC with nine bookstores and The Bible Society with Italy's largest Bible and literature centre. Pray for the growing number of Italian publishing houses – ADI Media (**AoG**), Alfa & Omega (Reformed publishers), GBU and *Passaggio*, among others. Pray also for the spread of the newly published Bible dictionary (GBU) and theological

dictionary (by IFED). Pray for a hunger for God's Word, for a desire for wholesome Christian literature and that quality material that leads people to Christ would be found in the more than 1,000 Catholic bookshops. The Gideons are active throughout Italy in distributing Scripture. Italy For Christ has spearheaded the distribution of over 600,000 NTs in schools as well as many copies of the evangelistic *Book of Hope*.