

# Citizenship: laws, reforms and comparative perspectives



RISE Responsible Involvement in Society and Elections

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

One of the fundamental—if not the most important—condition for the proper functioning of democracy is the level of **information available to citizens**. The existence of informed, aware and critical citizens who can discern and judge parties' proposals and governments' policies to evaluate their outcomes and develop public opinion is the main pillar of liberal-democratic regimes. The capacity to respond to citizens' expectations, the accountability in exercising government functions, and the legitimacy of democratic institutions are grounded first and foremost on the exercise of informed and critical judgement among those who are governed. In an era characterised by the **pervasive spread of fake news** that often fuel a completely sterile political confrontation despite being effectively instrumental to drawing consensus, the availability of information to citizens is one of the most important aspects for the effective maintenance of democracy.

Approximately 30% of eligible voters took part in the 8-9 June 2025 Referendum on citizenship—an insufficient turn out to validate the consultation. Unfortunately, this outcome makes any possibility of improving the current law in the coming years less likely. The Referendum was nevertheless an opportunity to reflect on the important issue of **belonging to political communities**. However, it was largely a missed opportunity for a number of political reasons. Firstly, the Referendum was affected by the growing **tendency towards abstentionism** now characterizing the Italian electorate. With almost one in two citizens deserting the polling stations—mainly because they are disillusioned with a political system that does not seem fit for solving the problems it should be addressing—it was reasonable to expect low turnout, even lower than the actual figure recorded. Secondly, political parties and, in particular, political institutions did very little to raise awareness and provide adequate information on the Referendum question. We know from surveys that the number of people who are unaware of an upcoming election, even when it is a general election, is increasingly high. This is a problem that has been largely overlooked until now, but that requires institutional solutions and **commitment from political parties** as it directly affects—as has been pointed out—the legitimacy of a democratic polity.

Precisely for these reasons, for a referendum concerning the conditions and boundaries of membership of the political community, it would have made more sense if (some) parties and institutions had chosen to promote an open and informed debate, encouraging participation in the vote rather than induc-

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<sup>1</sup> Analysis by Luciano Mario Fasano, Professor of Political Science at the Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan. On the importance of voting during referenda see also L. M. Fasano, *Il Referendum sulla cittadinanza: un voto per una democrazia matura?*, Fondazione ISMU ETS, 6 June 2025.

ing people to desert the polls for the only purpose of neutralising the effects of the Referendum. Similarly, mass media, starting with the public service, could have provided citizens with a better service by promoting a broader and more accurate understanding of the Referendum question and its implications in the event of its approval. On the contrary, the Authority for Communication (AGCOM) even had to call upon television and radio broadcasters, including RAI, to ensure **adequate coverage of the referendums**—both the one on citizenship and the ones on labour issues held on the same day—emphasising the importance of the right to information as a constitutional right and, more broadly, a key condition for the right to vote as well.

The results of the [interactive online quiz](#) conducted by the ISMU ETS Foundation as part of this Project and gathering a total of 1,597 responses, highlighted knowledge of the issue but also showed that the quality of information available to citizens was rather poor. People underestimate the number of citizenship acquisitions, do not believe that citizens of other EU countries have the right to vote in local elections, do not know that there is no difference in citizenship acquisition through marriage between heterosexual and homosexual couples, and show uncertain and inaccurate knowledge of the conditions for passing on citizenship to minor children. These aspects clearly suggest that the public debate around the Referendum suffered from a **significant information deficit**. This had a significant impact on the votes cast at the poll stations and on the very decision to vote.

Knowing who shares my rights as a citizen and why, and making informed decisions about it, is not irrelevant. It can also help mitigate a political climate marked by strong **ideological polarization**—especially when the issue at hand is complex and full of implications, such as immigration. The effects of poor or manipulated information, moreover, represent a problem that must be addressed with due care—not only to safeguard the right to participate consciously in a referendum, but also to defend the **foundations of our democracy**.

The analyses presented here are at the heart of the [RISE project](#) (Responsible Involvement in Society and Elections) on **informed participation in public debate** promoted by the ISMU ETS Foundation, that aims to counter misinformation and polarisation of positions on issues as important and critical as immigration and citizenship. We hope that this contribution will be useful for a more informed and critical understanding of the current regulatory framework in our country and for greater awareness among Italian citizens of its concrete implications. What is at stake is not only the idea of **inclusive citizenship** but also the possibility of restoring strength and **legitimacy** to our democratic polity.

# 1.

## The RISE Project: Responsible Involvement in Society and Elections

### The project

The RISE Project (Responsible Involvement in Society and Elections) by Fondazione ISMU focused particularly on new citizens, young people between 18 and 29, journalists and researchers, but more broadly to all citizens with voting rights, with the aim of fostering a **collective and multidisciplinary debate**. As part of the project, ISMU emphasises the need to overcome ideological polarisation through empirical data, legal analysis and European comparisons, in order to restore complexity to the subject without misleading simplifications.

The project's methodology was grounded in a participatory approach. An [interactive online quiz](#) was first shared with the public and was designed to assess levels of **knowledge and awareness** of the legal framework and reform scenarios on citizenship, consisting of eleven multiple-choice questions. Beyond stimulating interest and learning, this tool also made it possible to collect valuable data for analysing perceptions, potential misunderstandings and areas of greater vulnerability to disinformation. Alongside the quiz, the project included the creation of a dedicated [web page](#) containing outreach materials—legal commentaries, statistical data and political science reflections—intended to provide resources that were both accessible and rigorous. In addition, on 26 May 2025 a **public webinar** was held as a space for dialogue between researchers, experts and citizens that helped to broaden the debate and disseminate accurate information on the referendum and the rules on citizenship.

One of the project's key pillars concerned reflection on **disinformation** and the **role of the media**. Citizenship is unfortunately a subject that easily lends itself to polarising narratives. Simplifications and sensationalist headlines can indeed contribute to spreading distorted perceptions of migration and of the rules governing acquisition. In this sense, RISE also sought to act as a **space for civic information**, encouraging citizens to adopt a critical and verifiable approach to information, thereby reducing the risk that the referendum vote might be influenced by false or manipulated news.

The quiz promoted within the project was not limited to testing technical knowledge of the legal framework on citizenship, but also explored perceptions and

social representations, identifying those areas most exposed to disinformation. The quiz remained open for nearly one month prior to the referendum, gathering 1,252 responses—mostly people between 36 and 64. By 5 September, the number of respondents had risen to 1,597.

Participants showed a **solid understanding of the specific requirement under referendum scrutiny**<sup>2</sup>. Significant **misconceptions**, however, emerged **on the number** of annual acquisitions of citizenship, which was often underestimated. Some confusion also related to the voting rights of foreign nationals, wrongly perceived as being entirely excluded—which is not the case for EU nationals, who may vote in local elections—as well as the ways to acquire citizenship through marriage for same-sex couples, which are fully equal under the law to those for heterosexual couples. Another critical issue concerned **citizenship for minors**. The intense public debate around the *ius scholae* raised awareness of the subject, particularly of the consequences for young foreign adults residing in Italy but not holding Italian citizenship. Less attention, however, was paid to the question of **citizenship transmission from parents to children**. Finally, the comparison with other EU countries highlighted a **good level of comparative awareness** of different residence requirements and naturalisation criteria—generally less stringent, as will be discussed below— while the relationship between **citizenship rights and access to employment** in the public administration remained an often-overlooked area.

At the end of the project, this **paper** is prepared, retracing Italian legislation as well as the data collected, comparative European experiences and the main reflections on the acquisition of citizenship, all analysed from a legal, statistical, sociological and political science perspective. The paper's findings are also presented in a **webinar** in English, allowing the results to be shared with an international audience and fostering a broader and comparative debate.

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<sup>2</sup> The question in fact was not very transparent, but it read: “Do you wish to abrogate Article 9, paragraph 1, letter b), limited to the words ‘adopted by an Italian citizen’ and ‘subsequent to the adoption’; as well as letter f), containing the following provision: ‘f) a foreigner who has been legally residing in the territory of the Republic for at least ten years’, of Law No. 91 of 5 February 1992, containing new norms on citizenship?”. On the clarity of the referendum question, see M. Gioiosa, [Su che cosa verte il quesito referendario? È chiaro?](#), Fond. ISMU ETS, 23 May 2025.

## 2.

### Current legislation on Italian citizenship<sup>3</sup>

As of today, Italian citizenship law is governed primarily by the **Law No. 91 of 5 February 1992—“New Provisions on Citizenship”**—complemented by the Presidential Decree No. 572 of 12 October 1993 (implementing regulation) and the Presidential Decree No. 362 of 18 April 1994 (procedure for granting citizenship). The very idea of “new provisions” marked a historical break with the previous regime, namely the Royal Legislative Decree No. 555 of 13 June 1912 on Italian citizenship, which—albeit with amendments and adaptations—had remained in force for eighty years, spanning from the monarchical period to the Republic.

The Royal Decree No. 555/1912 reflected a version of Italy that was still a country of **mass emigration**. The law prioritised **descent** (*ius sanguinis*) and contained rules reflecting a **patriarchal model**—for instance, women lost their citizenship upon marrying a foreigner and could not pass it on independently to their children. Over the decades, this framework increasingly clashed with the Republican Constitution of 1947 and with the developments of case law, particularly that of the Constitutional Court, which had already struck down several discriminatory provisions as unconstitutional<sup>4</sup>. The 1992 law was thus conceived as a **structural reform** of the earlier framework. Among other things, it abolished gender-discriminatory rules, reaffirmed the principle of *ius sanguinis* while systematically regulating acquisition by marriage and residence—increasing the residence requirement from five to ten years—and drew a clear distinction between automatic acquisition and acquisition by application.

Since then, the law has remained substantially unchanged. The reforms introduced by the Parliament have been relatively few and of marginal impact, despite recurrent waves of political and academic debate<sup>5</sup>. Although Italy has shifted from being a country of emigration to one of immigration, the current legislation continues to place **ius sanguinis** at the centre as citizenship is auto-

<sup>3</sup> Analysis by Sara Morlotti, legal researcher at ISMU ETS and PhD candidate in European Union Law at the University of Milan.

<sup>4</sup> Constitutional Court, Judgments Nos. 87/1975 and 30/1983.

<sup>5</sup> As shown by the publication over the years of various reflections by ISMU: E. Codini, M. D'Odorico, *Per una nuova disciplina della cittadinanza*, Quaderni ISMU 2004; E. Codini, M. D'Odorico, *Una nuova cittadinanza, Per una riforma della legge del 1992*, FrancoAngeli s.r.l., Milano, 2007; E. Codini, M. D'odorico, *Democracy and Citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Critical Issues and Perspectives*, McGraw-Hill Education, Milan, 2024.

matically acquired by anyone born to an Italian father or mother, while **ius soli** remains confined to residual cases. The latter is limited to two main scenarios: (i) birth in Italy to unknown or stateless parents, or to parents unable to transmit their own citizenship; (ii) a foreign national born in Italy who has resided there lawfully and without interruption until reaching the age of majority, provided that they express their will to acquire citizenship. A direct consequence of the *ius sanguinis* principle is citizenship through descent, which is statistically significant—minor children of parents who become Italian citizens automatically acquire Italian citizenship themselves.

#### a. Different ways of acquiring Italian citizenship

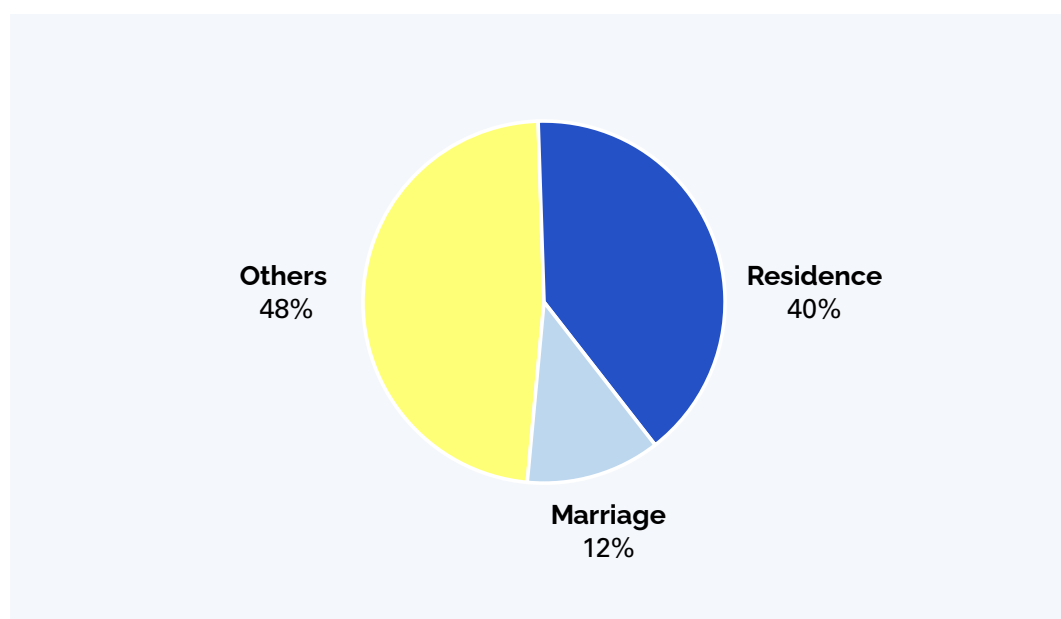
The **ways of acquiring Italian citizenship**, beyond those already described for birth and transmission, include other cases based on an application by the individual concerned, followed by an administrative procedure. This category comprises:

- acquisition through marriage or civil partnership with an Italian citizen, conditional upon at least two years of lawful residence in Italy after the marriage (reduced to eighteen months in the presence of children) or, for residents abroad, after three years;
- acquisition through prolonged residence (ordinary naturalisation), with differentiated residence requirements: 10 years for non-EU citizens; 4 years for EU citizens; 3 years for descendants of Italian citizens up to the second degree or for those born in Italy; 5 years for stateless persons and recognised refugees;
- acquisition on the grounds of special merit, granted to individuals who have rendered outstanding services to Italy, at the Government's discretion.

In the last two cases, it is particularly significant to note that the procedure involves a considerable **discretionary component**, as citizenship does not constitute an absolute subjective right but rather a concessionary prerogative of the State. It is conferred through an administrative process which may take up to three years, by decree of the President of the Republic, adopted on the proposal of the Minister of the Interior and following the opinion of the Council of State. During the assessment phase, the authorities verify the fulfilment of objective requirements—lawful residence, knowledge of the Italian language at a minimum B1 level, adequate income, absence of criminal convictions or threats to State security—as well as the presence of subjective conditions of integration.

From a **statistical perspective**, it is noteworthy that roughly half of new Italian citizens acquire citizenship through a combination of grounds grouped together under a **single category**, such as: transmission from a parent who has become Italian, the declaration of intent at the age of 18, or descent from Italian citizens. In 2023, acquisition through continuous residence accounted for 40% of all cases, while 12% of individuals obtained Italian citizenship through marriage with an Italian spouse<sup>6</sup>.

**Fig. 1. Italian citizenship acquisitions by mode, 2023 (%)**



Source: ISMU ETS elaboration of ISTAT data

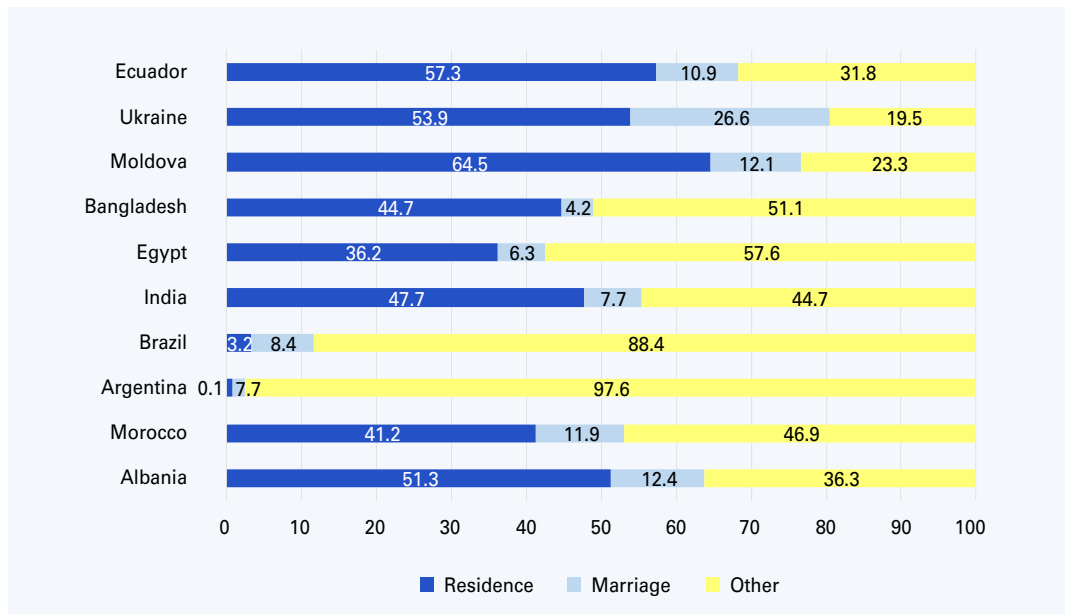
The modes of acquisition of Italian citizenship also vary **significantly depending on the country of origin**. The data available—referring only to non-EU citizens, and thus excluding Romania—shows that acquisition through residence is predominant among Moldovans (65% of all citizenships requested by this community), Ecuadorians (57%), Ukrainians (54%) and Albanians (51%). Ukrainians are the only group where marriage is a particularly significant tool to become Italian, with over one quarter of citizenships in 2023 obtained in this way.

By contrast, almost all the citizenships granted to people of Argentinian origin were obtained through ways other than residence or marriage. Although the data is not disaggregated, it is presumed that this largely reflects recourse to *ius sanguinis*, i.e., descent from Italian citizens (98%). A similar pattern can be observed for Brazilians, where this route accounts for 88% of all Italian citizen-

<sup>6</sup> Statistical processing by Giorgia Papavero, Senior researcher in the Statistics unit of Fondazione ISMU ETS. For further information and data consultation see <https://www.ismu.org/cittadinanza-banca-dati-sulle-migrazioni/>.

ships granted. As for Egyptians and Bangladeshis, the data indicates a majority of acquisitions for other reasons, mainly the transmission of citizenship to children by parents who had already become Italian citizens and the declaration of intent by young adults born in Italy upon reaching the age of majority.

**Fig. 2. Non-EU acquisitions of Italian citizenship, by mode and main countries, 2023 (%)**



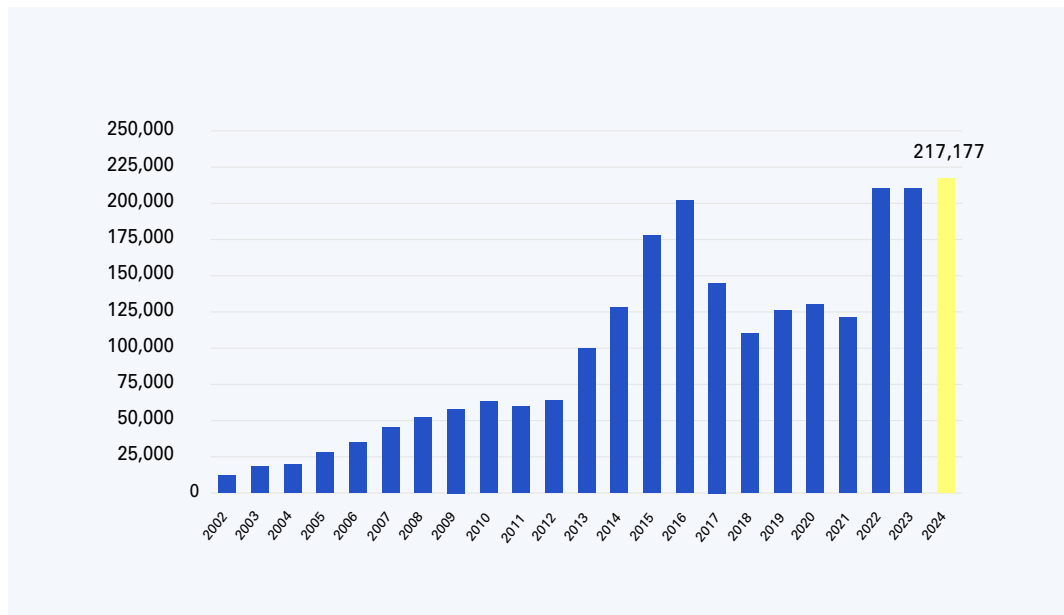
Source: ISMU ETS elaboration of ISTAT data

### b. Examining the data: new acquisitions of Italian citizenship<sup>7</sup>

It is extremely useful and interesting to explore the phenomenon of Italian citizenship from a statistical perspective. The demographic balance data published by ISTAT for the years 2002 to 2024—the latter being still provisional—shows a new **record in the acquisitions of Italian citizenship** by foreign nationals. In 2024, these exceeded **217,000**, and for the third consecutive year they surpassed the 200,000 thresholds. These are also the three highest values ever recorded, all concentrated in the past three years.

<sup>6</sup>The following paragraph refers to the statistical processing by Giorgia Papavero, Senior researcher in the Statistics unit of Fondazione ISMU ETS. For further information and data consultation see <https://www.ismu.org/cittadinanza-banca-dati-sulle-migrazioni/>.

**Fig. 3. Italian citizenship acquisitions, 2002–2024**



Source: ISMU ETS elaboration of ISTAT data

At the territorial level, **Lombardy** accounts for more than one quarter of all new citizens in 2024, with 57,000 acquisitions, equal to 26.3% of the annual total, with a relative increase of 9.5% compared with the regional data for 2023. In second place is Emilia-Romagna (28,000 acquisitions in 2024) followed by Veneto (26,000). In relative terms, Friuli Venezia Giulia recorded the most significant increase over the past year (+28.3%). However, there were also negative exceptions, most notably Piedmont—one of the largest regions—which recorded a 19.7% decrease.

For the analysis of countries of origin, we need to look at the consolidated 2023 data<sup>8</sup>. With over 31,000 acquisitions, **Albanian nationals** who became Italian accounted for 15% of the total. They were followed by **Moroccan** nationals (28,000), representing 13%, and **Argentine** nationals, whose numbers have risen most dramatically in recent years—the grants of citizenship to Argentinians more than quadrupled, from 3,600 in 2021 to over 16,000 in 2023. In fourth place came Romanian nationals, with more than 14,000 acquisitions.

Overall, new Italian citizens are evenly split between men and women, yet an analysis by country of origin reveals significant differences in line with the gender distribution of different migrant communities. The female component is par-

<sup>8</sup> Data for 2024 shows that citizenship granted to Romanian nationals (around 15,000 acquisitions) surpasses that of Argentinians, who returned to third place. The number of Italian citizenships granted to Argentinians and Brazilians is decreasing, while those granted to citizens from the Indian subcontinent are growing (India +30% and Bangladesh +19%).

ticularly high within Ukrainian, Moldovan, Romanian and Ecuadorian communities, ranging from 58% to 72%. By contrast, among Bangladeshi, Egyptian and Indian nationals, the majority of those acquiring citizenship are men (62-65%).

New Italian citizens are predominantly **young** as 48% are under 30, with those up to 20 forming the largest single group. In 2023, they accounted for more than 78,000 acquisitions, representing 37% of the 213,000 total number of new Italian citizens.

Among those under 20, the predominant modes of acquisition—as one might expect—are transmission from parents or declaration of intent to become Italian at the age of 18. By contrast, in the older age groups, acquisition through residence is the prevailing mode, accounting for around 70% of cases among those over 40. Among new citizens over 60, 15% obtained Italian citizenship by descent (*ius sanguinis*).

**Fig. 4. Italian citizenship acquisitions by age group and mode, 2023 (%)**



Source: ISMU ETS elaboration of ISTAT data

### c. Trends, enacted changes and proposed reforms

The legislative measures adopted after Law No. 91 of 1992 have, in general, proved marginal, affecting specific provisions rather than the overall framework of the legislation. The Law No. 94 of 2009 primarily **tightened the rules on acquisition through marriage**, replacing the original requirement of six months of residence after marriage with a minimum of two years. The Law No. 98 of 2013 made it mandatory for municipalities **to inform foreign-born young people** in Italy of their right to apply for citizenship upon reaching the age of majority. It also clarified that the continuity of residence may be demonstrated by **any suit-**

**able means**, even in the absence of regular registration in the civil registry.

As for procedures, the Decree-Law No. 113 of 2018, converted into the Law No. 132, extended the already lengthy time limits for the conclusion of administrative proceedings from 24 to 48 months—subsequently reduced to 36 by Law No. 173 of 2020—and introduced the requirement for applicants for citizenship by marriage or residence to certify their **knowledge of the Italian language** at a minimum B1 level.

More significant innovations were introduced by the Decree-Law No. 36 of 2025, converted into the Law No. 74, which mainly affected **acquisition iure sanguinis**. For the first time, an effective **connection with Italy** was required—at least one parent or grandparent born on the national territory, or the actual residence of a parent for at least two years prior to the birth or adoption of the child. Two entirely new provisions were also introduced: on the one hand, the reacquisition of citizenship by those who had lost it before 1992; on the other, acquisition by minors born abroad to Italian citizens, now conditional upon a formal declaration of intent to be submitted within fixed deadlines.

As regards **reform proposals**, the landscape is far richer—and generally more expansive of rights. Several bills have repeatedly been put forward to introduce a moderated form of **ius soli**—the automatic recognition of citizenship for minors born in Italy to foreign parents legally resident for a certain number of years—or **ius culturae**—the acquisition by foreign minors who have completed a specified period of schooling in Italy. In recent years, political attention on citizenship has clearly focused more on the acquisition of nationality by immigrants' children than by adult immigrants themselves. It is emblematic that the only reform bill ever approved by at least one chamber was the so-called *ius soli temperato*, passed by the Chamber of Deputies in 2015 but never by the Senate. In 2024, two bills concerning the so-called *ius scholae*—essentially another label for *ius culturae*—also attracted significant interest<sup>9</sup>.

As regards **naturalisation for adults**, most reform projects have sought to reduce the residence requirement from ten to five years, with one notable exception, i.e., the bill introduced in 2014 by Maurizio Bianconi (Forza Italia) which maintained the ten-year requirement but allowed applications to be submitted after eight years of lawful stay, adding a mandatory civic education course and

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<sup>9</sup> Cfr. E. Codini, *La proposta referendaria dell'8 e 9 giugno 2025 è in linea con i progetti di riforma che si sono susseguiti negli ultimi decenni?*, Fondazione ISMU ETS, 9 April 2025. On *ius scholae*, see E. Codini, *Ius scholae - Luci e ombre di un progetto*, ISMU Paper, 2022. For a more accurate analysis on possible evolutionary trends in the system, see E. Codini, *Towards overcoming familism in the Italian citizenship framework?*, Fondazione ISMU ETS, 14 September 2025.

requiring that the application be decided upon within two years<sup>10</sup>.

In general, many bills linked the reduction of the residence period to the introduction of **additional requirements**. The government bill of 2006, known as the Amato proposal, required the applicant to demonstrate an income equal to that required for the EU long-term residence permit. This economic criterion was taken up in numerous subsequent proposals, especially during the XVII Legislature. It should be noted, however, that even in the absence of an explicit statutory provision, the administration has always assessed applicants' income in a similar way. Case law has nonetheless clarified that such **economic assessments** must be carried out on a case-by-case basis. In practice, the statutory provision would not introduce a new requirement but rather formalise an already existing practice.

Beyond income, various bills also proposed requirements relating to **civic education**. In addition to the Bianconi bill, the bills by Bressa, Caruso and Di Leggo all envisaged forms of verification of civic knowledge. Particularly interesting is the 2009 Sarubbi-Granata proposal, introduced by two MPs from opposing political parties (the Democratic Party and the People of Freedom), which linked the reduction of residence time to a requirement of "satisfactory knowledge of Italy's civil life and Constitution", to be verified through a regulated interview. Indeed, it is notable that such proposals did not come from a single political bloc. Alongside centre-left initiatives, such as the Amato proposal, there were centre-right ones, like the Bianconi one, and bipartisan projects, such as the Sarubbi-Granata one. This demonstrates that the idea of reducing residence requirements has found support across a broad political spectrum<sup>11</sup>.

Ultimately, the various bills reveal a shared idea, i.e., that a reduction in residence requirements must correspond to greater emphasis on **substantive integration criteria**. These criteria aim to overcome the presumptive logic of the 1992 law—by which integration was presumed after ten years—and instead promote concrete verification of individual integration pathways. This approach was neither reflected in the referendum question, which by its abrogative nature could not introduce new requirements, or present in the recent reform adopted in 2025.

Finally, the **abrogative referendum** on Italian citizenship held on 8–9 June 2025 failed to reach the required quorum (50% +1), due to a turnout of 30.5%. As a result, its outcome had no legal effect and the existing requirement of ten years residence for naturalisation remains in force. Although 65% of voters supported

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<sup>10</sup> For the following considerations on the reform projects, see M. Gioiosa, *In che cosa la proposta referendaria si differenzia dai precedenti progetti di riforma volti a ridurre la durata della previa residenza richiesta per chiedere la naturalizzazione?*, Fondazione ISMU ETS, 9 May 2025.

<sup>11</sup> See E. Codini, *La proposta referendaria dell'8 e 9 giugno 2025 è in linea con i progetti di riforma che si sono susseguiti negli ultimi decenni?*, op. cit.

reducing the residence requirement, the high abstention rate—encouraged by limited media coverage and calls to abstain—nullified any legal consequences, revealing **widespread institutional disengagement**<sup>12</sup>. At the local level, cities such as **Milan** showed **greater civic mobilisation**, but overall the electorate expressed a substantive majority against reform.

Although not binding for future amendments to the Law No. 91/1992, the result clearly signals to the current Parliament that measures contrary to the substantive outcome of the vote are unlikely to be pursued. At the same time, the (possibly) renewed debate on *ius scholae*—which would allow the children of immigrants to acquire citizenship through schooling—demonstrates that the failed referendum does not exclude the prospect of future reforms to the Law No. 91/1992<sup>13</sup>.

## 3.

### A comparative perspective on the EU

The analysis of national citizenship cannot be separated from the European context where the national legal systems are embedded. Although the European Union has progressively harmonised legislation in many fields, the rules governing the acquisition of citizenship have traditionally remained the exclusive competence of Member States. Recent developments in the case law of the Court of Justice, as highlighted in the *Commission v Malta* judgment, have underlined the importance of a “genuine link” between individuals and nations, without, however, steering the European debate towards any real harmonisation of national rules.

A comprehensive picture requires, first, to examine data on the acquisition of citizenship across the EU, in order to assess its scale and trends and, then, to consider the development of national laws by comparing certain key countries, such as Spain, Germany and France.

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<sup>12</sup> For more on opinion polls and parties’ position on the referendum, see M. Regalia, *Verso il referendum: quanto i cittadini si esprimono sulla cittadinanza*, Fondazione ISMU ETS, 6 June 2025.

<sup>13</sup> See E. Codini, *E adesso? Riflessioni sul post referendum cittadinanza*, Fond. ISMU ETS, 7 July 2025.

### a. Acquisition of citizenship in the European Union<sup>14</sup>

In 2023—the latest available EUROSTAT data—EU countries granted citizenship to over 1 million foreign-born individuals who were legally residing in their territory. Compared to the previous year, this represents an increase of 6.1%.

Most of the new citizenships were granted by **Spain** (over 240,000, accounting for 22.9% of the EU total), **Italy** (213,600, or 20.3%), **Germany** (just under 200,000, or 19.0%), and **France** (97,300, or 9.3%). Altogether, these four countries accounted for 71.3% of all new citizenships granted in the EU in 2023.

Looking at the period from 2017 to 2023, **Italy stands out as the country with the highest number of citizenship acquisitions in the EU**, as over 1.066 million people obtained Italian citizenship while all other countries remained below the one million threshold.

**Tab.1. Main EU countries for granted citizenships. Years 2017-2023**

Country	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Totale EU</b>	<b>703,724</b>	<b>676,593</b>	<b>712,266</b>	<b>730,668</b>	<b>833,272</b>	<b>989,940</b>	<b>1,053,440</b>
Spain	150,944	66,498	90,774	126,266	144,012	181,581	240,208
Italy	201,591	146,605	112,523	131,803	121,457	213,716	213,567
Germany	112,843	115,421	116,750	111,170	129,990	166,640	199,790
France	119,152	114,274	110,014	86,483	130,385	114,483	97,288
<b>%</b>							
Spain	17,9	9,4	13,9	17,3	17,3	18,3	22,8
Italy	23,9	20,8	17,8	18,0	14,6	21,6	20,3
Germany	13,4	16,4	18,5	15,2	15,6	16,8	19,0
France	14,1	16,2	15,4	11,8	15,6	11,6	9,2

Source: ISMU ETS calculations based on EUROSTAT data

<sup>14</sup> Analisi di Giorgia Papavero, ricercatrice senior del settore statistica di Fondazione ISMU ETS.

## Naturalisation rate

In 2023, the naturalisation rate across the EU—defined as the ratio between the total number of citizenships granted and the number of foreign nationals residing in a country at the beginning of the year—was 2.6%. This means that 2.6 out of every 100 long-term foreign residents became citizens. The country with the highest naturalisation rate was **Sweden** (7.9%), followed by **Romania** (5.9%) and **Italy** (4.1%), while the lowest rates were recorded in Latvia (0.4%) and Lithuania (0.1%).

## Citizenship prior to naturalisation

The majority of individuals granted EU citizenship in 2023 were previously nationals of non-EU countries (87.6% of the total), while 11% were already EU citizens but from a different member state than the one granting citizenship. People who were stateless or had unknown citizenship accounted for 1.7% of the total.

In contrast with the EU average, Hungary and Luxembourg granted most of their new citizenships to nationals of other EU countries (64.4% and 60.6%, respectively). In Luxembourg, the largest group of new citizens were Portuguese nationals (34.7%), followed by French (21.7%), Belgians (9.6%), and Italians (8.8%).

Looking at the four EU countries with the highest number of citizenships granted, we find some notable differences compared to the EU average. **Germany** had a higher proportion of new citizens who were already EU nationals (16%), while **Spain** had the lowest (4%), with a clear predominance of non-EU nationals (96%), as was the case in Italy (92%).

Germany and France also reported a slightly higher share of new citizens who were stateless or whose previous citizenship was unknown.

**Tab.2. Citizenship acquisitions in the top four EU countries by type of previous citizenship (2023)**

Country	Number of acquisitions	Of which previous EU citizens (%)	Of which previous non-EU citizens (%)	Stateless or Unknown (%)
<b>Total EU</b>	<b>1,053,440</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>87,6</b>	<b>1.7</b>
Spain	240,208	3.9	96.1	-
Italy	213,567	8.2	91.7	0.1
Germany	199,790	15.6	81.8	2.6
France	97,288	7.7	89.7	2.6

Source: ISMU ETS calculations based on EUROSTAT data

Overall, in the EU, the largest groups by previous citizenship in 2023 were **Syrians** (107,500 people, 10.2% of all citizenship acquisitions), followed by **Moroccans** (106,500, 10.1%), **Albanians** (44,400, 4.2%), **Romanians** (37,200, 3.5%), and **Venezuelans** (32,100, 3.1%). In addition to Romania, two other EU countries were also among the top ten nationalities acquiring new EU citizenship, i.e., Poland (13,900 people, 1.3%) and Italy (10,200 people, 1.0%).

Italy, therefore, is not only among the main EU countries granting citizenship, but it also has a significant number of its own citizens living permanently in other EU member states who acquire citizenship there.

While many Italians have acquired citizenship in France, Germany, and Spain—countries where they have established permanent residence—few French, Germans and Spaniards have obtained Italian citizenship as a second nationality. In fact, none of these countries appear among the top countries of origin for new Italian citizens. Instead, citizens of Eastern European Member states dominate the rankings, with Romanians alone accounting for 82% of the total—over 14,000 people granted Italian citizenship in 2023—followed by nationals of Poland, Bulgaria, and Croatia.

In Germany, nearly 4,000 Italians acquired German citizenship, over 2,000 did so in Belgium, 1,400 in Spain, and just under 1,200 in France. If we also consider EFTA countries, more than 4,300 Italians obtained Swiss citizenship.

**Tab.3. Citizenship acquisitions in the top four EU countries by country of previous citizenship (2023)**

Country	Previous EU citizenship	Number of acquisitions	% of the total EU previous citizenships
<b>SPAIN</b>	Romania	4,932	53.2
	Italy	1,395	15.0
	Bulgaria	764	8.2
	Portugal	643	6.9
	Poland	520	5.6
<b>ITALY</b>	Romania	14,409	82.2
	Poland	980	5.6
	Bulgaria	702	4.0
	Croatia	286	1.6
	Unghary	184	1.0
<b>GERMANY</b>	Romania	7,580	24.3
	Poland	5,415	17.3
	Italy	3,990	12.8
	Greece	2,585	8.3
	Bulgaria	2,325	7.4
<b>FRANCE</b>	Romania	1,788	23.8
	Portugal	1,348	18.0
	Italy	1,179	15.7
	Poland	686	9.1
	Spain	649	8.6

Source: ISMU ETS calculations based on EUROSTAT data

When looking at the most represented countries in terms of citizenship acquisitions in the EU—namely Syria, Morocco, Albania, Romania, and Venezuela—we can see a strong link between these groups and specific destination countries. In particular, 70% of Syrians acquired German citizenship. Albanians primarily obtained Italian citizenship, with 72% naturalised in Italy and 22.4% in Greece. More than half of the Moroccan nationals became French citizens, while over a quarter obtained Italian citizenship. Romanians most often established residence and acquired citizenship in Italy (39%), followed by Germany (20%) and Spain (13%). The vast majority (94%) of the 32,000 Venezuelans who became EU citizens acquired Spanish citizenship.

**Tab.4. Main countries of previous citizenship and percentage distribution across top EU destination countries. Year 2023**

Country of previous citizenship	Number of acquisitions	Main EU country granting citizenship						
		Rank 1	%	Rank 2	%	Rank 3	%	Altri %
Syria	107,500	Germany	70.2	Netherlands	10.6	Sweden	10.4	8.8
Morocco	106,500	Spain	50.7	Italy	26.2	France	12.5	10.6
Albania	44,400	Italy	71.5	Greece	22.4	Sweedeen	1.6	4.5
Romania	37,200	Italy	38.7	Germany	20.4	Spain	13.2	27.7
Venezuela	32,100	Spain	93.8	Italy	2.2	Portugal	0.9	3.1

Source: ISMU ETS calculations based on EUROSTAT data

In the top four EU countries granting citizenship, when considering the main non-EU countries of origin of new citizens, we can observe the **varying attractiveness of foreign communities in their destination countries**. In Spain, countries that are geographically close—such as Morocco (23.4%)—are predominant, along with those that share historical and linguistic ties, namely Latin American countries like Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Honduras.

In Italy, citizenship was primarily granted to members of long-established communities such as Albanians (16%) and Moroccans (14%), as well as to Argentinians and Brazilians, with whom Italy shares strong ancestral ties.

In **Germany**, 45% of all new citizenships granted in 2023 to third-country nationals went to Syrians—a now well-established community—surpassing even the historically significant Turkish community, which ranked second at 6.4%. Germany also saw notable numbers of new citizens from Asian countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran, where migration flows have largely been driven by international protection needs.

In France, 35% of all citizenships granted went to people originally from North Africa—namely Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia—representing communities that have been present for several generations.

**Tab.5. Citizenship acquisitions in the top four con-EU Countries by number of granted citizenships, by previous citizenship. Year 2023**

Country	Previous non-EU citizenship	Number of Acquisition	% of the total non-EU previous citizenships
<b>SPAIN</b>	Morocco	54,027	23.4
	Venezuela	30,154	13.1
	Colombia	18,738	8.1
	Ecuador	11,326	4.9
	Honduras	11,189	4.8
<b>ITALY</b>	Albania	31,728	16.2
	Morocco	27,901	14.2
	Argentina	16,076	8.2
	Brazil	12,891	6.6
	India	9,736	5.0
<b>GERMANY</b>	Syria	75,485	44.8
	Turkiye	10,735	6.4
	Iraq	10,710	6.4
	Afghanistan	6,520	3.9
	Iran	6,420	3.8
<b>FRANCE</b>	Morocco	13,302	14.8
	Algeria	11,411	12.7
	Tunisia	6,364	7.1
	Turkiye	4,715	5.3
	Comore	2,770	3.1

Source: ISMU ETS calculations based on EUROSTAT data

### Acquisitions of citizenship by age and sex

The gender distribution shows a **slight predominance of women** (50.8%) compared to men (49.2%). In 2023, women acquired citizenship more frequently than men in all EU countries, except for Germany, Lithuania, Romania, Sweden, Hungary, Ireland, and Malta.

The highest percentage of citizenship acquisitions by women was recorded in Croatia (62.2%), while the highest percentage of acquisitions by men was observed in Germany (54.7%).

**Tab. 6. Acquisitions of citizenship by age and sex**

Country	% F	% M	Median age	0-14 years	55 years +
<b>Total EU</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>31.4</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>7.2</b>
Spain	54.8	45.2	32.5	25.0	7.3
Italy	50.2	49.8	31.4	25.0	9.1
Germany	45.3	54.7	30.8	21.5	5.1
France	51.9	48.1	25.0	35.0	5.0

Source: ISMU ETS calculations based on EUROSTAT data

In 2023, the median age of individuals who acquired citizenship across the European Union was **31 years**, 38.0% of those granted citizenship in an EU country were under the age of 25, while another 42.8% were between 25 and 44 years old. Individuals aged 45 and over made up 19.3% of the total. Children under 15 accounted for 24.5% of all new citizens. The highest percentages of minors were observed in France (35%), Greece (30.8%), Denmark (29.7%), and Belgium (29.3%).

Across the EU, 7.2% of those granted citizenship were aged 55 or older. In Italy, this share was higher, at 9%, while in France, it was below the EU average, at 5%.

In 2023, the four main EU countries for citizenship granted collectively recorded **over 400,000 new citizens under the age of 25** with a migration background. Of these, approximately 25% were under 15 years old.

## b. Citizenship in other EU countries: residence and integration<sup>15</sup>

From a legal perspective, several systems have progressively **recalibrated the balance between *ius sanguinis* and *ius soli***, supplementing them with criteria based on lawful residence and effective integration. In this respect, comparative analysis highlights certain divergences but also a clear evolutionary trend. **Germany**—a country traditionally anchored to an ethno-cultural model of citizenship—has progressively embraced the inclusive logic of residence. The reform of June 2024 reduced the general residence requirement for naturalisation from eight to five years, lowering it further to three for applicants who can demonstrate advanced levels of integration—for example, certified language skills and full economic self-sufficiency. The reform not only shortened the residence requirement to five years but also abolished the obligation for applicants to renounce other citizenships. For those born in Germany to foreign parents,

<sup>15</sup> Analysis by Sara Morlotti, legal researcher at ISMU ETS and PhD candidate in European Union Law at the University of Milan.

the residence requirement of one parent for citizenship acquisition at birth was likewise lowered from eight to five years. In addition, the *Optionspflicht*—i.e., the obligation for young people with dual nationality acquired at birth to choose, upon reaching adulthood, between German citizenship and that of origin—was abolished for those born in Germany after the entry into force of the reform<sup>16</sup>.

**France**, by contrast, applies an approach more closely linked to a **moderated ius soli**, as citizenship is accessible after five years of lawful residence, reduced to two where higher education studies have been completed in France. The assessment also takes account of substantive factors such as employment, language proficiency and familiarity with republican values<sup>17</sup>. **Spain**, while ordinarily requiring ten years of residence, provides a wide range of reductions, down to two years for nationals of Latin American countries, facilitations for citizens of former colonies, refugees, or descendants of those exiled by the Franco regime., reflecting a system that privileges **historical and cultural ties**.<sup>18</sup>

When looking at Italy comparatively, it becomes clear that its legal system runs counter to the reform trends observed in other EU countries. The requirement of ten years of continuous lawful residence for non-EU nationals—shared only by Austria, Lithuania and Spain, though the latter with very significant exceptions—represents one of the highest thresholds in the Union, while civic integration requirements or similar indicators remain secondary. The severity of the temporal criterion appears even more evident when looking at the prevailing approaches in many Member States, where timeframes to access citizenship have been shortened to facilitate the integration of new generations and stabilise long-term immigrant communities.

Beyond this, a crucial issue that is often overlooked in the political and media debate is the very notion of **“legal residence”**, i.e., the key criterion in Italian law for naturalisation. Unlike actual residence, which relates to stable and continuous presence on the territory, lawful residence depends on holding a valid residence permit and regular registration with the civil registry. This creates the risk of excluding from citizenship individuals who are fully integrated but have experienced formal interruptions or documentary irregularities. This discrepancy has often been criticised as characteristic of a framework that **prioritises bu-**

<sup>16</sup> See [New law on nationality takes effect](#), news on the German Ministry of the Interior website, 27 June 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Decree No. 2019-1507 of 30 December 2019 raised the language level required for those applying for French nationality by naturalisation, reintegration or marriage to a French person to level B1, both written and oral. Cf. *Décret n° 2019-1507 du 30 décembre 2019 portant modification du décret n° 93-1362 du 30 décembre 1993 modifié relatif aux déclarations de nationalité, aux décisions de naturalisation, de réintégration, de perte, de déchéance et de retrait de la nationalité française*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ley de Memoria Democrática*, a Spanish law approved on 19 October 2022, which updates and expands the previous Ley de Memoria Histórica of 2007. Its objective is to acknowledge, redress, and preserve the memory of the victims of the Civil War and the Franco dictatorship.

## reaucratic aspects over substantive indicators of social inclusion<sup>19</sup>.

In a comparative perspective, countries such as France and Germany tend to combine the formal requirement (time) with **qualitative criteria** (language, employment, civic participation) thus balancing the duration of residence with the degree of **actual integration**. Even in Spain and Austria, despite high temporal thresholds, significant reductions are provided for specific categories of applicants deemed to have a historical or cultural tie with the national community. Italy, by contrast, despite previous several reform proposals in this sense, has recently taken the opposite path. The aforementioned Decree-Law No. 36 of 2025 introduced strict limits on acquisition *iure sanguinis*, imposing **restrictions on descent-based transmission** and requiring an effective connection with the territory, whereas previously citizenship could be claimed without generational limits. This choice reflects an attempt to counter perceived “abuses” of rules, but at the same time distances Italy from the more inclusive approach adopted in other European systems—albeit in different contexts.

This debate takes on particular relevance in light of EU citizenship, which is closely linked to national citizenship. The Court of Justice of the EU, in the *Commission v Malta* judgment, emphasised the need for a “**genuine link**” between the individual and the Member State whose nationality is acquired, underlining that formal status cannot be detached from an actual connection with the political and social community<sup>20</sup>.

The debate on residence as a criterion for access to citizenship in Italy must therefore be placed within the European comparison. While many systems have interpreted citizenship as an instrument of inclusion and social stabilisation, Italy remains anchored to a restrictive and formalistic model, one that risks not reflecting the **demographic and cultural transformation** of its communities. The recent failure of the abrogative referendum to reduce the residence requirement for non-EU nationals from ten to five years confirms the persistent political hardship in questioning the current framework, despite reformist pressures from broad sectors of civil society and the academic debate. In this light, any future legislative action would need to reflect on the **substantive meaning**

<sup>19</sup> For example, foreign national students who have always resided in Italy and participate in study programmes abroad for a few months. If during that period, for any reason—even a formal one, such as the transfer of their family’s registered residence—they lose the requirement of continuous legal residence, the entire period may no longer be considered valid for citizenship purposes. This is a regulatory rigidity that risks penalising life trajectories that indicate full integration into the Italian reality but do not perfectly align with formal legal criteria. See S. Morlotti, *Cittadinanza: la vittoria del “sì” ci avvicinerrebbe o ci allontanerebbe dagli altri Paesi europei?*, Fondazione ISMU ETS, 19 May 2025.

<sup>20</sup> *Commission v. Malta*, Case C-181/23, Court of Justice of the European Union (Grand Chamber), judgment of 29 April 2025, “European Commission v. Republic of Malta (Citizenship by Investment)”. The case concerned the Maltese programme of granting citizenship in exchange for financial investment, which the Court of Justice found incompatible with EU law.

**of residence** as an indicator of membership in the political community and give more importance to criteria that acknowledge the effective integration paths of new generations.

## 4.

### What does it mean to be a citizen?<sup>21</sup>

Citizenship is, first and foremost, a legal institution. It certifies an individual's formal affiliation with a state and grants political rights as well as—in line with the European tradition—certain social and economic rights and duties toward the community and the state. **Full access to rights** is thus realized through the attribution of citizenship status, which enables, among other things, the right to request a national passport, vote, and stand for election.

Yet, in a broader sense, **being a citizen does not necessarily equate to possessing citizenship**. Legal status determines who is formally included by law, but it is social experience that reveals who is recognized and treated as part of the collective “us”. In everyday life, “being a citizen” entails participating in communal life, respecting shared norms, contributing through labour and taxation, caring for public spaces, engaging in civic discourse, and inhabiting spaces of proximity. Above all, it involves being **acknowledged** as such by others. For this reason, one may “be a citizen without citizenship”—as is often the case for individuals born or raised in Italy without legal status—and, conversely, “hold citizenship without fully being one” when symbolic or material barriers—such as discrimination, stereotypes, or precariousness—impede **access to opportunities and public voice**.

It is therefore useful to distinguish three interrelated dimensions, i.e., **formal citizenship** (legal status), **substantive citizenship** (the actual exercise of rights and capacity for participation), and **symbolic-identitarian citizenship** (inclusion in the eyes of others and in the collective narrative). The democratic quality of a country—its ability to accommodate all individuals, including those of diverse origins who reside “here,” and to fully recognize their potential—is measured, in part, by the **alignment of these three dimensions**. When such alignment is lacking, areas of suspended or minoritized citizenship emerge—a situation shaped by social and institutional processes that diminish voice, legitimacy, and effective access to rights, regardless of the size of the affected group.

<sup>21</sup> Riflessioni di Sumaya Abdel Qader, Dottoranda di ricerca in Sociologia, Organizzazioni, Culture presso l'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano.

This perspective re-centres the relationship between the individual and the community, where “community” refers primarily to the **national political community**—the Italian society as a whole, with its institutions, norms, and imaginaries of belonging—but also to **communities of origin and reference** (familial, religious, cultural, diasporic), and **communities of proximity** (schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces, and associations) where recognition is concretely enacted. Rights require institutions and imaginaries that render them practicable. Institutions and imaginaries, in turn, gain legitimacy when they recognize individual rights.

This relationship becomes visible in **everyday life**. Attending school, working, volunteering, and caring for shared spaces are practices that foster belonging. Every face-to-face interaction—with neighbours, classmates, colleagues, public officials—can include or exclude. Sociologically, citizenship functions as symbolic capital. When recognized, it opens spaces and opportunities, when denied, it impoverishes the legal status of its content. This is not a matter of individual perception but the outcome of institutional arrangements (norms, procedures, practices) and cultural frameworks (media narratives, categories of public discourse) that either legitimize or undermine belonging.

The Italian case illustrates the **potential gap between legal status and lived experience**. Many young people born or raised in Italy have long been “de facto” citizens before becoming “de jure” ones. They have attended Italian schools, learned the Italian language, built local networks, and participated in social and cultural life—yet lacked the legal recognition that would confer full formal and substantive legitimacy, open new opportunities, integrate them into a broader political, social, and cultural project, and grant access to citizenship on a symbolic-identitarian level. This liminal position produces **biographical fractures** where individuals grow up feeling part of a society that, at critical junctures (voting, international mobility, access to public competitions), reiterates that they are not fully included. It ends up excluding those who, though ‘long present’ or ‘born here,’ are still perceived as outsiders. Even after acquiring legal status, **symbolic barriers** may persist—such as a foreign surname, a different accent, or attire perceived as “other”—and act as markers that slow the attainment of substantive equality.

At the identity level, citizenship represents a bond with a **collective history**. As in “imagined communities,” national belonging is constructed through shared narratives, symbols, and memories. For those with other or multiple origins, this bond is not necessarily weak but can be understood as more complex, operating across multiple dimensions—not without challenges and tensions. The “community” of reference is not only national but also familial, religious, and diasporic. For the children of migrants, citizenship often entails **reconciling**

**plural identities**—being Italian while maintaining ties to their culture of origin. This form of multiple belonging enriches identity, yet public discourse tends to frame it as incompatibility rather than a challenge to be embraced. In this sense, citizenship becomes a laboratory of identity hybridization, where individuals navigate multiple communities without necessarily having to choose just one. Symbolic-identitarian citizenship should function as a bridge rather than a boundary. This represents a pivotal point.

The politicization of citizenship boundaries—often framed through a securitarian lens—tends to use the **line between “us” and “them”** as a tool of mobilization rather than a criterion for democratic inclusion. Even a purely procedural approach risks being short-sighted. As observed, acquiring legal status alone does not guarantee effective access to rights, opportunities, and recognition. **Policies are needed** to reduce the gaps between formal, substantive, and symbolic dimensions—inclusive schooling, non-stigmatizing public representations, anti-discrimination measures, ordinary channels of participation—alongside social practices that rebuild trust, particularly in spaces of proximity.

Citizenship, therefore, can also be understood as a relational and dynamic process situated at the intersection of the individual and the national collective, between original and acquired affiliations, between norms and practices. The decisive question is not merely “who is entitled to the document?” but, rather, “who is recognized as part of ‘us’?” The Italian challenge lies in transitioning from suspended citizenship—often conditional or denied—to a form of citizenship that can value plural biographies and **transform diversity into social and civic capital**. In essence, citizenship should serve as a tool of cohesion, not division.

# 5.

## Concluding remarks

The findings presented here draw on the data and reflections developed within the RISE research project, seeking to answer a fundamental question: what should be considered in Italy when deciding on citizenship, particularly on the rules governing its acquisition? The aim has been to provide a body of **knowledge** “against” ignorance and to counterbalance a public debate often distant from the substance of the issues.

The research highlighted how citizenship in Italy remains a **complex matter** in which legal dimensions, political dynamics and social perceptions are constantly intertwined. Law No. 91 of 1992 continues to constitute the normative foundation. Although subject to some sectoral amendments, it has never undergone an organic reform capable of responding to the demographic and social transformations of the past decades. No community remains unchanged over time—every society evolves, renegotiates its symbolic boundaries and incorporates new elements into its self-definition.

The referendum of 8–9 June 2025, although rendered ineffective by the unmet quorum, brought public attention back to the issue of naturalisation and, more broadly, the need for a transparent and informed debate. In this context, the RISE project contributed to public discussion by offering **dissemination tools**, opportunities for dialogue, and an innovative approach to measuring perceptions through an interactive quiz. The experience confirmed how crucial outreach work is to strengthening citizens' ability to exercise their rights consciously. The issues raised provided an opportunity to reflect critically on the contemporary meaning of citizenship, particularly in a social context increasingly characterised by cultural, identity and biographical plurality<sup>22</sup>.

Comparative analysis has shown that Italy ranks among the most restrictive European countries in terms of naturalisation requirements, while other contexts have more flexible models that view citizenship as integral to the processes of integration. This comparison should not be understood as a proposal to “import” external models, but rather as an **invitation** to reflect on what balance, in the Italian case, might be struck between the formal requirements of national be-

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<sup>22</sup> See S. Abdel Qader, *Il referendum è un'occasione per riflettere sul significato della cittadinanza?*, Fondazione ISMU ETS, 28 May 2025.

longing and the effective inclusion of individuals in the community.

This paper is not intended to advocate for a specific reform, but rather to serve as a starting point: **knowledge** must precede choice, with scenarios kept open to multiple options. The body of data and reflections built up during the research represents a foundation for further inquiry in multiple directions. For instance, more awareness of the socio-cultural and political implications of having—or not—citizenship could undoubtedly enrich the strictly legal understanding of the phenomenon and enhance its analysis.

The network of actors consolidated through RISE can serve as a tool for developing **new shared reflections**, in a context where the issue of citizenship is very likely to re-emerge in the years to come. In this perspective, the task of research remains that of nurturing public awareness, creating the conditions for every political choice to be based on knowledge and **shared responsibility**.

Fondazione ISMU ETS is an independent scientific institution that promotes studies, research, training, and projects on multiethnic and multicultural society, with particular focus on the phenomenon of international migration. ISMU collaborates with institutions, public administrations, third-sector organizations, schools, companies, international agencies, and both Italian and foreign research centers.