Italy

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1 Muslim Populations

Except for the settlement of Muslims in Southern Italy during the seventh and eighth centuries, Islam was almost absent in Italy until the 1970s. By the 1970s and 1980s, Italy had begun to attract migrant workers, among them Muslims from North Africa and Albania. Mainly due to immigration flows, Islam is today the second largest religion in the country, after Catholicism.¹ There is no official census of religious communities in Italy; according to the latest estimates, the number of Muslims, who are mostly Sunnis, is between 1.5 and 2.2 million (2.5% to 3.5% of the total population of about 60 million).² Muslims are mainly registered residents without Italian citizenship and they make up

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¹ The most recent sociological research about religious communities in Italy, conducted by CESNUR (Center for Studies of New Religions), is published in Introvigne M. – Zoccatelli P. (dir.), *Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia*, (Torino: Elededi 2013); online version *Le religioni in Italia*, at www.cesnur.org/religioni_italia/default.htm, accessed 2 January 2014.

² Caritas Migrantes, *Dossier statistico immigrazione 2012* (Immigration Statistical Dossier 2012, Roma: IDOS 2012, p. 192 f.) indicates 1,650,902 Muslims. According to the CESNUR survey, Muslim population in Italy includes about 1,360,000 foreign residents and 115,000 Italian citizens (*Le religioni in Italia*, tab. n. 1 and 5, at www.cesnur.org/religioni_italia/introduzione_01.htm, accessed 2 Jan. 2014). According to the Pew Forum, in 2010 Muslims in Italy are estimated to be 2,200,000 (see Global Religious Futures, 2013, at www.globalreligiousfutures.org/sharable/1822, accessed 2 January 2014). Different estimates are due to different methodology: Pew Forum surveys are based on a self-identification method; CESNUR conducted a sociological research monitoring the presence of affiliated and their participation to the worship and activities of local religious organisations and mosques; Caritas Migrantes calculates estimates on the basis of the percentage of Muslim population in the Countries of origin of immigrants (for example, if official data indicates that in Morocco 99% of population is Muslim, the survey calculates that 99% of Moroccan residents in Italy is Muslim). This method seems to be weak in certain aspects (reliability of data on religions in some countries; difference between the nominal/official religious affiliation in the mother country and the real number of adherents to Islam in Italy; etc.).
about 30% of foreign residents in the country. Italy’s Muslim community is significantly ethnically diverse; the main countries of origin are: Morocco, Albania, Tunisia, Senegal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Macedonia, and Algeria. Muslims who are Italian citizens are estimated to be around 115,000. Italian citizenship laws are based on the *jus sanguinis* principle and provide for strict conditions to acquire citizenship, while obtaining work and residency permits is easier. By consequence, many immigrants who have lived in Italy for years (and their children born there) cannot easily obtain Italian citizenship. The high number of Muslim non-citizens, including illegal immigrants, is one of the obstacles to their integration into Italian society; many foreign Muslims are still first-generation immigrants living in poor socio-economic conditions. However, the rising number of family reunifications and the growing number of young Muslims (second and third generation and new families) are changing the picture of the Islamic community living in Italy. Muslim groups have settled throughout Italy but tend to be concentrated in urban areas.

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3 Different estimates exist about the number of foreign residents in Italy: *Istat* (National Statistics Institute) indicates 4.3 million, without counting irregular immigrants; *Caritas Migrantes* about 5 million; *Cesnur* counts more than 3 million.

4 See *Caritas Migrantes, Dossier statistico immigrazione 2012*, op. cit.

5 *Le Religioni in Italia*, op. cit. <www.cesnur.org/religioni_italia/introduzione_01.htm>. According to the Ucoii, in 2012 Italians converted to Islam were about 70,000 (see http://islameneurope.blogspot.it/2012/05/italy-70-000-converted-to-islam.html, accessed 8 January 2014).

6 The phenomenon of illegal immigration has always been spread in Italy, mostly due to strict immigration laws. In the last couple of years, Italy has attracted irregular flows of immigrants, subsequent to the political and institutional changes in the Mediterranean Region (so-called *Arab Spring*) and to the conflict in Syria. In 2013 various incidents occurred to immigrants and refugees seeking to reach Sicily by boat. Immigrants without documents are generally detained in the so called “Centres for Identification and Expulsion” and sent back to their country of origin; some of them, however, attempt to escape and to remain in Italy. No precise data exists on the national and religious characters of irregular immigrants, but it is very likely that a percentage of them, especially those coming from North Africa, are Muslims. See <www.dw.de/migrants-in-italy-struggle-against-illegal-status-exploitation/a-17168175>, accessed 2 January 2014.

7 According to recent data, among foreign residents there is a growing percentage of minors and of children born in Italy. See www.dossierimmigrazione.it/docnews/file/2013_Scheda_Dossier.pdf, accessed 2 January 2014.