

Assessment and recommendations

Overview

In the span of a decade, immigrants to Italy became a significant component of the population

With Spain, Italy is the OECD country with the highest annual growth of its legal immigrant population since the beginning of the 2000s. Its location in the middle of the Mediterranean basin and sustained demand for labour in lower-skill occupations has made Italy a major destination for migrants. Between 2001 and 2011, the share of the foreign-born in the total population nearly tripled to 9% of the total population. Immigrants are largely over-represented in the most active age groups (25-44) and overall, they represent nearly 11% of the working-age population (15-64). This share is higher than in Greece and Portugal but remains below the share of most other OECD countries with similar GDP levels.

The prevalent features of the integration of immigrants in Italy differ significantly from most other OECD countries reviewed

Migration to Italy was initially mainly for employment. Family reunification has more recently led to a large settled immigrant population, and to a growing number of immigrant offspring. The share of humanitarian migration in total permanent-based migration has remained relatively small in comparison with most of the European OECD countries which have participated in the OECD reviews on the labour market integration of immigrants and their children. The first groups of migrants came from North Africa and the Philippines to work in Italy. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, flows from eastern European countries, mainly Albania, Romania and the former Yugoslavia have increased rapidly and migrants from European countries now constitute more than half of the immigrant population. The enlargement of the European Union to Romania and Bulgaria has accentuated this trend. Proximity to past or current conflict areas (Albania, Balkan countries, North Africa) also explains why Italy receives a certain number of humanitarian immigrants, although the assistance provided to refugees, beyond initial reception and an orientation period, is limited and almost indistinguishable from that provided to the mainstream.

In contrast to most other OECD countries, overall, the employment rates of immigrants are higher than those of their native-born counterparts

While immigrants' employment rate is far below the OECD average, this reflects the low employment rate in Italy. In fact, immigrants in Italy have a higher labour market participation rate than their native-born counterparts, regardless of gender. This positive overall outcome, however, is largely driven by differences in the age structures of the native- and foreign-born populations, as well as the concentration in northern regions. In

addition, there is a worrisome and accelerating decline in labour market outcomes, both in absolute terms and relative to the native-born.

The integration of immigrants in Italy is less a present concern than a concern over risks for the future

At first glance, it is difficult to claim that integration is an issue in Italy, since immigrants have higher employment rates than natives, even after accounting for differences in socio-economic characteristics. The current situation bears many resemblances with that of the so-called “guest workers” in other European OECD countries in the 1960s and 1970s. While it would be reductionist to make a direct parallel with that epoch, the similarities point to risk factors for the sustainability of employment, marginalisation and poverty, and difficulties faced by immigrant offspring, notably those born in Italy. Signs of these phenomena are already appearing, and to avoid going down the pathway of countries which were unable to ensure integration, attention to these risk factors is necessary. The main issue is thus to avoid immigrant-specific vulnerability and ensuring the long-term employability of those immigrants who will remain in Italy, and of their offspring.

Immigration and integration has a major regional dimension

For decades, Italians in southern regions moved to northern and central regions to find jobs. The same pattern is now observed for the migrants who start working, generally informally, in the agricultural sector in the South and then move to the North when they get a better job opportunity. In 2012, 84% of legal immigrants were living in northern and central regions of Italy, in contrast to 66% of the Italian population. However, the increase in numbers of foreign children attending schools in southern regions may be a sign that immigrants are settling more in those regions than they did in the past or that some are moving back South during the economic crisis.

Immigrants became a structural part of the labour force in some specific sectors

Most of the labour migration is driven by a high demand for low-skilled workers, mainly for domestic services and care for families and in small firms. Progressively, immigrants became a major supplier for low-skilled employment. In 2012, they were holding around 31 and 40% of low-skilled jobs for men and women, respectively. Moreover, Italy is the OECD country with the highest concentration of immigrant employment in specific industries and occupations, with one out of two immigrant men in employment in construction or manufacturing and one out of two immigrant women employed in the personal services sector.

The domestic sector, which employs a large share of migrants, may not continue to grow

Home care for a growing elderly population has driven employment growth for immigrant women, especially. However, this sector is supported only partially by public subsidies, and relies on family savings which are diminishing. This may be not sustainable in the future and demand for home carers may not increase further. In this context, migrant domestic workers may face difficulties to maintain employment, and thus ultimately to stay in the country.

The few highly educated immigrant workers face hurdles in accessing adequate jobs

The only immigrant group with lower employment rates than natives are the highly-educated, comprising 10% of the working-age immigrant population, who struggle with a general shortage of opportunities for medium and highly skilled jobs. This is related to the limited development of medium- and high-skilled jobs in Italy and progress in the educational attainment of natives. In this context, highly educated migrants face even more difficulties than their native counterparts to integrate in the labour market, and those who are employed are less likely than their native counterparts to hold a job that matches their qualifications. Some evidence also shows that over-qualification rates do not decline with job experience and presence in Italy, in contrast to most other OECD countries.

The labour market is highly segmented and immigrants are often trapped in low-paid jobs

There is a large wage gap with the native-born which appears to increase, rather than decline, with age and work experience acquired in Italy. Many factors contribute: an insecure legal status during the first years in Italy may reduce incentives to invest in human capital, in particular in language; the need to demonstrate contract employment for residence permit renewal or first issuance may tend to reduce geographical and professional mobility during the first years in the country; finally, the large overrepresentation of immigrant workers in low-skilled and low-paid jobs may create a vicious circle and lead to statistical discriminatory behaviour by employers vis-à-vis more skilled migrants.

A longitudinal study of outcomes of immigrants is required to better understand risk factors and obstacles to mobility

As stated above, the integration problem in Italy has less to do with the current labour market situation of immigrants than with its evolution in the medium- to long-term. Despite recent efforts to improve statistical information on immigrants and their children, a major longitudinal survey still needs to be conducted to better understand the processes at play and the factors affecting integration.

Address the disproportionate effect of the economic crisis on immigrants

In times of crisis, the admission of new workers should be linked more closely to the availability of suitable and sustainable jobs

The recent economic crisis revealed the limits of the labour market resilience of low-educated immigrant workers. Both native- and foreign-born workers are now facing higher and rising unemployment, which especially affects the least educated. Immigrant men have suffered particular setbacks between 2007 and 2012, with unemployment rising from 5.3 to 12.6%, compared with 4.9 and 9.7% for natives. The top three sectors for employment of immigrant men in 2012 (industry, construction and trade) have all seen dramatic declines in the total workforce since 2007. While in the construction sector, foreign- and native-born unemployment rates rose at the same pace, in industry and trade, the situation deteriorated more among the foreign-born. Women were somewhat protected by persistent demand in domestic and personal services, with unemployment rising by 3.7 percentage points, to 15.9%, compared with a similar increase in terms of

percentage points to a level of 11.3% for native women. Admission of new recruits from outside the EU has been largely suspended since 2009, with the exception of a large quota in 2010. In times of crisis, incentives to employers to recruit low-educated workers already resident in the country instead of recruiting foreign workers from abroad should be reinforced.

The Italian legislation favours workers who have received pre-migration training abroad, although in practice this channel has been underutilised. In principle, one would expect such preparatory training to address some of the factors contributing to poor integration outcomes, as participants should have language and professional skills, as well as a regular employment contract. It is therefore important to evaluate whether participants have better integration outcomes than other migrants, especially labour migrants and, if this is indeed the case, to expand this channel.

Concentrate integration efforts on those immigrants who are likely to stay

Non-EU/EFTA migrants are admitted on a temporary basis and in most cases, the renewal of their permits is tied to employment. While there is little evidence of this occurring in practice, the disappearance of jobs and persistent high unemployment, especially among recent migrants and those who have not brought their families, may lead to some return migration. Investment in training should be targeted towards those likely to remain, notably family migrants and those with long-term residence permits.

Increasing the participation of immigrants in activation programmes is particularly important

It is still too early to evaluate the impact on the labour market integration of immigrants of the labour market reforms undertaken in 2012. Beyond the increase in unemployment, some evidence points to the economic crisis reinforcing the high segmentation of immigrants in the labour market. It seems that the structural dualism of the Italian labour market is becoming “ethnically” polarised. The limited data available on the participation of immigrants in active labour market programmes tend to show that immigrants are largely underrepresented in mainstream programmes. Furthermore, the few targeted programmes are small-scale and project-based, with little evaluation of their effectiveness. In this context, it is important to strengthen the participation of eligible immigrants to mainstreamed active labour market policies.

It is also important to strengthen the matching between employer demand and the supply of immigrant workers

The public employment service (PES) is the agency in charge of job placement although other actors can also be authorised to do so. The major difficulties faced by the PES to efficiently accomplish this mission are linked with the importance of informal channels to recruit new workers. Evidence shows that immigrants are less likely to contact the PES than natives. It seems that for immigrants, the PES tends to be a reference point for administrative purposes, such as for getting an extension of their permit of residence, instead of playing an active role in job placement. In practice, municipalities are often the first contact point for unemployed migrants and some of them are already active in the area of job matching. As long as the PES remains in charge of matching, it must be better equipped to deal with a growing number of immigrant clients. Incentives should be provided to unemployed migrants to more systematically contact the PES, notably through referrals municipalities and existing information points. In addition,

incentives should be provided to employers to report their job vacancies to the PES. In this regard, partnerships with other stakeholders such as the Chambers of Commerce could increase PES efficiency and reduce the reluctance of employers to contact the PES when hiring new workers. In addition, municipalities and other bodies that are already active job matching should be allowed to experiment further, with subsequent mainstreaming.

Ensure that immigrants and their children have equal access to the public sector

Public sector employment is an important indicator and driver of integration. In Italy, immigrants are barely present in public sector employment, as a legacy of restrictions. Since 2013, non-EU citizens with a long-term residence permit as well as relatives of EU immigrants, refugees and humanitarian migrants can apply for jobs in the public sector. For these groups, requirements are similar to those for EU citizens. As the public sector has been under pressure to reduce hiring, this decision should have little immediate impact. Whether the recent changes will lead, in the medium- to long-term, to more immigrants taking civil service exams and entering the public sector is not clear. Other OECD countries have introduced diversity charters and other initiatives to ensure that the public sector reflects the composition of the population, and their experimentation in Italy should be considered.

Combat informal and illegal work

Avoid long delay in decisions on permit issuance to reduce overstay and illegal work

Processing times for permit applications for employment have historically been very long, with months or years passing before the worker finally enters. Often, the job has disappeared in the meanwhile, and the immigrant joins the ranks of job-seekers. In cases of renewal, lengthy delays lead to overstaying. Accelerating procedures should help reducing this phenomenon.

Replacing cash-benefits with service vouchers in the care sector would contribute to lower informal employment by families and to increase participation in training programmes of this category of workers

With the third highest share of elderly people in its population in the OECD, Italy is facing a structural need for qualified long-term caregivers. Recourse to low-paid immigrant women has become one of the main mechanisms to compensate for insufficient public long-term care services. Compared with most other OECD countries, cash purchase of long-term care services is more common than public service provision. The national institute of social security (INPS) provides a national disability cash-benefit which is not subject to a means-test and which is not sufficient to cover the cost of a full-time legally employed and certified caregiver at home. Some groups of immigrant women (notably Ukrainians, Peruvians and Filipinos) are frequently recruited in these jobs and the cash-for-long-term-care allowance seems to fuel recruitment of low-paid immigrant workers and to allow families to keep them in the informal sector. Replacing the cash-for-long-term-care allowance with service vouchers would lead to at least partial formal employment for many workers.

Home care work currently requires no certification in Italy and is considered an unskilled job, with little prospect for career progression or emergence from the secondary labour market. Vocational training for workers in the personal services may help, but is currently under-developed and benefit a limited number of migrants. Service vouchers for families have been experimented in Italy, and are used in a number of OECD countries. In addition to reducing informal employment, service vouchers would allow vocational training plans to be proposed to participating workers. Similarly, some municipalities offering additional benefits to eligible recipients link the benefit to legal employment; this could be promoted more widely and linked with upskilling or other forms of training.

Self-employment is often a valuable means to integration for resident migrants

Overall, self-employment is relatively more common in Italy than in other OECD countries, and this holds for native-born and for immigrants. Self-employment has been a valuable means to adapt to the Italian labour market. Immigrant businesses, however, are smaller and face higher failure rates. Some of these are individual firms which are actually single-client subcontracting, substituting contract employment. In general, support services for immigrant entrepreneurs have been mainstreamed into initiatives for the self-employed, and this should be supported in the future. However, self-employment may mask another phenomenon, businesses created only to sponsor foreigners for work visas. To discourage this, criteria for sponsoring businesses under the quota system should be reviewed.

Strengthen integration offers and participation of migrants in mainstreamed programmes

Language training supply has made significant progress...

An integration contract introduced in 2012 has set clear criteria for renewing a first residence permit, notably the acquisition of basic language skills. Since 2012, national and European resources have been allocated to the local organisation of related language courses, establishing a national language-training system using existing and new resources. Different levels of courses are organised: 100 hours for reaching an A1 level and 80 hours for an A2 level. These are less than the hours provided in other OECD countries, where 300 to 600 hours of instruction are the usual goal. The lower provision – both in terms of hours also in terms of the level aimed at – in Italy seems to reflect the lower expectations by employers, and the often low-skilled nature of employment for which immigrants have come. Some courses are adapted for people using non-Latin alphabets and for illiterate persons. Targeted services are also included to overcome obstacles to participation by categories such as mothers with young children or workers who are available only in the evening. The acquisition of an A2-level is a prerequisite to access adult learning and few links are made with the acquisition of vocational skills directly used on the labour market.

The Permanent Local Centres for Adult Education (CPIA) play an essential role in the acquisition of language competences. A large proportion of participants in these centres obtain a language certificate at the end of their courses. Given these results, the role of these centres in the provision of language training in Italy could be strengthened further. Additional financial and staff resources need to be provided to these structures to overcome the increasing need in language training and to propose more flexible courses.

... although good practice in this area needs to be extended...

Language provision is not always well co-ordinated at the regional level, and often a myriad of private providers work alongside several public structures. Good practices in informing potential students of different opportunities and in rationalising courses to avoid overlap while making sure that all needs are being met and should be extended to all regions or provinces.

... as well as stronger job-specific links

One shortcoming of existing language courses is that they are oriented towards the integration contract rather than the labour market. Courses should also be organised in the framework of vocational training and more generally with respect to employment-related language skills, which is currently largely lacking.

It is important that immigrants benefit from the new framework for the validation of competences and that the social partners are involved in the process.

The 2012 labour market reform includes provisions on the assessment of formal and informal skills. This reform aims to establish a more transparent system in terms of learning through a certification system and the validation of non-formal learning; and to deliver more flexible programmes better matched to participants' needs (adequate content; possibility of part-time and flexible hours). A 2013 decree states the definition of general norms and criteria for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, offering a general framework for a national register of VET qualifications awarded in the national education system and by regions and autonomous provinces. A platform where the corresponding European Qualification Framework level will be indicated for all national qualifications is planned for mid-2014. Immigrants stand to benefit from this, although their distance from labour market institutions suggests that social partners will have to play a role in ensuring that immigrants undergo validation. This would also ensure that employers accept the certification outcome.

At the national level, dissemination of better information, notably on labour market institutions, should be provided

One of the most widespread initiatives for integration in Italy is to create an “information counter” to provide orientation and support to immigrants. Information counters first appeared in municipalities with large immigrant populations in the 1990s, and are by now a fixture in most areas with an immigrant presence, although they take different forms. In light of the procedural difficulties often faced by immigrants renewing their permits, many information points work closely with the prefectural One-stop Shops, and are often co-ordinated under the umbrella of the Territorial Council. There is no single standard for information at the regional or national level. The national website is a good step in this direction, although it is still more of a reference tool than a guide.

Strengthen the institutional framework as well as synergies of actors dealing with integration policies

There are many bodies to co-ordinate, yet these do not always seem to be delivering

The multitude of actors raises questions regarding responsibilities and co-ordination to avoid overlap while making sure that all needs are met, both efficiently and effectively. Italy boasts a large number of political and institutional bodies charged with co-ordinating and rationalising integration policy. A brief experience with a Ministry of Integration attempted to improve links among actors, although it was not equipped with the resources to fulfil this task and recently abolished. At the sub-national level, there are the Territorial Councils for Immigration, linked to the Ministry of Interior. These involve representatives from all sub-national levels and involve local actors but are understaffed and have no independent resources. Furthermore, consultative bodies exist in most regions, as well as in many provinces and municipalities. The challenge is to identify which body or bodies are most likely to deliver, and to provide this body with the resources necessary to acquire credibility and the ability to intervene concretely to influence integration investments.

Projects need to be rationalised

Integration measures are highly decentralised in Italy, with local authorities and third sector service providers being the usual contact for immigrants. Integration programmes depend on an alignment of priorities and resources at the regional and local levels, and the number of actors mean that coverage and execution can be fragmented, sometimes clashing, overlapping or leaving gaps. Moreover, projects are often small-scale and activities are co-funded by multiple players with the risk of that no coherent approach to integration is used, even at a local level.

... and successful ones mainstreamed

What would be ordinary integration policy in other OECD countries is conducted with extraordinary funding in Italy. Basic integration services such as information and documentation, orientation and training, are often not provided through regular budgets but through project financing. These should be covered by regular budget lines and not tenders designed to promote experimentation. The fact that many initiatives are project-based and generally funded for one to three years means implies a lack of sustainability. Mechanisms should be put in place to better identify and subsequently mainstream effective integration projects. Under those conditions, the duration of tenders/subcontracts should be extended where appropriate.

European Social Fund investments do not always seem to provide value for money

One key source of funding for labour market integration in Italy has been the European Social Fund, which is co-financed by the Ministry of Labour and the regions. The expenditures per user under training programmes and other active labour market initiatives supported by the European Social Fund are often high – over EUR 20 000 per beneficiary – and in the absence of a thorough evaluation it is not clear whether or not this expense is justified by the outcome. These projects should be carefully evaluated in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

Regional funding for integration often goes unspent or is distributed only after lengthy delays

The national framework for integration is supported by specific regional legislations that regulate the actions to be planned and implemented within the regional territory in the field of social integration. Some regions experience difficulties to effectively use their resources. Overall, in 2010, of EUR 31 million budgeted by the regions, only 18% was disbursed, with an additional 58% assigned to projects but not actually transferred. These untransferred funds go back to the general budget if not paid out in two years. Further, if the remaining funds (24% in 2010) go unspent, they are effectively lost. The reasons for this situation are not clear, but may include low capacity to manage procurement, weakness of service providers, or mistargeted funds directed at areas which do not require intervention. A better identification of cost-effective integration projects and the extension of effective projects duration to a minimum of three years should contribute to simplify the allocation of funds by reducing the constant need to search for new tenders. Regions which are unable to spend should receive more support to deal with administrative challenges, and if even then unable to spend, their funds should be shifted to regions which are able to realise projects. Further, to address situations of chronically delayed payments should be addressed, as well as the issue of the high administrative burden of integration projects. In this regard, a national body should be given not only a co-ordination role but could also have means to monitor integration expenditures and to intervene to support local authorities to effectively spend or redirect integration funds.

The integration contract needs to be assessed

The integration contract introduced by Italy in 2012 took a novel approach compared with similar contracts in other OECD countries, using a bonus/malus points system. Whether this is effective in improving integration outcomes and in ensuring that immigrants most likely to integrate are granted permits has not been evaluated. In light of the central role of this instrument, information on the number of points at renewal should be collected and analysed in terms of the determinants of passing and failing scores, and its relation with effective integration.

The framework for anti-discrimination needs to be strengthened

There is evidence of discrimination in the labour market – including selective layoffs – and other domains such as housing. The public discourse is not welcoming for immigrants. Despite a legal framework for anti-discrimination, application is infrequent: recourse to the courts is rare and there are few sanctions. The national discrimination body, UNAR, collects and follows cases of discrimination, but is still not widely known among migrants and cannot represent plaintiffs in court. UNAR should be given more operational independence and the ability to represent cases in court. More targeted information regarding immigrants' rights and legal recourse, especially for workplace discrimination should also be provided.

Regional differences in access to benefits should be eliminated

Regions currently apply different residence and eligibility criteria for certain public benefits. This may create the risk of benefit-shopping and distort mobility patterns. To avoid this, access criteria should be harmonised nationally.

Set the integration of immigrant offspring as a top priority

The high rate of early school leavers among immigrant children is a major risk factor

Already in 2001, almost 20% of the immigrant youth had left school without a diploma. This is particularly a risk for those who arrive late, as adolescents. On average, in 2012/13 almost 40% of the immigrant students were at least one year behind in their studies compared with the usual grade at their age, which represents a further risk factor for dropout.

The low educational outcomes of young migrants trained in Italy and of native-born children of immigrants require special attention

Half of the foreigners aged 15 to 34 who arrived in Italy between 6 and 15, who represent the bulk of the youngsters with a foreign background, have a level of education at best equivalent to lower secondary, compared with 22% of the Italian young adults. The transition from lower to secondary school is a difficult step for students with an immigrant background, especially for those who arrived at a late age. The socio-economic background of the family only partly explains the gap with native students. Many students are placed in classes with younger classmates and this may contribute to their discouragement and likelihood to drop out. Larger financial support to local initiatives that significantly improve students' proficiency in Italian, and support to schools in terms of allocation of hours of Italian as a second language would contribute to improve the situation.

Encourage earlier family reunification and accelerate procedures would reduce late arrival and associated school delay

Late arrival of immigrant children negatively affects educational outcomes of immigrants coming from countries where the educational system is less performing than in Italy. It is necessary to reduce delays in the family reunification procedure, possibly by assisting with applications and documentation, and to give incentives to families to bring their children earlier, in time to learn Italian in school.

After-school programmes would especially help immigrant children

The Italian school days ends in the early afternoon in most cases and homework loads are high. Immigrant children are rarely helped with their homework, and, along with other lower income children, are less likely to have after-school activities organised. After-school programmes would help address this gap with native-born students. After-school programmes would also be the appropriate venue for language support, rather than placing immigrant children in classes with younger students.

Incentives to complete lower secondary education should be provided to all children arrived before the age of 18 and who plan to settle in Italy

Many immigrant children arrive at the end of mandatory schooling, at age 15 or 16, often because their family hopes they will start working immediately. In light of their limited language skills and low familiarity with Italian institutions, this group faces particular challenges in the labour market. Ensuring that they attend school requires more financial and staff resources for schools which receive newly arrived immigrant children

and stronger incentives for schools to provide them support. This also requires to reinforce participation to CTP activities and to increase staff and financial resources dedicated to these structures. Provided that these conditions are met, incentives such as more favourable conditions in issuing long-term permits should be provided to immigrant children arrived before the age of 18 to achieve a minimal level of education.

More guidance should be provided to families in the education system and post-graduation labour market prospects, particularly prior to the orientation at the end of lower secondary education

Immigrant students arrived before the age of 18 and, to a lesser extent, native-born immigrant offspring are predominantly enrolled in vocational programmes, which is not, in itself, a problem. However, evidence shows that few students enrolled in a vocational programme participated in orientation initiatives before enrolling in this kind of programme. Choice is often driven by different family expectations as well as by a desire to rapidly access the labour market. More effective school orientation within the Italian system, notably at the end of lower secondary education, should be provided to both students and families to help them choosing the school pathway that best suits their competences and aspirations.

More bridges should be created to allow students to continue for a fourth or a fifth year after completing a vocational programme

A recent survey conducted by ISFOL showed that more than 20% of immigrant and native-born students with foreign-born parents were interested in pursuing post-secondary training after finishing a vocational training qualification. However, only seven regions currently offer the possibility to continue for a fourth year, and only two to complete a fifth year. Raising the vocational training system to this level across different regions would be beneficial to immigrant students who are an increasing part of the student body in vocational secondary education.

The school-to-work transition occurs in a difficult context both for native- and foreign-born youngsters

The school-to-work transition, and more generally the labour market outcomes of youngsters with a foreign background, have to be seen in a context of high youth unemployment. However, a third of the immigrants aged 15-24 are at risk to be marginalised, as they are neither in employment nor education nor training (so-called NEET). This is one of the highest rates among OECD countries (after Belgium, Spain, Greece and Turkey) and compares with 20% among the native youngsters.

Citizenship should be facilitated and its uptake encouraged

Access to citizenship helps immigrants improve their labour market outcomes and appears associated with investment in human capital. Naturalisation criteria are rather restrictive in Italy relative to other OECD countries. Nonetheless, recent legislation requires municipalities to inform immigrant minors of their right to apply for naturalisation upon turning 18. Many minors were unaware of this right and failed to take advantage of this one-year application window (recently extended to three years). Municipalities should build on good practice in this area to contact minors and their families and encourage naturalisation, as laid out by recent reforms.



From:
Jobs for Immigrants (Vol. 4)
Labour Market Integration in Italy

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264214712-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2014), "Assessment and recommendations", in *Jobs for Immigrants (Vol. 4): Labour Market Integration in Italy*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264214712-4-en>

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