Introduction to Italy

From the World Factbook

BACKGROUND

Italy became a nation-state in 1861 when the regional states of the peninsula, along with Sardinia and Sicily, were united under King Victor EMMANUEL II. An era of parliamentary government came to a close in the early 1920s when Benito MUSSOLINI established a Fascist dictatorship. His alliance with Nazi Germany led to Italy's defeat in World War II.

A democratic republic replaced the monarchy in 1946 and economic revival followed. Italy is a charter member of NATO and the European Economic Community (EEC). It has been at the forefront of European economic and political unification, joining the Economic and Monetary Union in 1999. Persistent problems include sluggish economic growth, high youth and female unemployment, organized crime, corruption, and economic disparities between southern Italy and the more prosperous north.
GEOGRAPHY

Location: Southern Europe, a peninsula extending into the central Mediterranean Sea, northeast of Tunisia

Note: Strategic location dominating central Mediterranean as well as southern sea and air approaches to Western Europe.

Area: 301,340 sq. km (country comparison to the world:72)

Note: This includes Sardinia and Sicily.

Coastline: 7,600km

Climate: Predominantly Mediterranean; Alpine in far north; hot and dry in south

Terrain: Mostly rugged and mountainous; some plains, coastal lowlands

Natural resources: Coal, mercury, zinc, potash, marble, barite, asbestos, pumice, fluorspar, feldspar, pyrite (sulfur), natural gas and crude oil reserves, fish, arable land

Public Domain
2015
Natural hazards: Regional risks include landslides, mudflows, avalanches, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, flooding; land subsidence in Venice

Note: Significant volcanic activity; Etna (elev. 3,330 m), which is in eruption as of 2010, is Europe’s most active volcano; flank eruptions pose a threat to nearby Sicilian villages; Etna, along with the famous Vesuvius, which remains a threat to the millions of nearby residents in the Bay of Naples area, have both been deemed Decade Volcanoes by the International Association of Volcanology and Chemistry of the Earth’s Interior, worthy of study due to their explosive history and close proximity to human populations.

PEOPLE AND SOCIETY

Nationality: Italian

Ethnic groups: Italian (includes small clusters of German-, French-, and Slovene-Italians in the north and Albanian-Italians and Greek-Italians in the south)

Languages: Italian (official), German (parts of Trentino-Alto Adige region are predominantly German-speaking), French (small French-speaking minority in Valle d’Aosta region), Slovene (Slovene-speaking minority in the Trieste-Gorizia area)

Religion: Christian 80% (overwhelmingly Roman Catholic with very small groups of Jehovah’s Witnesses and Protestants), Muslim (about 800,000 to 1 million), Atheist and Agnostic 20%

Population: 61,680,122 (July 2014 est.)

Population growth: 0.3% (2014 est.)

Birth rate: 8.84 births/1,000 population (2014 est.)

Death rate: 10.1 deaths/1,000 population (2014 est.)

Urban population: 68.8% of total population (2014)

Rate of urbanization: 0.39% annual rate of change (2010-15 est.)

Major urban areas: ROME (capital) 3.697 million; Milan 3.094 million; Naples 2.207 million; Turin 1.761 million; Palermo 855,000; Bergamo 830,000 (2014)

Physicians density: 3.76 physicians/1,000 population (2012)

Education expenditures: 4.3% of GDP (2011)

Literacy: 99.2%

School life expectancy (primary to tertiary education): 16 years
GOVERNMENT

Country name:

Conventional long form: Italian Republic

Conventional short form: Italy

Local long form: Repubblica Italiana

Local short form: Italia

Former: Kingdom of Italy

Government type: Republic

Capital: Rome

Geographic coordinates: 41 54 N, 12 29 E

Time difference: UTC+1 (6 hours ahead of Washington, DC, during Standard Time)
Independence: 17 March 1861 (Kingdom of Italy proclaimed; Italy was not finally unified until 1870)

National Holiday: Republic Day, 2 June (1946)

Legal system: Civil law system; judicial review of legislation under certain conditions in Constitutional Court

Suffrage: 18 years of age; universal except in senatorial elections, where minimum age is 25

Chief of state: President Sergio MATTARELLA (3 February 2015); Giorgio NAPOLITANO resigned 14 January 2015

Head of government: Prime Minister Matteo RENZI (since 22 February 2014); note - the prime minister is referred to as the President of the Council of Ministers

Flag description: Three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), white, and red; design inspired by the French flag brought to Italy by Napoleon in 1797; colors are those of Milan (red and white) combined with the green uniform color of the Milanese civic guard

National symbols: White, five-pointed star (Stella d'Italia); national colors: red, white, green

National Anthem: "Il Canto degli Italiani" (The Song of the Italians)

Note: adopted 1946; the anthem, originally written in 1847, is also known as "L'Inno di Mameli" (Mameli's Hymn), and "Fratelli D'Italia" (Brothers of Italy)