

# ITALY

GP 57,226,000 ~ JP 30,000

## Demography

Italy's widely dispersed Jewish community has, at different periods of its long history, been present in scores of cities and towns across the country. Italian Jewry is today concentrated in Rome (15,000) and Milan (10,000). Smaller communities are situated in Turin (1,600), Florence (1,400), and Leghorn (Livorno) (1,000). A few hundred Jews are also organized in Bologna, Genoa, Trieste, and Venice, and smaller numbers of Jews are found in Alessandria, Ancona, Asti, Ferrara, Gorizia, Mantua, Merano, Modena, Naples, Padua, Parma, Perugia, Pisa, Siena, Spezia, Vercelli, Verona, Viareggio, and Casale Monferrato.

A number of eastern European Ashkenazim, mainly Holocaust survivors, found sanctuary in the country after World War II. In more recent years, some 3,000 Libyan Jews who moved to Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s have bolstered Italian Jewry.

## History

The experiences of Jews who have lived in the lands known today as Italy have been precursors of the experiences of Diaspora Jewry throughout the world.

In its early years, anti-Semitism did not characterize Benito Mussolini's Fascist movement. Indeed, some Italian Jews were enthusiastic Fascists until the alliance of Italy with Germany, and even after it. Nazi pressure to implement discrimination against Jews was for the most part ignored or enacted half-heartedly. The appearance of anti-Semitism in Mussolini's speeches, however, was a hint of the tragedy that was to come. In 1931 there were 48,000 Jews in Italy. By 1939 up to 4,000 had been baptized, and some thousands more chose to emigrate, leaving 35,000 Jews in the country. During the war, Jews were interned in labor camps in Italy, but when the Germans effectively occupied the north of the country in 1943, the threat to Jews became critical. In spite of German efforts to deport Italian Jewry to death camps, the willingness of much of the Italian population to shelter Jews meant that many Nazi efforts were stymied. By the end of the war, the Nazis and some Italian Fascists had murdered 7,750 Jews.

## Community

The community's organization, the Unione delle Comunita Ebraiche Italiane, is directly involved in providing religious, cultural, and educational services, and, significantly, represents the community politically. Individual communities and associations are independent but maintain firm cooperative links with the Rome-based union. Until Israel and the Vatican secured a diplomatic accord in 1993, the union was a critical link between the Catholic Church, Israel, and world Jewry. International organizations such as B'nai B'rith and WIZO are active in the main cities in Italy, and a number of them also provide for youth (B'nai Akiva and Hashomer Hatzair), welfare, and cultural concerns.

Pope John Paul II's visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome in 1986 marked the rapprochement between Jews and the Vatican.

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the town of Ladispoli, near Rome, was used by the JDC as a transit station for Soviet Jewish emigrants. During the 1970's and 1980's, Italy also became a focus of pro-Palestinian activity, and a number of huge rallies took place during the Intifada to protest Israeli policies. Pope John Paul II's visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome in 1986 marked the rapprochement between Jews and the Vatican.

## **Culture and Education**

Jewish schools are established in Rome, Milan, Florence, Genoa, Livorno, and Trieste. The community tends to use the primary-level schools at a high rate (more than 60% of the Jewish children in Rome attend) and sends its children to regular schools for secondary education. Advanced studies-including those for rabbinical students-are available in institutes in Rome, Turin and Milan.

The monthly Shalom is the Roman community's key publication, while its counterpart, the Bollettino delle Comunita, is published in Milan. Numerous organizations have their own publications. La Rassegna di Israel is an academic quarterly. Milan and Rome have Jewish cultural clubs for the community-at-large and for youth.

## **Religious Life**

The continual presence of a Jewish community in Rome for more than two millennia has produced a distinctive tradition of prayer-comparable to the Sephardi or Ashkenazi traditions-called the Nusach Italki (Italian rite). A number of synagogues in Rome, including the Great Synagogue, follow this tradition. The nusach has its own order of prayer and tunes. Most synagogues in Italy are Sephardi.

The Italian chief rabbi officiates at the Great Synagogue of Rome and heads the country's rabbinical council. Kosher food is available, and there are kosher restaurants in Bologna, Florence, Milan, and Rome.

## **Israel**

Israel and Italy enjoy full diplomatic relations. In addition to its embassy in Rome, Israel maintains a consulate general in Milan. Since 1994 Israel has also had an ambassador to the Holy See. Aliya: Since 1948, 4,170 Italian Jews have emigrated to Israel.

## **Sites**

The Venician ghetto, with its remaining synagogue and museum, is a prime Jewish tourist attraction. The catacombs in Rome include a number of Jewish tombs, and the Arch of Titus (opposite the Roman Forum) depicts the destruction of Jerusalem. The remains of a 4th-century synagogue can be seen in Ostia Antica, near Rome, constructed on the site of a synagogue from the 1st century b.c.e. Jewish history museums are found in Rome (where the city's ghetto can be visited in the San Angelo district), as well as in Venice, Casale Menferrato, and Asti.