
UNIT 33 ITALIAN DIASPORA

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33.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to better understand the following:

- The size, trends, and factors of emigration from Italy.
- The history and features of the Italian diaspora.
- The significance of Italian Diasporic cultural contributions

33.2 INTRODUCTION

Italy is located in Southern Europe, which shares land borders with France, Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, and the enclaved microstates of Vatican City and San Marino. Due to its central geographic location, it has been home to ethnic groups of German, French, Slovene Italians in the north and Albanian-Italians and Greek Italians. Italy is the third-most populous member state of the European Union with around sixty million inhabitants. Italy has a long history of large-scale emigrations to various parts of the world. Among the European countries, the Italian Diaspora is considered one of the old and prominent diasporas globally. There are several factors responsible for the emigration from Italy. However, the nature of emigration was voluntary. Therefore, it has significant trends, elements, features, and significance, which we will further discuss in this Unit.

33.3 DIASPORA MOVEMENTS AND EUROPE

The Europeans have emigrated to different parts of the world throughout history. However, Europe has become a continent of immigrants since the

early 20th century. The trends of international migration from, towards and within Europe have undergone significant changes over the years. International movements have become more globalized, mobile, connected and distant in the 21st century. Consequently, highly diverse diaspora communities rose in terms of origin, ethnic and religious identities, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, primarily in the North, West and South parts of Europe. Considering the status of the immigrants, Europe used to welcome- regular, irregular, smuggled and trafficked immigrants- which does affect their legal status and integration process in the receiving countries of Europe.

Historically, the Diaspora communities are found among those people who were stateless ethnic communities within European countries. During the late 18th century, many European people emigrated to the United States, Canada, Brazil, Chile, Australia, Siberia and other countries.. On the other hand, many European immigrants came from Germany, Ireland, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, France and Russia. In contemporary times, the emigration of people from Europe can be seen within European countries, like internal mobility (intra-EU mobility) or mobility within the Euro-asian Union. In recent times, the European migrant crisis, also known as the refugee crisis, has become a critical issue in many European countries. Many refugees and asylum-seekers moved to European countries from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the European Union countries predominantly, France, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom, have the most significant numbers of refugees in 2014.

33.4 EMIGRATION FROM ITALY

Italy is known as one of the most culturally and economically developed countries and has the eighth-largest economy by its Gross Domestic Product. However, there has been a long history of emigration from Italy. Since the 19th Century, Italy has been a country of emigration, with millions of Italians migrating to America, Europe, North Africa and the Middle East soon after the unification process. The nature of emigration has been voluntary, which has been influenced by economic and political reasons.

The emigration from Italy has been accounted as the most considerable voluntary emigration of human beings in history, with 13 million emigrants from 1883 to 1915. After the Unification of Italy in 1861, the crises in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors drastically reduced the incomes for the rural people, which triggered the first migration flow from Italy. The downfall of the economy and lack of job opportunities led to the increasing outflow of people from Italy.

Italy's political Unification in 1861 did not influence scholars' resort to the diaspora paradigm to define the experience of Italian migrants. In the context of Italians, Gabriel Sheffer's distinction between stateless and state-linked diasporas can be aptly applied to the experience of Italians (Luconi, 2011). The Italian migrants, thus, are considered as diaspora without a state of origin before 1861 and became a diaspora with a state of origin following the 1861 birth of the Kingdom of Italy. However, Donna R. Gabaccia identified Italian diaspora both before and after the peninsula Unification (Gabaccia, 2000). Moreover, although historian Zeffiro Ciuffoletti has contended that the Kingdom of Italy

was a state without a nation' because of the survival of localistic identities among its citizens in the post-unification decades (Ciuffoletti, 1993), it could be more reasonably suggested that Italian emigrants continued to be 'stateless' people even after 1861 on the grounds of the alleged neglect of their government for the expatriates.

The emigration from Italy began along with Italy's unification which can be divided into three main phases. The first phase of emigration started from the 1860s to the end of the century, in which around seven million people emigrated from Italy to the other European countries. The reason for emigration was poverty, which increased due to the reducing rights on agricultural land under unification measures. During that time, most of Italy was a rural society with many small towns and agricultural farms, and there was no industrial growth seen to compel farmers to stay back in their homeland. Therefore, due to the lack of land management practices, the farmers and poor people started moving across borders to search for better income prospects and livelihoods. Another reason was an overpopulation of Southern Italy, which could be due to the socio-economic developments after the Unification. The demographic boom forced the youth population to emigrate to the developed countries, primarily to the United States of America.

The second phase of emigration started after the end of World War II and ended around 1980. Between this period, approximately 25 billion Italians left the country permanently. The third wave took place post-1990s. It was characterized by the socio-economic problems caused by the economic crisis and deterioration of employment condition. Between the 1990s to 2015, there have been over five million Italian citizens living outside Italy and over eighty million people around the world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

A third wave occurred due to the socio-economic problems caused by the fiscal crisis during the early 21st century, which affected the employment opportunities for the young population. The number of Italians abroad increased from 3,106,251 in 2006 to 4,636,647 in 2015, which grew by 49% within just ten years (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Over five million Italian citizens live outside Italy, and over 80 million people worldwide claim full or partial Italian ancestry.

33.5 HISTORY OF UNIFICATION OF ITALY AND ITS IMPACT ON MIGRATION

The Unification of Italy smashed down the feudal land system, which existed in South Italy since the Middle Ages, especially where land had been the absolute property of aristocrats, religious bodies of the King. Nevertheless, the breakdown of feudalism and redistribution of land did not necessarily lead to small farmers in the south getting land of their own or land they could work and make a profit. Many remained evicted, and plots grew smaller and smaller and less productive as the land was subdivided amongst heirs (Italian Diaspora, 2022).

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Italy, like practically all other European countries, experienced massive population losses due to widespread emigration. In comparison to other European countries, Italian emigration was

relatively low until the 1870s (European Emigration, n.d.). Up until the 1880s, Italy was not typical when it comes to the emigration destination in comparison to most of its European neighbours: almost a third of all Italian emigrants stayed on the European continent, preferring to emigrate towards neighbouring countries of destinations rather than opting to settle in any countries across the European continent.

The large-scale migration of Italians, which also often referred to as the 'Italian diaspora', began initially around the Unification of Italy in 1861. Modern-day Italy came into being after the Unification of the Kingdom of the Two States. By 1870, Italy had a total population of around 24 million inhabitants; however, by 1990, it increased to over 32 million inhabitants (European Emigration, n.d.).

In the initial stage, the emigration process was not mainly regulated by the Italian government. Like other European countries, there were emigration agents who took advantage of the impoverished and unaware migrants. In 1888, the first special migration law was approved in Italy. This way, many emigration agencies were under state control. Until 1901, the Commissariat of Emigration controlled all aspects of emigration; from fixed ticket costs to granting licenses to carriers, health inspections, etc.

The most important Italian ports were Genoa and Naples on the west coast of Italy, Palermo in Sicily for southern Italy and Venice in the northeast of Italy in the Adriatic Sea. Venice was excluded as an official boarding port by the Commissariat of Emigration in 1903. The port of Naples gained particular importance in the early 20th century when in 1907, more passengers left Europe for North America from Naples than from the Port of Liverpool in the same year. These emigrants were mainly Italians but also from Greece, Turkey and Syria.

Check your progress I

Note: Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

1. Which are the central destination countries of the Italian Diaspora in the first two phases?

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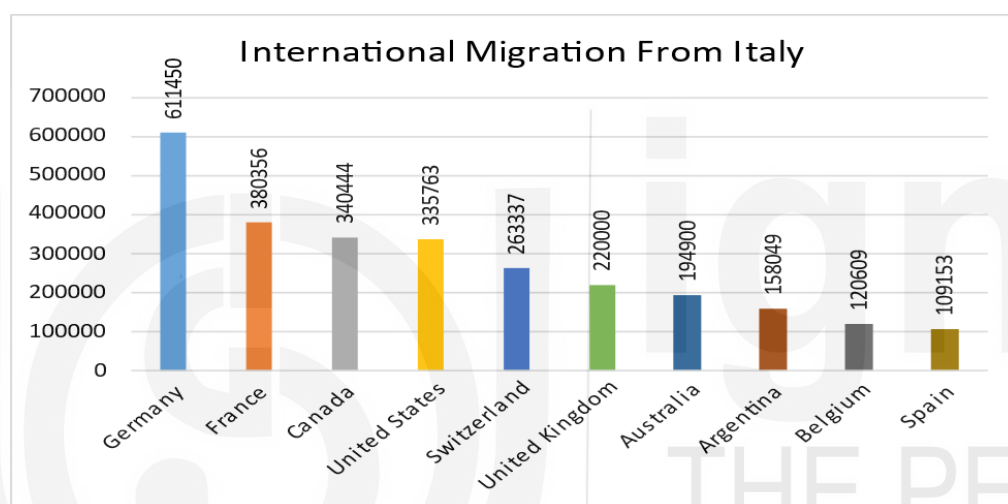
2. What are the significant changes between the first and third phase of Italian migration?

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33.6 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF ITALIAN DIASPORA

The number of migrants from Italy scattered across many countries globally has significantly increased since 1990 as per the United Nations data. However, the growth rate of Italian migration indicates a downwards trend in 2019 (World Bank, 2019). Undoubtedly, the movement of Italian migrants was more pronounced in the most developed regions and high-income group countries. Interestingly, Europe has been the foremost destination for Italian migrants, followed by America, Africa and the Gulf, which has a substantial number of Italian migrants' settlements (World Bank, 2017). Typically, Asia remained the least preferred country of destination for Italian migrant communities.

Table 1: International Migration from Italy (2017)



(Source: bilateral migration matrix 2017, the world bank, 2017)

A. Europe

Italian migration towards Germany and France have been increasing since the end of the 19th century. Germany and France are the two most preferable destinations for Italian emigrants. Earlier, Italian immigration to modern France (late 18th to the early 20th centuries) came primarily from Northern Italy and then from Central Italy, mainly to the bordering southeastern region of Provence (Italy Emigration and Immigration, 2022). In this context, Germany is a relatively new country of destination for the Italian migrants. After World War II, many immigrants from Southern Italy emigrated to France, primarily settling down in industrialized areas of France, such as Lorraine, Paris and Lyon (Italian Diaspora, 2022).

B. The Americas

America has been the top country of destination for Italian migrants as well as the Italian diaspora. Since late 19th century until the 1930s, the United States of America was the leading destination for Italian immigrants, with most first settling in the New York metropolitan area, but with other major Italian American communities developing in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, San Francisco and New Orleans. Most

Italian immigrants came from the Southern regions of Italy, namely Campania, Apulia and Sicily (Italian Diaspora, 2022). A few Italian immigrants to the USA were small landowners. Italian Americans are known for their close-knit communities with ethnic pride (Italian Diaspora, 2022). They have been highly influential in the development of modern American culture, particularly in the country's Northeastern region. Italian diasporic communities have often been actively engaged with American culture, art, and cinema.

Furthermore, a substantial number of Italian immigrants' influx to Canada started in the early 20th century when over 60,000 Italians emigrated to Canada between 1900 and 1913 (Italian Diaspora, 2022). Almost 1,000,000 Italians reside in the Province of [Ontario](#), making it a robust global representation of the Italian diaspora (Italian Diaspora, 2022). The city of [Vaughan](#), just outside [Toronto](#), and the town of [King](#), just north of Vaughan, have the two most significant concentrations of Italians in Canada, at over 30% of the total population of each community (Italian Diaspora, 2022).

C. Australia

Italian diaspora comprised the sixth largest ethnic group in Australia, with 4.6% of the population (Census-Australia, 2016). Italians emigrated to Australia to seek better employment opportunities and more comfortable life. Between 1840s and 1850s, the number of Italian migrants of farmworker background increased who came for economic reasons. The massive influx of Italians to Australia during the post-World War II period significantly changed the face of Australian society and arguably contributed to the expiry of the White Australian policy. It paved the way for the more progressive policies of multiculturalism in the 1980s, which eventually led to the opening up of immigration to Australia. In recent times, a significant number of young skilled and professional Italians emigrate to Australia for better employment options and livelihood purposes.

D. South Africa

South Africa has been the third-largest destination for Italian migrants. However, Italians did not emigrate to South Africa in significant numbers, but there has been a continuous process of Italian immigration with a substantial impact on its economy and society. The official record of Italians in South Africa was noticed before World War II. Before the Second World War, a few Italian immigrants came to South Africa; however, the numbers had become quite impactful during World War II, when Italians were captured in Italian East Africa. They were needed to be detained as prisoners of war (POWs). South Africa was the perfect destination, and the first POWs arrived in Durban in 1941 (Italian Diaspora, 2022).

E. Libya

Libya was one of the important destinations for Italian migrant settlers during the Second World War in 1940, constituting about 18% of the total population in Italian Libya. The Italians in Libya resided in most major cities like Tripoli (37% of the city was Italian), Benghazi (31%) and Hun (3%) (Italian Diaspora, 2022). The numbers started declining after second World War II. Notably, a year after Muammar Gaddafi's military coup, most of Libya's Italian residents were expelled from the country in 1971. However, nearly 9 lakh Italian settlers

F. Somalia

Somalia has been a recipient country of Italian migrant settlers. There were nearly 50,000 Italian Somali settlers during World War II, constituting about 5% of the total population in Somaliland. The Italians resided in major cities in the central and southern parts of the territory, with around 10,000 living in the capital Mogadishu (Italian Diaspora, 2022).

33.7 DEBATE ON ITALIAN DIASPORA

Italy has a critical history of mass emigration, which resulted in the formation of diaspora communities in many countries. Italian diaspora is spread in the USA, Argentina, Germany, France, Canada, Switzerland, and few African countries. Argentina has the most prominent Italian population outside of Italy, with over one million Italians residing in the South American country as of 2019.

Italian diasporas possess strong linkages and socio-cultural ties in the destination countries. Diaspora scholars have raised various features over time in the literature. Cohen (1997) classified Italian migration as forming a labour diaspora in his typology of diasporas. He rated the Italian migrants as opportunity seekers who were promoted by the need to seek prosperity beyond the limited opportunities in their homeland.

It has been a constant movement and outflow of individuals—often the same persons at different stages in their lives—across the country's borders, rather than a worldwide diasporic dispersal of people. Confining the concept of diaspora to the Jewish experience of forced exile alone appears to be a pretty restrictive use of the concept, even though Jews do fit neatly into the various ranges of the paradigm. As a result, the few Italians who were able to seek refuge abroad—particularly in the United States—after the 1938 Fascist anti-Semitic law can be correctly designated as part of a larger diaspora, the Jewish diaspora (Luconi, 2011).

By highlighting the complexity of the factors that prompted the three different waves of Italian migration during the early 19th century, Gabaccia (1984) extended the discussion that there has been a plurality in Italian diaspora. She clarified her point by giving instances of widespread Italian migration to the different regions, continents, and countries of the world. Despite however, she argued that it was a 'diaspora that never was'. Luconi (2011) studied further and rejected the notion of diaspora arguing that the term is not justified because the broad pattern of Italian migration has been motivated by many varied reasons, which has not been routinely characterized by trauma and has raised more regional, localistic and family-oriented communities than national ones.

In contrast to this, Mark Choate (2000) used the concept of 'emigrant nation' in Italian emigration and focused on the affiliation of the emigrant Italians with Italy as a nation-state. Notably, the term "diaspora" was rejected by the Italian government because it emphasised the meaning and references of "defeat and decline. He explored how Italian administrations were required to nurture their nationals abroad as an 'expatriate network' and cherished the idea of a 'global nation'.. Concerning the existence in the Middle East and North Africa, the

Italians have been mostly typecast under a 'colonial framework', although it has been debated in various forms. Previous works highlighted the contributions of individual Italians in public service, economic life and cultural production in Egypt and produced accounts of their considerable socio-economic achievements.

Italy's political Unification in 1861 has not affected scholars' understanding to characterize the experience of Italian migrants in the purview of the diaspora paradigm (Luconi, 2011). However, it seems like, as in the case of Jews before and after the establishment of the state of Israel, Gabriel Sheffer's distinction between 'stateless' and 'state-linked' diasporas can be aptly applied to the experience of Italians (Sheffer 2003, 148–79). In other words, they were a diaspora without a state of origin before 1861 and became a diaspora with a state of origin following the 1861 birth of the Kingdom of Italy. Indeed, Donna R. Gabaccia has identified Italian diasporas both before and after the Unification of the peninsula (Gabaccia, 2000). Moreover, although historian Zeffiro Ciuffoletti has contended that the Kingdom of Italy was a 'state without a nation' because of the survival of localistic identities among its citizens in the post-unification decades (Ciuffoletti, 1993), it could be more reasonably suggested that Italian emigrants continued to be stateless people even after 1861 on the grounds of the alleged neglect of their government for the expatriates (Tirabassi 2003, 70).

As one of the latter objected, the Patria—namely the native country- 'has never done anything for us' because it 'belongs to the masters! The poor people's Patria does not exist' (Margariti 1994, 40, 55). The concept of diaspora widely referred to the Italian expatriates in the decades of mass migration, when an Italian state had already been established and the great bulk of the émigrés belonged to the working class. However, the use of this term has been extended to other stages of the Italian people's experience abroad. Most notably, the Italian entrepreneurs struggling for a share of the worldwide market in the present-day age of globalization are allegedly part of a diasporic business community network even if few of these individuals have left their homeland to relocate somewhere else for good, while a large majority of them have confined themselves to spending most of their time in countries other than their native one on business trips (Corradi and Pozzi, 1995). To some historians, the Italian entrepreneurs' diasporic experiences would date back at least to the Renaissance (Caglioti, 2009).

According to Piero Bassetti (2002), diaspora is a pivotal component of the Italian identity that had characterized the inhabitants of the peninsula even before they achieved the political unification of their country (Luconi, 2011). Also, in his opinion, the diaspora has involved the transborder mobility not only of the Italian people but also of the nation's values and culture over the centuries (Bassetti, 2002). To many scholars, the concept of diaspora is a practical notion for understanding the Italian experience, especially in the case of the emigration to the United States (Luconi, 2011). Italian Americans have maintained a national identity of their own, which is a component of a diaspora. Indeed, Italian Americans do seem to comply with the three paramount criteria—dispersion, homeland orientation, and connection to the motherland—to fully qualify for a diasporic status (Luconi, 2011). According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, about 16 million U.S. residents claimed Italian ancestry in 2000, which marked a 7 per cent increase over the number that had listed the same ethnic

background ten years earlier (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002, table QT-02). The proliferation of Italy-related websites, the broadcast of Rai International in the United States, and the introduction of low airfares to Italy potentially let Americans of Italian background feed their interest in Italy and keep in touch with their ancestral land around the clock (Tirabassi 2003, 81–86).

33.8 SALIENT FEATURES OF ITALIAN DIASPORA

Like other diaspora communities, the Italian diaspora is highly connected, affiliated and interlinked with their homeland. The concept of 'homeland' that Italians envisioned was indigenous space, ethnicity, culture. Italy has also witnessed both 'old diaspora' and 'new diaspora'. As discussed earlier, the historical trends of Italian emigration constituted the traits of the old diaspora.

In contrast, the emigration that took place during the 1990s can be understood as the new diaspora. In the post-1990s, the Italian migration has been seen as emigration of educated, skilled and professionals diaspora. The key features of Italian migration to Europe.

1. Italian emigration as 'highly skilled mobility': The young, highly educated and skilled women and men from Italy have experienced several years of economic distress. They have been seeking to make their transition from study to work and to build their professional life. Since the last few decades, Italy has been experienced labour market breakdown, growing unemployment rates, economic recession, austerity, impoverishment, inequalities, and local professional development opportunities (Bartolini et. al. 2016). Therefore, many youths decided to try their talents and expertise in other countries, searching for better and more diverse options and higher returns on their human capital investment. Studies (OECD, 2013b; Papademetriou, 2015) have already highlighted that the new Southern European emigrants have been motivated by expectations for better career prospects and quality of life at their destination. Ironically, it is also found in many studies that the share of skilled workers' mobility from European countries, primarily, Italy has been less than the developing countries.
2. Challenge of low birth rate and ageing population: Ageing is a significant challenge facing developed countries. Italy has the largest proportion of the elderly population in Europe. Like most European countries, the pattern of this process is mainly linked to the fertility fluctuation which occurred during the second half of the 20th century. Other factors such as survival expectancy and international migration also affect age structure. The phenomenon is related to the progressive 'ageing from above' (increasing longevity), and especially to the 'ageing from the bottom,' i.e., low birth rate, which was neither compensated nor significantly slowed by the effect of migration. However, the problem of an ageing population and the low birth rate does affect the trend and scope of migration. On the one hand, the ongoing reduction of mortality at all ages has increasingly involved the elderly, shifting forward the limit of life duration. On the other hand, the positive net migration has mitigated the process by sustaining the active age population and positively influencing fertility levels (Mazzola et. al; 2015).

3. Remittances, Trade and Diaspora Effects: Diaspora effects stem from the formation of diaspora networks of migrants that maintain strong links with their communities of origin, thus strengthening international relationships among home and host countries. This also impacts the development of both societies and economies. The workers' remittances and investment of the Italian diaspora do affect its economic growth and development. Over the years, the remittances inflows in Italy have been increasing from 4, 092 US \$ Million (2005) to 7 975 US\$ Million (2010), which further grew to 9,609 US \$ Million (2015) to 10, 459 US \$ Million (2019) (The World Bank, 2020). This shows the active diaspora engagement of Italian migrant workers and diaspora communities back to their homeland.

33.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF ITALIAN DIASPORIC CULTURE

Culture has been an essential dimension of the immigrant community in the destination country. The art, music, dance forms, tradition, and ethnicity, constituted an integral part of the Italian culture which became popular in the destination countries such as the United States of America during the nineteenth century. The historical and musical traditions of immigrants from Italy, especially from Southern Italy, primarily Naples and the area around the city are well known. Neapolitan music has been one of the most significant elements of Italian songs, which contributed to the history of the Italian American community. Because of its pronounced cultural autonomy and autarchy, the central tenet of Neapolitan song represents a musical microcosm in a century. The recurrent themes of this song refer to revolving around the eternal pain of the loss of love, a feeling associated with the beloved woman and the city itself. From the end of the nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century, the Neapolitan song found itself holding a peculiar position in the history of modern music and culture.

Notably, the invention of phonorecording allowed music to be accessible for the masses through a technologically driven cylinder and a flat disc. In this way, Neapolitan song rightfully entered the era of musical technology. Finally, it came fully alive in the transition phase and became a cultural hybrid. It went on to become a commodity of mass culture projected into the territories of the growing transnational culture.

Having achieved its most mature phase in the early years of the twentieth century, the Neapolitan song became a cultural experience much like the poetic experiments of Salvatore Di Giacomo, Libero Bovio, and Ferdinando Russo (Frasca, 2014). It perfectly represented the precise and apparent boundary between rural Italy, still absorbed by the centuries-old question of the national language, and a country strongly drawn toward modern urbanization as exemplified in the major European and American cities (Frasca, 2014).

Check your progress 2

Note: Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

4. What are the characteristics of Italian Migration?

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5. What is the role of Neapolitan music?

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33.10 LET US SUM UP

The story of the Italian diaspora is long and sometimes confused, a testament to how vast it is. The Italian immigration story is one of the most successful in history, an example of seeking a new life while maintaining one's roots abroad. The community has members all throughout the world, and its culture has been broadly accepted through time. Its enormously popular cuisine and its many variations, which can be found worldwide, are emblematic of its prosperity.

33.11 KEY WORDS

Neapolitan a native or inhabitant of Naples, Italy.

Patria one's native country or homeland.

33.12 REFERENCES / SELECTED READINGS

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33.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check your progress I.

1. The major destination of Italian Diaspora are Europe, America, South Africa and Oceania regions. According to the World Bank (2017), the choice of destination countries were Germany, France, United States of America, South Africa, Somalia and Libya.
2. The main difference between first and third wave of Italian emigration process lies in the cause of their emigration. The first wave of Italian emigration occurs due to poverty, overpopulation, and redundant agricultural land ownership. All such problems have forced the masses to leave their countries. On the other hand, the third wave of Italian emigration took place by the socio-economic problems caused by the fiscal crisis of the early 21st century. Due to joblessness and income sources, the young, skilled and educated people moved across their country. However, the nature of Italian emigration has been the most significant voluntary movement of the people

in history, unlike, mass expulsion of Jews.

Italian Diaspora

Check my progress: 2

3. Italian migration has been a continuous inflow and outflow of migrants rather than a global diasporic dispersal of people. Comparatively, the concept of the diaspora of the Jewish experience of forced exile, notion of diaspora has narrow application in the context of Italian diaspora. This is the country having almost equal proportion of in and out migration.
4. Neapolitan music has been one of the most significant elements of Italian songs, which contributed to the history of the Italian American community. The central tenet of the Neapolitan song represents a musical microcosm in a century and due to its pronounced characteristics of cultural autonomy and autarchy. The recurrent themes of this song referred to revolving around the eternal pain of the loss of love, a feeling associated with the beloved woman and the city itself.

