

## Italians in Canada in the 1990s

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### **Introduction**

In 1991, the number of persons in Canada with Italian ancestry surpassed the one millionmark, for the first time. Out of a total Canadian population of 27 million the number who had some Italian ancestry was 1,123,299 or four per cent of the total. After the English and French, only those with some German origin had a higher number than Italians.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1981, respondents to the Canadian census, are allowed to give more than one ancestry. Each ethnic origin is thus divided into single and multiple-origin. Single-origin, simply means that ones ethnic ancestors are all from the same group, while multiple-origin, means that at least one ancestor is from that particular group. In the case of Italians, of all who had some Italian ancestry, 382,533 (34 per cent) also had some other ancestry. The proportion has grown considerably, since it was only 14 per cent in 1981.

The proportion of persons in the multiple category, is an indication of the integration of a group, since, in Canada's multicultural society, it means that more and more people of different ethnic origins are inter-marrying. Generally, when considering characteristics of all Italians in 1991, those of multiple-origin, appear to be closer to the characteristics of the total Canadian population. This is not always necessarily a positive difference. For instance, single-origin Italians have better wage and total incomes and higher proportions owning their homes than those of multiple-origin. This difference is mainly due to the relatively large age-differences between singles and multiples, the latter being much younger.

One reason for this greater integration of Italians into Canadian society, is the fact that immigration from Italy to Canada, has literally ceased. At one time, Italy was a number one source of immigrants to Canada. In the period 1981 to 1991, the yearly average of persons from Italy to Canada was only 979. This is in sharp contrast to earlier decades. Between 1946-1951 the yearly average was 4,057, but in the following three decades (beginning 1951, 1961, 1971) yearly averages were: 25,081, 19,076 and 4,082. As fewer and fewer persons immigrate to Canada from Italy, the proportion born in Canada increases and they are acculturated to Canadian norms from birth.

In considering the characteristics of those with some Italian ancestry in 1991 we will compare Italians to the total population of Canada. Characteristics will be considered in the following descriptive areas: Geographic Location, Demography and, Immigration and Citizenship. This will be followed by an analysis of the degree of integration of Italians in terms of Religion, Language and Education, and an analysis of Labour-Force Activity, Incomes and Housing. In considering these areas, attention will be paid to the sex differences in characteristics. In many cases, females of Italian origin have integrated as much, if not more, than males.

## Descriptive characteristics

**Geographic location.** Ontario, remained the province of choice of Italians. While the province represented 37 per cent of the total population of Canada, of all with some Italian ancestry, 62 per cent lived in this province. The respective proportions for the provinces of Quebec and British Columbia were: 20 and 10 per cent. However, in Ontario and Quebec, the proportions of Italians of multiple-origin were about 6 per cent lower than the national average, while in British Columbia they were 6 per cent higher. In other words, the less Italians were concentrated, the higher the proportion with multiple-origins.

Despite mainly rural origins in Italy, Italians were very urbanized. Of all with some Italian ancestry, 85 per cent could be found in Census Metropolitan Areas (C.M.A.s). The comparable figure for the total Canadian population was 59 per cent. Toronto accounted for 41 per cent of Italians in C.M.A.s, while Montreal accounted for 22 per cent. Those of multiple-origin, were less likely to be living in large cities, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver accounting for just over half of this group.

**Demography.** As a whole, Italians had similar proportions to the total population of Canada in four age groups: 0-14; 15-19; 20-64 and 65+. (These groups correspond approximately to children, young adults, active population and retired.) These proportions for Canada were: 20, 7, 61 and 11 per cent. However, Italians of multiple-origin, were considerably different, proportions being respectively, 46, 9, 44 and 1 per cent. As pointed out earlier, many of the differences found between all Italians and those of multiple-origin, have to do with these age differences.

While the majority of persons in the 1991 census were either single or married, 5 per cent of the total Canadian population were divorced and 2 per cent separated. Montreal had the highest proportion in these two categories. Compared to the 7 per cent in these two categories for Canada, among all Italians the proportion was 4 per cent. However, the proportion was highest among Italians of multiple-origin, despite them being much younger. It should be noted that these figures simply state the proportion of a group who falls into these categories. When considering the number of persons divorced/separated per 1,000 ever married, Canada's rate was 137 while that of all Italians ever married was 86.

The definition of the family has undergone considerable change. In previous times, a family consisted of a mother, father and children. Today, family status includes 11 categories: 1. husbands, 2. wives, 3. males and 4. females in common-law relationships, 5. single male and 6. single female parents, 7. children in husband-wife families, 8. children in common-law families, 9. children living with a male lone parent 10. children living with a female lone parent and 11. singles living on their own.

In Canada, in 1991, 43 per cent of males and 42 per cent of females, were in husband-wife families. Around 5 per cent each of males and females were in common-law situations (as much as 9 per cent in Montreal) and while 1 per cent of males were lone parents this was 6 per cent of females. The remainder were children in these families or singles living on their own. These singles, were most likely to be found in the large cities. Italians were much more likely (10 per cent more) to be living in husband-wife families. Among multiples,

around half were children in husband-wife families. As with the total population, the highest proportion of common-law marriages (around 7 per cent ) were to be found in Montreal.

The two most common family sizes were: four-person (most likely father, mother and 2 children), 26 per cent and two-person (most likely both spouses) just under 24 per cent. Non-family members (singles) accounted for 15 per cent of the Canadian total, but only 10 per cent among all Italians. While 16 per cent of persons in Canada came from families of five or more persons, this was 20 per cent for all Italians.

Considering fertility (children born to females 15 years and over), about one third of all Canadian women have had no children, just over a quarter have had two children, but five per cent have had 5 or more children. Those living in metropolitan areas had highest proportions with no children (37 per cent). In general, these proportions were similar for Italians, except for those of multiple-origin: just under half had no children and only two per cent had 5 or more children.

**Immigration and citizenship.** We have already referred to the immigration patterns of Italians, in the introduction. By 1991, only 35 per cent of all with Italian ancestry, had been born abroad. Of all those born abroad, in 1991, 44 per cent had immigrated between 1951 and 1960, 36 per cent between 1961 and 1970 and 10 per cent between 1971 and 1980. In contrast, when considering all immigrants to Canada, only 19 per cent each had come in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, 24 per cent between 1971 and 1980 and 28 per cent since. In other words, while Canada continued to receive large numbers of immigrants these were no longer coming from places like Italy.

With regards to citizenship, in the Canadian population as a whole, 83 per cent were Canadian-born and 11 per cent had become naturalized. For Italians, these proportions were, respectively, 65 and 27 per cent. In other words, while 94 per cent of all persons in Canada were citizens, 92 per cent of Italians were citizens.

### **Integration characteristics**

While Geographic, Demographic and Immigration characteristics, describe a group and allow us to consider their situation within the context of the larger population, the characteristics that follow, show how the group has changed and, to a large extent, the degree to which they have become Canadians, similar to other Canadians.

When Italians started coming in large numbers, in the post-war period, they were a distinct group, characterized by their Catholic religion, their language (most having Italian as a mother tongue and almost all speaking Italian in the home, with few able to converse in either English or French) and their very low levels of education.

These factors played an important part in determining where the group fit into the Canadian social structure. On arrival they were largely destined for the low status and low-paying jobs. The degree of upward social mobility among the immigrant generation was almost non-existent, However, by 1991, the situation had changed drastically, and in many cases Italians were doing as well as, if not better than, many other groups. These changes are reflected in their labour-force activity, their occupations and their incomes, most of which

changed as a result of the great improvement in their levels of education.

**Religion, language, education.** As was to be expected, the majority of Italians professed the Catholic Religion. This is not surprising, since Catholicism is the major religious preference of all Canadians as well. In 1991, 46 per cent of Canadians were Catholic, 36 per cent Protestant, 6 per cent professed other religions and 12 per cent said they had no religion. However, not all Italians were Catholic. While 94 per cent of single-origin Italians were Catholic with 4 per cent being Protestant and 2 per cent stating that they had no religion, among multiple-origin Italians, these proportions were, respectively, 60, 23 and 15 per cent. Since multiple-origins is a reflection of marrying outside the group, it seems that when this occurs the numbers who remain Catholic drop considerably. It should also be noted that a larger proportion of Italians of multiple-origin than that of the total Canadian population, stated that they had no religion.

The Canadian census defines ones mother tongue as the language first learned at birth and still understood at the time of the census. Among all Canadians, 60 per cent had English as a mother tongue, 24 per cent had French, while 16 per cent (including 2 per cent Italian) had other mother tongues. Among all with some Italian ancestry, under half (47 per cent) said that their mother tongue was Italian. Of course, among those of single Italian origin, the proportion was much higher (69 per cent) but even here, 30 per cent had one of Canada's official languages as a mother tongue. The degree of integration of Italians is even more emphasized when we consider the proportions who could speak Italian. The relative proportions who could speak it were, 55 per cent for all with Italian ancestry, 79 per cent for those of single-origin and only 7 per cent of those of multiple-origin.

Naturally, these differences were reflected by language spoken in the home. A quarter of all Italians spoke their language in the home, compared to 37 per cent if they were of single-origin, but only one per cent of those of multiple-origin.

In all cases, Italians had little or no difficulty with Canada's official languages, only 7 per cent of single-origin could not converse in either English or French and this proportion was 0.2 per cent of those of multiple-origin.

There is concern in some circles that Italians are losing the language completely. In particular, newspapers and radio/television shows in Italian, depend on their audiences knowing the language. But the number is in constant decline. On the positive side, language has ceased to be a barrier to full participation in Canadian life, for a majority of Italian origin persons.

It should be noted, that in the areas of religion and of languages, there were few differences between the sexes. In the case of education, there were always slight differences in favour of males.

The education statistics refer only to persons aged 15 years and over. As a result, while around 80 per cent of total population and total Italian population were no longer attending school, this was only 69 per cent of the multiple Italian group, because of their younger average age. When considering total years of schooling, those having more than 13 years were around 30 per cent. However, there was a relatively strong contrast between single-origin and multiple-origin Italians. The proportion with more than 13 years was 25 per

cent for the former and 40 per cent for the latter.

These differences were reflected in the proportions going on to Post-Secondary education. For the total population of Canada, aged 15 and above years, the proportion was 47 per cent, for single-origin Italians it was 38 per cent but for those of multiple-origin it was as high as 57 per cent. In other words, the proportion of multiple-origin Italians going on to higher education was 10 per cent higher than that of the national average. The strongest differences between the sexes were to be found among single-origin Italians: seven per cent more males than females went on to higher education. While this difference in favour of males was just four per cent for the total population, it was just over one per cent for multiple-origin Italians.

Differences between the sexes were notable in fields of study, but Italians overall appeared to choose similar fields to all Canadians. The top five fields were: 1) Technical Trades, 2) Commerce and Business Administration, 3) Education, Recreation and Counselling, 4) Social Sciences and 5) Secretarial fields. Overall, while 41 per cent of males were in Technical Trades, this was only four per cent for females, the majority being in Secretarial (16 per cent more than males) and Education, Recreation and Counselling (10 per cent more). The number one choice for single-origin Italian males was Technical Trades (44 per cent) while Commerce and Business Administration was the first choice of single-origin Italian females (20 per cent). While still a number one choice for multiple-origin males, only 35 per cent were in Technical Trades, while Social Sciences, Education, Recreation and Counselling and Secretarial fields were first choices of multiple-origin females (around 13 per cent each).

**Labour-force activity, occupations, incomes and housing.** The proportion of persons 15 years and over, who were unemployed in 1991, was six per cent for all Canadians and for multiple-origin Italians. These proportions were very slightly lower for all and single-origin Italians. The majority of workers were in paid employment, only just over six per cent being self-employed, multiple origin Italians having the lowest proportion of self-employed (under five per cent). There were strong variations by sex: in the total population, the proportion of males in self-employment was double that of females and among single-origin Italians it was almost three times higher. Naturally, when it came to full or part-time employment there were strong differences by sex. In the total population, one fifth were part-time employees. Among males this was 12 per cent but 29 per cent of females. Total and single-origin Italians had also around one-fifth in part-time employment, with the proportion for females being over twice the proportion of males. Among multiple-origin Italians, one quarter were in part-time employment (no doubt, a good many younger people had difficulties getting full-time jobs) with the proportion being 20 per cent for males and 33 per cent for females.

Occupations can be divided into four major categories: Professional (Managers, Administrators, Scientists, Engineers, Social Scientists, Teachers, Medical Professionals and Artists); Lower non-manual (Clerical, Sales and Service); manual (Factory workers, Construction and Transport) and primary (Farming and Mining).

The relative proportions in these four categories for the total population were: Professional 30 per cent; Lower Non-Manual 41 per cent; Manual 25 per cent and Primary 5

per cent. For all Italians the proportions were fairly similar, except for three per cent less among professional, four per cent more among manual workers and three per cent less among primary workers. In fact, less than two per cent of Italians were in Agriculture or Mining, one of the interesting facts about Italians in Canada despite mainly rural origins in Italy, few settled in rural areas of Canada. There were strong contrast between single- and multiple-origin Italians. The latter had nine per cent more among Professionals and 13 per cent less among Manual workers.

In all cases proportions of females in Professional occupations were slightly higher than that of males. Females were, of course, concentrated in Clerical, Sales and Service Occupations: between 25 per cent (multiple-origin Italians) and 30 per cent (other groups) more females than males were in these occupations. The difference in the sexes, were to be found in Manual occupations, where the above proportions were, literally, reversed.

Italian males have the stereotype of being construction' workers. However, this goes back to the time of their arrival in Canada in large numbers. While among all males 10 per cent were in construction, this was as low as 14 per cent for all Italian males. There was a sharp difference, however, between single- and multiple origin males: 16 per cent of the former and only eight per cent of the latter were in construction. The fact that 86 per cent of all Italian males are in other than construction jobs, does little to dispel the stereotype.

The 1991 census gives a wide variety of sources of incomes. The two essential statistics, however, are wage income (both part- and full-time) and total incomes (incomes from all sources). For Canada as a whole, the major source of income (75 per cent) was from wages and these proportions were even higher for Italians (around 80 per cent for single- and total and 85 per cent for multiple-origin Italians). The second most important source was government transfer (pensions, family benefits, unemployment insurance, welfare) which was 14 per cent of all sources for Canadians and around 11 per cent for total and single-origin Italians, but only six per cent for the multiple group.

Self-employment accounted for five per cent for all Canadians and for the multiple Italian group but only four per cent for other Italians. Finally, investments were a major source for three per cent of all Canadians, a similar proportion for single- and total Italians, but only one per cent for multiple origin Italians.

The average total income for all Canadians, 15 years and over, was 21,668 dollars. For all Italians it was slightly higher, \$ 21,997. It should be noted that total income is divided by all persons aged 15 years and over, while wage incomes are based only on those in the labour-force. Hence, the latter, is usually a higher average than the former. For single-origin Italians even higher, \$ 22,220 but for multiple-origin Italians (no doubt, because of their younger age-structure) it was, \$ 21,298. Overall, then Italians, despite their low status on arrival in Canada, were doing as well as if not better than the average Canadian. Naturally, there were strong differences by sex. For every \$ 100 earned by males, in the above groups, the corresponding average for females was \$ 54 for all females as well as for all Italian females, \$ 52 for single-origin but as high as \$ 79 for those of multiple Italian origin. While younger persons have lowest average incomes, disparities between males and females were less acute.

In the present economic climate, the proportions of persons in part-time jobs is relatively

high and particularly so, in the case of females. While one-fifth of all working Canadians were in part-time employment, the proportion for females was two and one half times higher than that of males. The respective proportions of males and females in part-time occupations among all Italians were: 20 and 28 per cent; single Italians 11 and 26 per cent and multiple Italians 19 and 33 per cent.

Since part-time employment can vary to a large degree from a few hours per month to an almost eight hour a day job, comparisons of incomes are not reliable. Hence the following comparisons are for full-time employment only. The average full-time income for all Canadians was \$ 25,654. But it was higher for all three Italian groups: total \$ 26,660, single-origin Italians \$ 26,703 and multiple-origin Italians \$ 26,532. As with total incomes there were differences between male and female averages but the discrepancies, while still important, were not as great as they were for total incomes. For every \$ 100 earned by all males in full-time employment, this was 69 per cent for all females, 70 per cent for all Italians, 69 per cent for single-origin Italians and 73 per cent for Italians of multiple origin.

Certainly, Italians have improved immensely in the socio-economic sphere since the time of their large-scale immigration into Canada in the post-war years. This is also reflected in housing.

If there is one area in which all Italians take pride, it is in the home. An important goal of most Italian immigrants to Canada, was to own a home as soon as possible, after arrival. While 70 per cent of all Canadians were living in homes that were owned, this was 83 per cent for total, 88 per cent for single-origin, but only 68 per cent for Italians of multiple origin. As we mentioned earlier, those of multiple Italian origin, were often closer to the Canadian norm.<sup>2</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The year 1991 could be considered to be the 50th anniversary of Post-War Italian Immigration to Canada. Looking at the 20th century as a whole, in the early years of the century, there was a regular movement, even if not on the same scale as the post-war movement, of Italians coming to Canada. In the first two decades of the century, there were, on average, just over 8,000 Italians coming to Canada per year. In the 1920s, this dropped to just over 3,000 per year and in the 1930s to just under 350.

In the Post War period, history appears to repeat itself, at least as far as patterns of immigration are concerned.

In the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, the yearly averages were around 25,000 and 19,000 and then dropped to 4,000 per annum in the 1970s and under 1,000 in the 1980s.

As we have seen, fewer and fewer persons are immigrating from Italy to Canada. The proportion of Canadian-born has increased to 65 per cent. The group has become more assimilated as a whole. Thoughts of return to Italy dissipate, as Canada has become home, not only for those born here, but for their immigrant parents as well. The proportion of all persons with Italian ancestry whose mother tongue was Italian, has dropped to under half. Only 55 per cent could speak Italian. Few have difficulties with Canada's official languages. Almost all are Canadian citizens. Levels of education have improved immensely and a good deal of

upward social mobility, in terms of occupations and incomes, has taken place in the Canadian-born Italian population, when compared to those who immigrated. In other words, Italians are losing their distinctiveness and are no longer considered to be among Canada's immigrants, but one of the more established groups that make up the Canadian mosaic.

Will there be a resurgence of Italian immigration to Canada in the 21st Century?

### Endnotes

1. The above article is a brief synopsis of a still to be publish manuscript entitled *Canadians and Italo-Canadians in the 1990s*. This contains much more detail, including tables by sex for each characteristic, broken down by total population, Italian total, single and multiple origins, for Canada as a whole the provinces of Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia and the cities of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. It also contains figures and an updated bibliography of Italians in Canada.

2. The source of all the above information is: *Statistics Canada, 1991 Census of Canada, Public Use Microfiche Files*.