



# DIASPORAS AS KEY ACTORS FOR CHANGE:

... A FRESH PERSPECTIVE  
... ON DEVELOPMENT  
... COOPERATION



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# **DIASPORAS AS KEY ACTORS FOR CHANGE:**

**· A FRESH PERSPECTIVE  
· ON DEVELOPMENT  
· COOPERATION**

# PREFACE

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**I**nternational migration is a complex phenomenon caused by the combination of various political, economic, social, historical and environmental factors. All these elements need to be taken into account to understand the interdependencies between the societies involved. In this sense, migration is a phenomenon intrinsic to social change.

The inclusion of migration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030) and in the Sustainable Development Goals was an important step in this regard. The Agenda, adopted in 2015, recognizes migration as a powerful driver of sustainable development for migrants and their communities. It brings significant benefits in the form of competences, workforce improvement, investments, cultural diversity and financial resources.

MIGRATION IS  
A POWERFUL  
DRIVER OF  
SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT

As a result, talking about development cooperation nowadays also means recognizing and stimulating the leading role of citizens with a migrant background. The law regulating Italian cooperation (Law 125/2014) has formally recognized the ability of diasporas to act as connectors and generators of social, economic and cultural networks between their

countries of origin. This law assigns migrant associations a concrete and active role in international cooperation.

SINCE 2011,  
IOM HAS  
BEEN ABLE TO  
DEVELOP AND  
IMPLEMENT  
A WIDE  
RANGE OF  
INITIATIVES  
IN ITALY AND  
ABROAD

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recognizes the reciprocal relationship between migration and development. Thanks to the continued support from and the collaboration of the Italian Government, since 2011, IOM has been able to develop and implement a wide range of initiatives in Italy and abroad aimed at improving the process of engaging diasporas and their associations in the dynamics of local development.

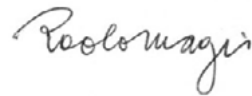
However, being aware that the transnational engagement of these actors is influenced both by internal and external factors and structural conditions, it is necessary to better understand the ambitions and perceived limits of such associations with respect to their role as co-development actors. To this end, this study also investigates the political, social and economic dynamics that structure and influence their positioning within the sector.

The picture that emerges highlights several challenges and problems that still hinder such associations from participating fully and effectively, but at the same time it confirms their willingness to start a process of growth and consolidation. To this end, this research, carried out in collaboration with the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI – Istituto Italiano di Politica Internazionale), identified specific areas and key actions that can be taken to improve the situation in this regard.

We hope that this analysis contributes to the improvement of the social, cultural, civic, political and economic participation of migrant associations, while encouraging and promoting improved processes of integration of Italian diasporas into the development cooperation ecosystem.



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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THESE  
ASSOCIATIONS  
HAVE FULLY  
INTEGRATED  
INTO THE  
COOPERATION  
ECOSYSTEM

**I**n Italy, there are more than a thousand associations with a migratory background,<sup>1</sup> some of which represent the direct expression of specific diaspora communities. Since migrant associations were recognized as development cooperation actors (Law 125/2014), they have fully integrated into the cooperation ecosystem as key actors. This is especially true given the relevance that migration has acquired in international cooperation over the last few years.

On the other hand, access to funds and direct involvement in cooperation and/or co-development projects depends on various factors and conditions, which can be both internal to associations and related to the context of reference and the actors that operate in it.

This analysis investigates the needs, ambitions and perceived limits of associations with a migratory background in Italy with respect to their role as co-development actors. By

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1 This figure was determined on the basis of the mapping of associations with a migratory background carried out by the Italian Ministry of Labour in 2019.

considering both internal and external challenges and opportunities – therefore also referring to the actors with whom associations interact – this research identifies and suggests specific areas of intervention and key actions aimed at improving and stimulating the leading role of migrant associations in the field of co-development and international cooperation.

To this end, this research analysed the political, social and economic dynamics between (both formal and non-formal) actors that are connected to international cooperation and that structure and influence the positioning and actions of diaspora associations based in Italy and involved in the sector.

This study borrows the methodology from the *Political Economy Analysis*<sup>2</sup> and adapts it to analyse the behaviour of diaspora associations<sup>3</sup> and their members within the sociopolitical and economic context in which they operate.

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2 This study borrows techniques, tools and methods from the Political Economy Analysis (PEA), an approach to development policies that stems from the observation that, until the early 2000s, development intervention tended to be imposed from above, taking little account of local conditions, including the political conditions historically determined in the target locations and regions. Therefore, it was necessary to design development policies that were sensitive and responsive to the sociopolitical context within which they were to be implemented (Dahl-Ostergaard et al., 2005). The aim of any PEA analysis, therefore, is to understand what effects and consequences external interventions (such as development projects) can have, while considering the context in which the relevant action is carried out. In this way, it allows to avoid any unexpected consequences by those who design a project without in-depth knowledge of the relevant context (DFID, 2009).

3 For a definition of diaspora, please refer to the introduction to chapter 2 of this analysis.

## 1.1 Methodology

This analysis was carried out on the basis of a broader study conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – Coordination Office for the Mediterranean in collaboration with the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI). This research was structured around three data collection phases, namely the distribution of an online questionnaire, the creation of a focus group, and the conduction of semi-structured interviews.

Particular attention was paid to ensuring a good degree of diversity when selecting participants in focus groups and semi-structured interviews (gender, geographical origin, age, length of stay in Italy, migratory background and status – for example residence permit/citizenship). This was not possible when distributing the questionnaire, which was widely publicized among diaspora associations and completed by those interested on a voluntary basis. Moreover, the questionnaire did not ask respondents to indicate their geographical area of residence, so it was not possible to analyse the answers received in relation to the specific context of reference.

During the first phase (3 June–16 July 2019), IOM and ISPI distributed an **online questionnaire** to diaspora associations and received 173 responses (ref. Annex 1). The reference sample was drawn from the contact list of the 1,413 associations that emerged as active from the census carried out in 2018 by the Italian Ministry of Labour and that are included in the mapping available on

PARTICULAR  
ATTENTION  
WAS PAID TO  
ENSURING A  
GOOD DEGREE  
OF DIVERSITY IN  
THE GROUP

[www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it](http://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it). The questionnaire asked associations to evaluate what they considered to be the most relevant internal and external challenges, opportunities and themes from a range of provided options, which could be scored on a scale from 1 to 5 depending on the relevance perceived.

To further explore some of the issues emerged, a **Diaspora Focus Group** (DFG) was organized consisting of 11 people (five women and six men) from the world of Italian diaspora associations.

Finally, **anonymous semi-structured interviews** were conducted with seven representatives of diaspora associations and people from the world of associations.

After a first analysis and elaboration of the collected data, ISPI presented the preliminary results during a closed-door meeting with a group of 17 people: representatives of IOM Italy, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), the National Coordination of the New Italian Generations (CoNNGI)<sup>4</sup> and the Diaspora Summit.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the results, as well as food for thought to improve the analysis.

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4 CoNNGI is a second-level association that brings together more than 30 associations based in Italy. CoNNGI places the leading role of young Italians with a migratory background at the forefront, claiming their belonging to Italy.

## **2. DIASPORAS: THE CONTEXT IN ITALY**

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**W**hile the concept of diaspora is widely discussed in academic circles, and although the role that diaspora actors play in the cooperation and co-development framework is internationally acknowledged, there is no single universally recognized definition of “diaspora”.

For the sake of this research, IOM’s definition will be used, according to which **“diasporas”** means the set of “migrants and descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background” (McAuliffe and Ruhs, 2018).

This definition allows to highlight, as a distinguishing feature, the perceived influence that a migratory background has had in shaping identity. This fluid and personal definition allows a certain flexibility in determining who are the members of a diaspora community.

There is also no shared definition of **“diaspora association”**. In this study, diaspora associations are defined as those organizations, either formally or informally established, that include people with a migratory background who



decide to formally come together to pursue common goals, regardless of such goals themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Specifically, this study considers and focuses its analysis on diaspora associations based in Italy that are involved in co-development<sup>6</sup> and/or international cooperation activities.

## 2.1 Diaspora associations: how many and where

On 1 January 2020, the foreign population resident in Italy consisted of about 5.3 million people, equivalent to about 8.8 per cent of the total population resident in the country (Istat, 2020).

Moreover, in the last 15 years, around 1.3 million foreigners have acquired Italian citizenship (112,000 in 2018 alone) (Eurostat, 2020).

According to Eurostat, in 2019 the foreign-born population resident in Italy consisted of about 6.3 million people (ibid.). In addition, about 1 million people were born in Italy or arrived in Italy when they were children.

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5 In this study, the terms “diaspora associations”, “migrant associations” and “associations with a migratory background” are used interchangeably.

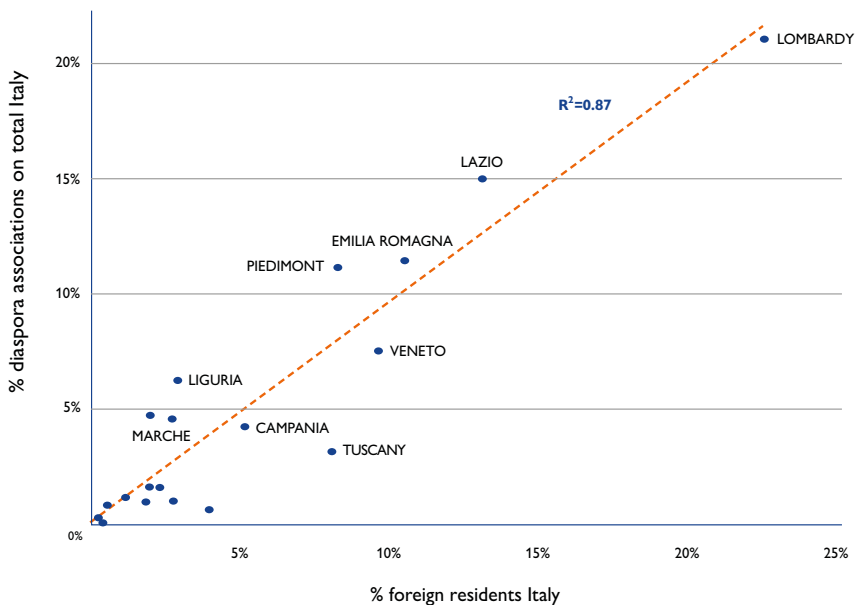
6 In this study, co-development refers to development paths that are mutually beneficial both to Italy and the countries of origin and in which communities of migrants (and of people with a migratory background) living in the destination country play a crucial role.

Therefore, the population that can be defined as having a “migratory background” in Italy could reach 7.3 million people, that is 12 per cent of the total resident population.

By analysing the geographical distribution of associations in Italy, it can be noted that it reflects the distribution of communities with foreign origins, with a prevalence in northern Italy and in the Lazio region.

The graph in Figure 1 was created based on the database of diaspora associations developed by the Italian Ministry of Labour, the latest version of which includes 1,413 associations, with 555 additional associations compared to the previous mapping.

**Figure 1 - Foreign residents and diaspora associations in the different Italian regions (2019)**



With respect to those associations, it was not possible to guarantee that the relevant information was up to date or that their status had been verified.

It should also be considered that associations, including those with a migratory background, tend to have a high creation and disbanding rate.

## 2.2 Diasporas and Italian cooperation

Law No. 125 of 11 August 2014 (“General regulations on international cooperation for development”) gave a new impetus to the Italian system for international cooperation. The reform provided the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) with the political steering of the cooperation system and placed the objective of “working together as a system” at its core, with the widest possible involvement of all public and private actors engaged in international development cooperation.

“WORKING  
TOGETHER AS A  
SYSTEM”, WITH  
THE WIDEST  
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INVOLVEMENT  
OF ALL ACTORS,  
BOTH PUBLIC  
AND PRIVATE

In particular, art. 26 of Law 125/2014 includes an accurate list of “Agents of development cooperation actors” and after listing NGOs, non-profit organizations of social utility and other civil society organizations, it includes for the first time “organizations and associations of communities of immigrants that maintain development cooperation and support relations with their Countries of origin or

that collaborate with actors, in the Countries concerned, meeting the prerequisites set forth in this article.”

CNCS MEETS  
ANNUALLY  
TO EXPRESS  
OPINIONS  
ON MATTERS  
RELATING TO  
INTERNATIONAL  
COOPERATION

Specifically, the involvement of diasporas in the world of cooperation was formalized with the establishment of the Italian National Council for Development Cooperation (CNCS).<sup>7</sup> Of the three new auxiliary bodies established by Law 125/2014, the Italian National Council for Development Cooperation is “a standing participatory, advisory and advocacy instrument” (art. 16), which meets annually “to express its opinion on development cooperation issues and especially on the consistency of policy choices, strategies, orientations, programming, forms of intervention and their effectiveness and on the evaluation thereof.” Since CNCS includes various other actors (representatives of the Government, local authorities, non-governmental and civil society organizations, businesses and foundations active in cooperation), it provides the only institutional and structured opportunity for these actors to meet and exchange information, knowledge and interests.

Moreover, Law 125/2014 stipulates that every three years MAECI convenes a national public conference on development cooperation, where citizens, including diaspora associations, are invited to participate in the formulation of cooperation policies. Therefore, thanks to Law 125/2014, diasporas

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7 Ref. 3.2.

are provided with a consultation platform, where they can express their requests and provide their contribution to development cooperation policies, especially through their representation within CNCS.



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### **3. COOPERATION ECOSYSTEM: KEY ACTORS**

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**T**he **stakeholder analysis** takes into account the main actors involved in the choice, formulation and implementation of Italian development cooperation policies, as well as, more generally, in co-development processes that involve communities with a migratory background in Italy. Due to its complex nature, the set of actors involved, and their relationships are herein referred to as an “ecosystem”.

### **3.1 Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, and the public sector**

Since the reform of the Italian cooperation system initiated in 2014, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI)<sup>8</sup> has been supported by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS).<sup>9</sup>

In this context, MAECI provides the policy guidelines to

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8 Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Italiana (MAECI).

9 Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (AICS).

be implemented by AICS, the technical and operational arm of the Italian cooperation system, which plays the role of a technical and formally independent body.

Within this framework, and in view of the limited organizational capacities of diaspora associations, it is interesting to note how their relationships with institutions can be affected by changes in the power relations and in the political orientations of the public stakeholders they interact with (Ministry and Agency).

### **3.2 Intermediary institutions: Italian National Council for Development Cooperation and Diaspora Summit**

In order to involve diaspora associations and their representatives more closely in the policymaking process, Law 125/2014 stipulates the establishment of the National Council for Development Cooperation (CNCS).<sup>10</sup> The latter, which consists of 50 members, currently includes two representatives of diaspora organizations (one of whom acts as deputy representative) directly appointed by the Ministry. The representative of diaspora organizations also coordinates one of the four working groups, namely the one for “Migration and Development”.

IT IS INTERESTING  
TO NOTE HOW  
RELATIONSHIPS  
BETWEEN  
ASSOCIATIONS  
AND INSTITUTIONS  
CAN BE AFFECTED  
BY CHANGES  
IN POWER  
RELATIONS

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10 Consiglio Nazionale per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo.



Based on an idea developed within the “Migration and Development” working group of CNCS, in 2017 the “National Diaspora Summit” project has been set up, with the financial support of AICS and some bank foundations (Cariplo Foundation, Charlemagne, Foundations for Africa Burkina Faso). The project was created with the aim of connecting diaspora associations in Italy and providing them with contacts at national political institutions, local authorities and civil society organizations.

**THE PROJECT  
WAS CREATED  
WITH THE AIM  
OF CONNECTING  
DIASPORA  
ASSOCIATIONS**

More specifically, the project is structured around four main pillars: (i) training activities in international cooperation addressing diaspora associations; (ii) information meetings and debates on migrant entrepreneurship also aimed at strengthening the connection between entrepreneurship and development cooperation; (iii) cultural events enhancing the art and traditions of diasporas’ cultures of origin; (iv) a national diaspora summit, organized on an annual basis and designed to provide an opportunity for discussion over the creation of a structured network between associations, NGOs, institutions, and to facilitate access to cooperation by diaspora associations and migrant entrepreneurs. In 2019, in preparation for December’s national summit, 12 local meetings were also held, 6 of which focused on the diaspora territorial networks.<sup>11</sup>

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11 Direct communications with the organizers of the summit.

### 3.3 Foreign diplomatic missions in Italy

Although they are not often involved in defining development cooperation policies, diplomatic missions' networks based in Italy are important stakeholders. They can facilitate connections between local actors in partner countries and development cooperation actors in Italy, both in the project design and in the implementation phase.<sup>12</sup>

NETWORKS  
OF FOREIGN  
DIPLOMATIC  
MISSIONS IN  
ITALY ARE  
IMPORTANT  
ACTORS

However, their role can be ambiguous. While on the one hand they can support cooperation actors in identifying the most suitable and reliable partners, on the other hand, there is a risk that their action may be aimed at meeting objectives different from those set for the development cooperation. For example, they may wish to pursue foreign or local policy goals, even when not in line with the development cooperation priorities.

These positive and negative dynamics can particularly affect diaspora associations.

In fact, it is inevitable that local development or co-development projects, where diasporas play a major role, are substantially affected by political (in a broad sense) conditions that govern such projects, as well as by the political implications at a local level. In addition,

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<sup>12</sup> Evidence for this statement emerged very clearly during the focus group discussion, as confirmed by several diaspora representatives who participated.

often support might be provided to development or co-development projects for the sake of political trade-offs and expediencies, being therefore not only based on the evaluation of each project initiative and on effective local needs' assessments.

### **3.4 International organizations**

International organizations support diaspora engagement through different types of projects that promote their role as international cooperation actors, as recognized by Law 125/2014 on development cooperation.

In particular, training, capacity-building and technical assistance projects aim to make diaspora associations and their representatives better qualified to apply for development and co-development calls for proposals and to manage and implement such projects on their own.

On a higher level, however, there are projects where diaspora associations are directly involved as project partners of international organizations. These initiatives have a high symbolic value, as they legitimize those associations in the eyes of other actors in the system, by acting and at an advocacy level and reminding such actors of the importance of involving diaspora.

### 3.5 Local administrations

With the reform of the cooperation law in 2014, the role of local administrations was also formalized. They can now participate in the formulation and implementation of development cooperation initiatives upon receiving the favourable opinion of the Italian Joint Committee for Development Cooperation (CICS)<sup>13</sup>, normally by resorting to AICS (art. 9.2 of Law 125/2014).

LOCAL  
ADMINISTRATIONS  
CAN PARTICIPATE  
IN THE  
FORMULATION AND  
IMPLEMENTATION  
OF COOPERATION  
POLICIES

This way, the reform allowed to formally recognize the growing experience of local administrations in this area, while encouraging those that until a few years ago looked at development and co-development cooperation as secondary activities.

Local administrations play a crucial role, especially with the spread of local partnership initiatives, where main Italian cooperation stakeholders in the third countries concerned are namely local or subnational authorities.

The decentralization of development cooperation activities to the local level is a trend that, at least at a first analysis, would seem to facilitate the engagement of diaspora associations in development cooperation projects.

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<sup>13</sup> When dealing with issues concerning Regions, Autonomous Provinces, or local administrations, CICS also includes the President of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces, the Presidents of the Regions, and the Presidents of associations representing local administrations (art. 21.2 of Law 125/2014).

ENHANCING  
THE SPECIFIC  
COMPETENCES OF  
ASSOCIATIONS

In fact, associations have close relations with their surroundings, direct knowledge of local needs and frequent contacts with local institutions. Ongoing dialogue between associations and local authorities leads to the creation of partnerships with high added value, which enhance the specific competences of associations and respond more consistently to the needs of local communities, as well as to local priorities and objectives.

The circumscribed extension of local partnership projects enables diaspora associations to play a more active and conscious role, which is also more realistic with regard to the capacities available.

### **3.6 Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)**

NGOS HAVE  
ACCESS TO A  
POOL OF PRIVATE  
AND PUBLIC  
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IS FAR MORE  
STABLE OVER TIME

This section deals with those NGOs that carry out development cooperation activities, are recognized by MAECI and registered in a special list managed by AICS. In Italy, about 200 NGOs fall under these criteria.

The role of NGOs in cooperation is essential. On the one hand, they are specialized and equipped to carry out development cooperation activities from a regulatory and organizational point of view. On the other hand, their recognized role enables them to access a pool of private (e.g. donations) and public (e.g. participation in calls for proposals) resources that is far more stable over time.

The formalization of the role of diaspora associations has both advantages and disadvantages with regard to their relationships with NGOs.

By rewarding the involvement of diaspora associations in cooperation and co-development projects, the law encourages partnerships between associations and NGOs. Inevitably, associations usually remain in a position subordinate to NGOs, precisely because of their less structured nature.

At the same time, it is certainly a positive fact that the law encourages the involvement of such actors, which otherwise would be destined to remain on the side-lines because of their nature.

However, there is no doubt that such encouragement to involve diaspora associations in development and co-development projects can sometimes be “forced”, especially when these initiatives address local areas in Italy where there are no well-structured associations to be involved.

If NGOs are to involve diaspora associations, they need to provide strong support not only during the project implementation phase, but also and above all in the preliminary and preparatory stages.

## **4. DIASPORAS AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS**

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**S**ince it is not possible to take into account the enormous diversity of experiences, motivations and interests that make up the world of diaspora associations, this section attempts to analyse such associations by investigating the perceptions of their members, while focusing, in particular, on internal and external challenges, opportunities, and priority areas of intervention.

This analysis combines the results of the online questionnaire (173 responses) with the focus group, the semi-structured interviews, and the final discussion with stakeholders.<sup>14</sup>

## 4.1 Challenges

### INTERNAL CHALLENGES

According to the online questionnaire's responses, the main internal challenges faced by diaspora associations in Italy are as follows: (a) difficulty in understanding the regulatory

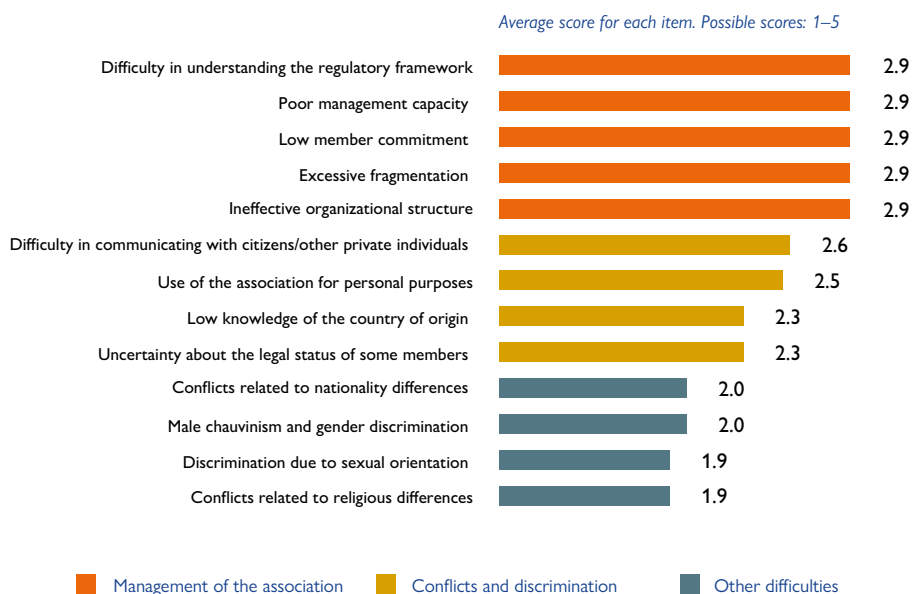
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<sup>14</sup> Please refer to Annex 1 - "Diaspora Questionnaire: Sample Characteristics" at the end of this analysis.



framework; (b) poor management capacity; (c) low member commitment; (d) excessive fragmentation; and (e) ineffective organizational structure.

**Figure 2 - Internal challenges**



Source: Online questionnaire distributed by ISPI (n=173).

In particular, the challenge arising from difficulties in **understanding the regulatory framework** (which is essential to participate in calls for proposals and therefore to obtain the resources necessary to carry out projects)

THE CHALLENGE ARISING FROM DIFFICULTIES IN UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK WAS IDENTIFIED AS VERY IMPORTANT BY BOTH YOUNGER AND "OLDER" MEMBERS

was identified as very important by both younger and "older" members. Many associations are faced with this issue, as it has an important impact on the range of actions they can actually carry out, and it points out the need to provide more training and funds to access paid courses. Although there are also courses free of charge or that provide for reimbursement of expenses, associations are not always aware of them.

The perception of the challenge related to **poor management capacity** (and the use of associations for personal purposes) seems to be controversial and divergent, as it depends on the position/function of the respondent within the association (whether they have management responsibility or not).

On the contrary, there is a consensus on **low motivation**, especially among **younger** members, and on the importance of clarity as to the missions and objectives of associations, which is necessary to motivate and involve member. Consensus also exists on the importance to update and adapt an association's mission to changes in the context in which it operates and in the association itself.

This issue is linked to another crucial internal challenge: leaders' **desire to play a major role**, with its advantages (commitment, and energy and time devoted to achieving the objectives of the association) and potential disadvantages (dependence on the leader in terms of ambitions, vision of

the association, and the energy, time and ability necessary to gather resources).

Opinions on **fragmentation of diasporas** are also divergent, as such fragmentation is seen both as a challenge and an opportunity. Overcoming fragmentation leads to networking between associations, rather than scaling up the existing ones. Leaders' desire to play a major role also has a positive aspect, namely the fact that any association works best when their leaders have a clear picture of their own personal mission and that of the association. The challenge therefore seems to be to **find a balance** between two factors. On the one hand, adapting action to any changes undergone by the association and the context in which it operates, trying to welcome new ideas. On the other hand, preventing leaders' desire to play a major role from causing the fragmentation of association's objectives.

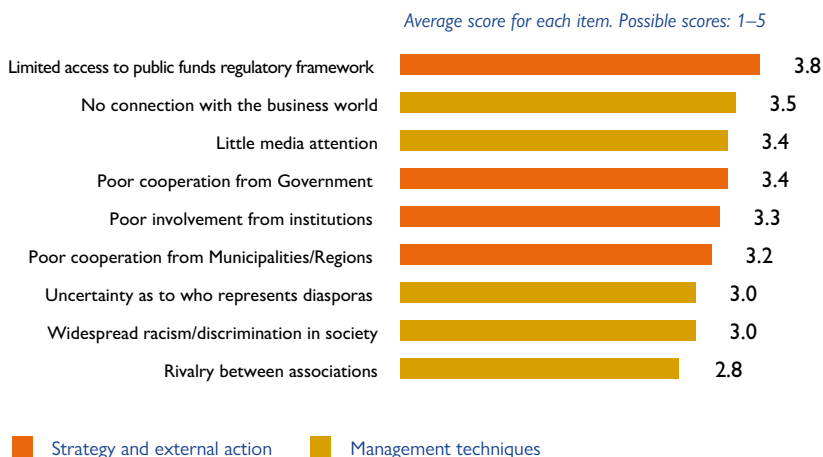
ANY  
ASSOCIATION  
WORKS BEST  
WHEN ITS  
LEADER HAS A  
CLEAR PICTURE  
OF THEIR OWN  
PERSONAL  
MISSION

Finally, internal challenges related to **discrimination** are not perceived as much as a problem. However, it is interesting to note that those who most perceive discrimination as a significant internal challenge are the younger generations: both as regards gender and sexual orientation discrimination.

## EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

**External challenges** were assessed as far **more relevant** than internal challenges. Difficulties posed by the context surrounding associations tend to be perceived as more significant than difficulties within associations themselves.

**Figure 3 - External challenges**



Source: Online questionnaire distributed by ISPI (n=173).

**Limited access to public funds** was identified as the main external challenge by the majority of respondents. As mentioned above, this aspect is also connected with the difficulty in understanding the regulatory framework, which is the highest-ranking internal challenge.

To receive any public funds, in addition to knowing how to do so, an association should also have a portfolio of previously received funds and of projects successfully carried out. Those requirements are considered as an indicator of the association's performance and stability and therefore as a guarantee for future applications for funds.

According to the respondents, the second most important challenge is the **lack of connection with the business sector**, which can also be seen as a criticism of the limited access to private funds.

CHINESE  
ASSOCIATIONS  
ARE MUCH MORE  
LINKED TO THE  
PRIVATE SECTOR  
THAN OTHERS

This aspect brought to light the profound differences between various associations, also due to the different countries of origin of their members. For example, Chinese associations are much more linked to the private sector than others, and therefore they also have greater and more diversified funds available than many other diaspora associations.

The challenge identified as the third most important is the **little media attention** devoted to initiatives undertaken by diaspora associations.

It may well be that this lack of attention demotivates some of the most active members, while it might be interesting to explore ways of highlighting the activities of “successful” associations through non-traditional media channels, such as social media.

THE NEGATIVE  
EFFECTS OF THIS  
CHALLENGE  
SEEM TO BE  
MORE EVIDENT  
AT LOCAL LEVEL

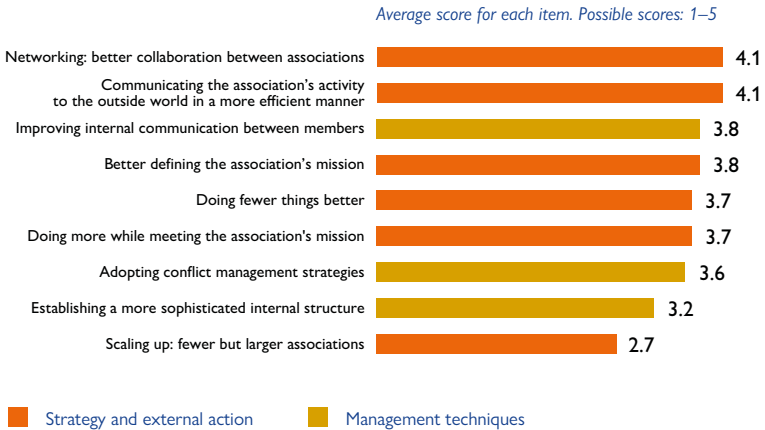
Finally, there is **poor cooperation** from the **Government, institutions** and **local administrations**. Those who experience difficulties in collaborating with or receiving funds from a particular institutional level are likely to experience similar problems when interacting with other levels of government. This perception was reported mainly by representatives of association boards and respondents that did not have Italian citizenship. Moreover, as local authorities are often the first stakeholders approached to implement and fund projects, the negative effects of this challenge seem to be more evident at local level, not necessarily due to lack of political will, but sometimes due to lack of information (for example on funding/regulations).

## 4.2 Opportunities

This study examines opportunities identified by associations as useful to improve their agency.

The highest-ranking opportunity is the possibility of creating networks of associations, which should not be seen as the possibility of scaling up associations by merging them.

## Figure 4 - Opportunities



Source: Online questionnaire distributed by ISPI (n=173).

Next in the ranking of opportunities are **communication aspects**: communicating the association's activity to the outside world in a more efficient manner and improving internal communication.

Moreover, many respondents shared the need to get to know activities carried out by larger associations, both with and without a migratory background, that are renowned for their organizational capacity and can act **as a guide** for smaller associations.

Also high on the list is the need to **better define the association's mission**.

As for all associations, this is a fundamental step for narrowing down the range of objectives that are actually intended to be pursued and it also helps to better define the potential projects on which to focus. Having a well-defined mission also allows to update it consistently as external conditions change.

**Conflicts** are also a strongly perceived issue within associations. Therefore, many respondents indicated the possibility of adopting conflict management strategies as an opportunity for creating more collaborative and less conflict-prone working environments.

## ISSUES

The graph in Figure 5 on next page encourages reflection on two aspects connected with the fundamental issues on which, according to interviewees, associations should focus most. On the one hand, the difficulty encountered by associations in defining their priorities. On the other hand, the fact that development cooperation ranks third among priority issues, after integration (including a more balanced and correct communication on migration).

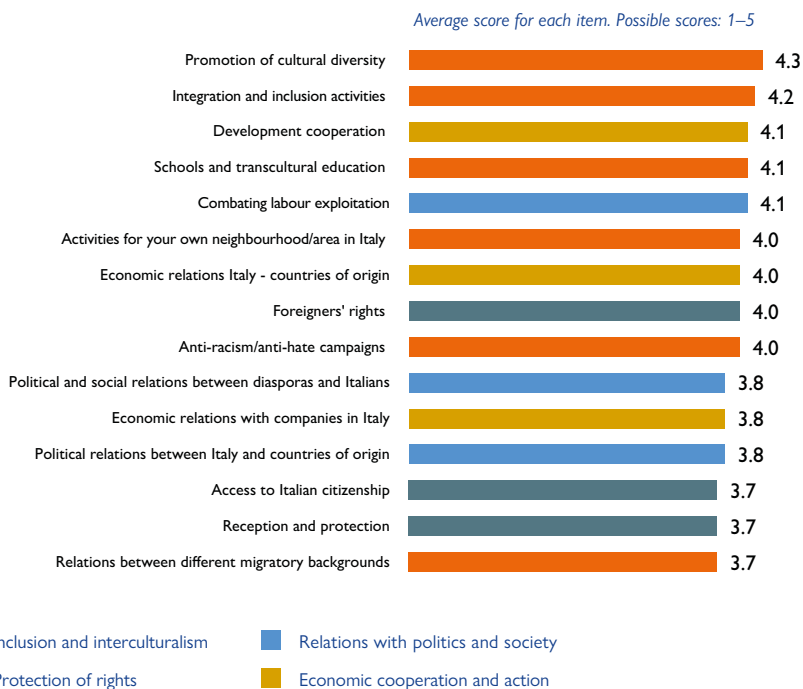
The latter aspect could reflect the self-critical perception associations have with regard to their financial and technical capacity to fully contribute to development cooperation. This result also seems to confirm the hypothesis that integration is the key intermediate link in the migration and development nexus and that participation at local



level is as important as involvement in the country of origin (for example “performing activities for one’s own neighbourhood/area”).

The picture that emerges highlights the bridging role of diaspora associations and their interest in “internationalizing” themselves through projects implemented at local level. These projects connect different cultures and nationalities, without perpetuating the stereotypes through which they are usually represented.

**Figure 5 - Issues**



Source: Online questionnaire distributed by ISPI (n=173).

However, the issue of such representation has a further level of complexity. Indeed, it is not easy to combine the idea of people that have a migratory background as a collective group, which should be represented and defended as a whole, with the pragmatic need to represent diverse interests. This is especially true if one considers the nationalities of the communities of reference. Such interests may vary both due to different degrees of knowledge of the local situations in Italy and the world, and due to cultural, personal and scope differences between communities.

IT IS  
IMPORTANT TO  
DEVELOP THE  
CAPACITY OF  
INDIVIDUAL  
ASSOCIATION  
MEMBERS

In general, improving co-development actions carried out by diaspora associations requires a twofold effort. While it is possible to work towards the creation of a more favourable enabling environment for each association, it is also important to build the capacity of individual association members. This could be achieved by providing them with tools that help them to orient themselves in the complex world of Italian associations and to take the steps required to participate in co-development projects. In this sense, enhancing the qualities of “internalizing optimistic” members<sup>15</sup> emerges as an opportunity to build on.

---

15 “Internalizers” are probably more inclined to take action to overcome the challenges an association faces, rather than blaming external actors or contextual conditions. “Optimists” are also more inclined to act because they think there are great opportunities to be seized and that action can be taken to improve the situation.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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SUCCESSES  
AND FAILURES  
OF DIASPORA  
PARTICIPATION  
DEPEND  
MAINLY ON A  
NUMBER OF  
STRUCTURAL  
VARIABLES

**T**he picture that emerges from the analysis shows that also those diaspora associations that would like to collaborate in the field of development and co-development cooperation are still struggling to find their place within this ecosystem. Furthermore, the successes and failures of their participation depend more on a series of structural variables (size of the association, capacities and ambitions of its members) than on the existence of a precise, clear and structured process of support, selection and technical assistance.

By their very nature, these associations remain probably the weakest actors in the development cooperation ecosystem. However, it is also necessary for associations themselves to act on the “demand side” by requesting that institutions provide them with certain services and opportunities for discussion and for their contribution to be heard.

To this end, this research identified the main problems in today’s diaspora ecosystem that hinder the effective engagement of diasporas in co-development and international cooperation projects, as well as the relevant actions that can be taken to improve the situation in this regard.

Specific recommendations are listed below for both associations and third-party actors that collaborate and have relations with them.

### **FOSTERING NETWORKING**

The life of an association is often short, characterized by many changes in its management and a high turnover rate due to increasing human mobility, and it is influenced by the work and family commitments of its members. Moreover, as mentioned in chapter 2.1, there is a high association disbanding rate.

This makes it difficult to share, on the one hand, **systematic information on past “successful” projects**: projects that worked out and that can be an inspiration and an example for associations that have only recently been established, also by sharing strategies implemented in response to difficulties; and on the other hand, **information on the areas of activity** of associations, to stimulate the interest of other associations in collaborating, while facilitating the exchange of ideas and the creation of synergies.

For this purpose, it would be important to systematically monitor and evaluate projects, making the results public.

Similarly, there is **no outreach aimed at highlighting successful projects and associations among institutional actors**. Highlighting such experiences among key

stakeholders would make them more likely to involve associations in projects promoted by them and to develop initiatives more in line with associations' needs.

Improving communication and enhancing an association's visibility by promoting its work and highlighting its vision is therefore of crucial importance. This can be achieved not only through online actions but also through targeted offline activities: direct presentation of ongoing projects to institutional actors at both central and local level, participation in events where one can share one's own experience, sharing success stories and lessons learned in an open and participatory manner, facilitating discussion and an exchange of ideas with associations and organizations in the sector, and organizing public events.

**Creating an online space** where all calls for proposals and funding opportunities of interest to diaspora associations can be collected could also facilitate networking aimed at creating strategic partnerships. To this end, it could be interesting to explore the possibility of creating special web pages on already existing platforms, such as iDiaspora (<https://www.idiaspora.org/en>), a platform developed and promoted by IOM at global level, which, used at local level, could host such pages.

**Regular and systematic mapping** of associations would also make it easier for them to network and thus share knowledge and information. In this way, the various

THE VARIOUS  
STAKEHOLDERS  
COULD BE  
ENCOURAGED  
TO DO MORE  
SCOUTING

stakeholders could be encouraged to do more scouting, and it would certainly be easier to convey the same information to all or different subgroups of potentially interested associations. Diaspora associations themselves would be encouraged both to network and to inform themselves about the activities of other associations located nearby or similar to them (according to criteria like geographic location, thematic areas, interests, etc.) and to provide information about existing opportunities (for funding and/or action) outside their own context.

Integrated mapping methods could be considered: both active (direct research by those responsible for mapping) and passive (self-reporting), also taking into account incentives to encourage proactive participation (e.g. access to a mailing list for associations or to training activities, etc.).

Finally, there is no formal place, at national level and known to all associations, to bring associations together, encourage networking and provide them with best practices to follow. There are such places at municipality level (e.g. Centro Zonarelli in Bologna; local groups of associations linked to the Diaspora Summit), but there are none at central level. Some examples at national level, such as the Diaspora Summit project or CoNNGI, are taking steps in this direction, but they should probably be extended and consolidated from an organizational point of view.

## ENHANCING TECHNICAL CAPACITIES AND INNOVATING TRAINING PROVISION

The lack of specific competences in project management and **the consequent need for further training** was identified by respondents as one of the main challenges. Although several training initiatives are implemented in Italy, including some specifically targeting migrant associations, communication does not always reach all associations concerned. It therefore happens that, in some cases, associations that would need such training do not actually receive any.

In this regard, associations themselves should be **more proactive when seeking training opportunities**, also by broadening their search for them and considering capacity-building opportunities for the third sector in general and not only specifically targeting diaspora associations.

Training opportunities should be made available to all members of associations in order to enhance the capacities of the whole group and thus consolidate the whole structure. However, usually only top managers participate in either formal (training, courses) or informal (debates, workshops) events. This does not allow extensive capacity-building and consolidation of an association as a whole, on the contrary, it undermines its resilience in case of changes in the membership composition.

At the same time, those who attend training courses should undertake to devote some of their time to sharing

TRAINING  
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BE MADE  
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TO ALL  
MEMBERS OF  
ASSOCIATIONS



their knowledge and transferring their competences within their association, with a view to sustainability.

Nevertheless, an **online space** for collecting all training opportunities for diaspora associations, in fields of interest for them and enhancing their specificities, could be useful for associations that have little time to carry out online searches or lack computer skills.

Moreover, a comprehensive **mapping** of associations including their respective contacts and an automated mailing list could facilitate communication about calls for training.

**Sharing good practices and “what works”** can also provide an opportunity for growth, inspiration and motivation, especially if it is done with a peer-to-peer approach. In particular, people who believe that opportunities are bigger than challenges and that responsibility for the good functioning of an association depends more on internal aspects (its members, its organizational structure, etc.) than on external ones should be encouraged to participate in the activities of associations. To this end, they could be provided with examples of what works or has previously worked out, as well as with opportunities to share their experience.

SHARING GOOD  
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APPROACH

It would also be important to provide capacity-building activities for diaspora associations in Italy which do not have the primary purpose of development cooperation, but which are already well structured and well established

in their area, to enhance their migratory capital in a transnational perspective.

A closer analysis of and discussion with such associations should be carried out by third-party actors, but also by associations already involved in cooperation projects.

Moreover, there seems to be a lack of opportunities for **discussion between associations**: in particular, such occasions where an expert takes the role of mediator and facilitates discussion between participants (an informed discussion on specific issues – including difficulties, e.g. internal conflicts or conflicts between associations). In this way, the training meeting can provide an opportunity to reflect on the capacities of individuals and to do networking or brainstorming.

THE TRAINING  
MEETING CAN  
PROVIDE AN  
OPPORTUNITY  
TO REFLECT ON  
THE CAPACITIES  
OF INDIVIDUALS

However, the current training provision does not support associations throughout their growth, but it tends to be repetitive and focused on short-term development (consistently with the “life expectancy” of diaspora associations). Projects for training purposes with a multi-year vision are rather uncommon. Therefore, a **longer-term training planning** would be necessary, which may initially be more time- and resource-consuming but should pay off in the long term.

In addition, too much focus is put on training in “technical” aspects, with little attention paid to motivational aspects and to the development of creative capacities and of a sense

ENHANCING  
COMPETENCES  
USEFUL FOR  
AND IMPORTANT  
TO PROJECT  
MANAGEMENT

of belonging to a group or “team” (crucial capacities also to the success of a project). Courses of this kind can be effective in helping to get a first idea of which associations are more closely-knit than others.

Training can also be considered with a focus on **cross-cutting competences** of association members, to enhance competences that are useful for and important to project management, such as relational and communication competences, also with a focus on institutional communication.

Moreover, the tendency for individuals to play a major role and the constant push to establish parallel or alternative associations can be a problem for institutional continuity, for effective action and for the identity of an association. Keeping in mind this aspect, the enhancement of the abovementioned cross-cutting competences could particularly involve the most active members of an association and include team building and organizational development activities in terms of human resources and division of tasks.

Supporting associations along a training path also means providing opportunities for growth and learning outside the training room.

For example, by providing **feedback on unsuccessful projects**, presenting concrete and targeted actions for improvement, and specifying areas that need to be consolidated.

In addition to providing an opportunity for associations to grow, this can also increase the transparency of evaluation processes and boost associations' confidence in themselves and in donors.

### INCREASING THE PRESENCE OF ASSOCIATIONS IN FORMAL INSTITUTIONS

DIASPORA  
ASSOCIATIONS  
ARE STILL  
TOO LITTLE  
INVOLVED IN  
INSTITUTIONAL  
MEETINGS

Although diaspora associations have an in-depth knowledge of the world of associations, they are still too little involved in institutional meetings for discussing and planning development and co-development cooperation policies. Even when they are involved, two problems arise. First, the top-down approach of such formal institutions. Second, the legitimacy of diaspora representatives (bottom-up problem). Often representatives are not directly selected by diaspora associations. Instead, they are chosen due to their acquaintance with other actors in the cooperation ecosystem.

A greater **involvement in institutional meetings on development cooperation** would be desirable to make other involved actors more aware and able to involve diaspora associations in specific projects, as well as to develop ad hoc initiatives aimed at empowering such associations.

## IMPROVING COORDINATION BETWEEN ACTORS IN THE “COOPERATION ECOSYSTEM”

In order to ensure that the process of engaging diaspora associations is as effective and efficient as possible, it is necessary to improve the current functioning of the development cooperation “ecosystem” and in particular the coordination mechanisms, so as to avoid overlapping activities of the various third-party actors.

IT IS NECESSARY  
TO IMPROVE  
THE CURRENT  
FUNCTIONING  
OF THE  
DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATION  
“ECOSYSTEM”

Greater coordination makes the panorama of stakeholders and their activities more transparent and easier to identify. In addition, it could encourage greater differentiation of the activities and services they provide. This could also create the opportunity to capitalize on each other’s competences and experience, so that projects complement each other.

It would therefore be important to **invest more in networking and coordination**, while also meeting the diasporas’ need to “network” in a more national dimension and/or by addressing specific issues. This would open the ground to new opportunities for collaboration in development and co-development cooperation projects.

### FOCUSING ON PRIORITY ISSUES FOR ASSOCIATIONS

The questionnaire allowed to collect the associations’ priority areas of intervention. By analysing them, it emerged that co-development is not the main objective of all diaspora associations. However, collaboration with third-party actors is often focused on the theme of cooperation.

COLLABORATION  
WITH THIRD-  
PARTY ACTORS IS  
OFTEN FOCUSED  
ON THE THEME  
OF COOPERATION

A closer **analysis of the priorities** and objectives of individual associations by third parties would enable associations to do more and better, as well as to capitalize on their expertise in relevant subject areas. Similarly, it would provide added value to projects that involve areas in which associations have relevant experience but in which they have not been involved yet.

Nevertheless, more careful strategic planning and a clear definition of the areas where action is intended to be taken are also necessary for associations themselves.

This reflection within an association would also allow it to react more resiliently to changes in the external context and changes in the leadership of the association itself. In fact, associations are often born and grow with their leaders and therefore tend to be too tied to their demands and perceptions.

It is therefore important to adapt the objectives to the evolution of an association, with the aim of maintaining the interest of its members and of the community. This can be achieved by defining the association's strategic priorities and mission in a clear manner.

**ANNEX**

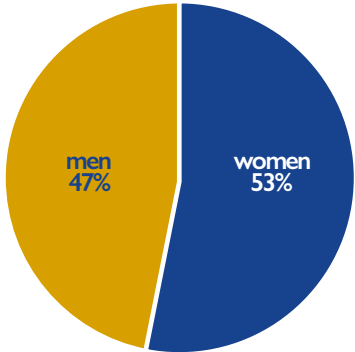
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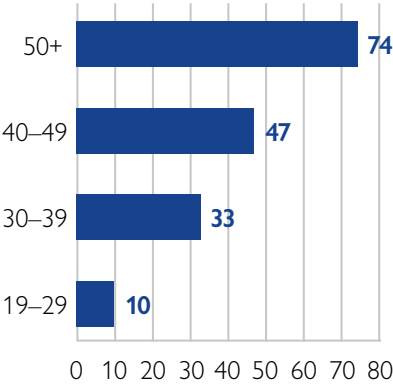


# Diaspora Questionnaire: Sample Characteristics

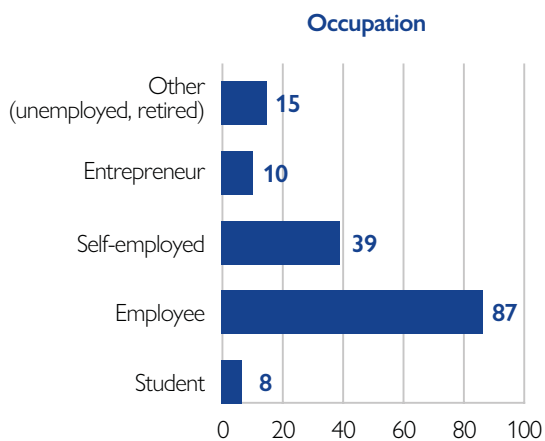
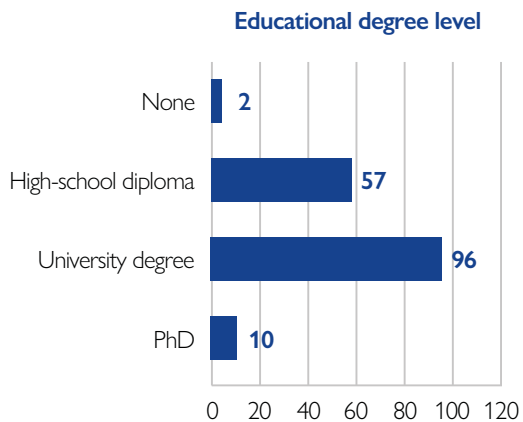
Gender



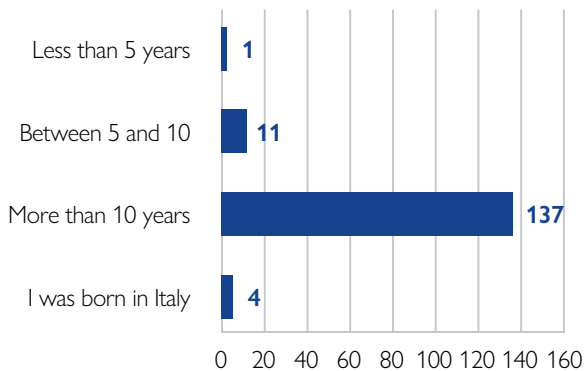
Age



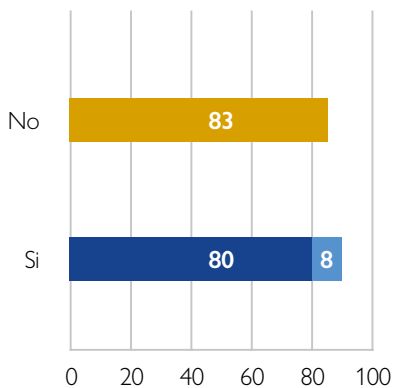




### How long have you been in Italy

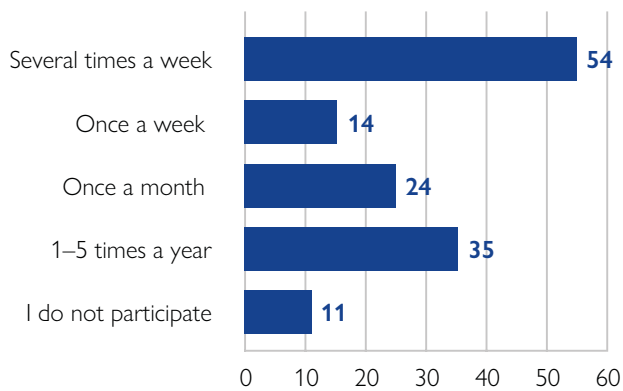


### Italian citizenship?

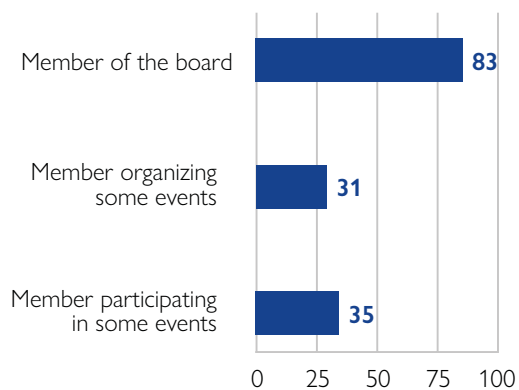


- Yes, I have acquired it
- No, I have had it since birth

### Frequency of participation in diaspora associations



### Level of participation in diaspora associations





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