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EN

LARA'S

LANGUAGE JOURNEY THROUGH ITALY

WELCOME TO LARA'S LANGUAGE JOURNEY THROUGH ITALY

As Lara travels across Italy, she quickly realises that the country's story is told through many different voices. Italy is not shaped by one language alone, but by centuries of shared history, cultures and ways of speaking. Italian connects the country today, but alongside it lives an extraordinary variety of other languages, each with its own story to tell.

Before 1861, when Italy was not yet a single nation, more than 95% of people did not speak Italian at home or in public. Instead, families and communities spoke local languages that had developed over generations. Schools later became the main place where Italian spread, helping to create a shared national identity.

As Italian became the language of schooling and public life, local languages were often treated as something to hide. Children who used them in school could be punished, and these languages were frequently regarded as less important or less "correct". As a result, many gradually fell out of everyday use.

Today, the situation has changed dramatically. Languages once overlooked or discouraged are increasingly recognised as valuable expressions of Italy's cultural diversity. The Italian Constitution of 1948 guarantees protection for linguistic minorities and their historical and

cultural traditions, while Law No. 482 adopted in 1999 formally recognised several historical minority languages. Official protections extend to the languages spoken by Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovene, and Croatian minorities, as well as by communities speaking French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan, and Sardinian. In addition, Italian Sign Language received legal recognition in 2021.

Millions of people continue to speak regional languages such as Sicilian, Neapolitan, Piedmontese, Venetian and Lombard. Although they are often mistakenly referred to as "dialects", Lara soon learns that these are fully fledged languages, each with its own grammar, history and literary tradition. Altogether, they are spoken by up to 30 million people – around half of Italy's population.

These languages have rich literary and cultural traditions. For centuries, people have used Neapolitan, Venetian, Sicilian and other regional languages to write poems, books, fairy tales and plays, bringing local characters, customs and humour to life.

Many Italians effortlessly move between Italian and a regional language depending on the situation. This form of regional bilingualism has been part of daily life for generations. Yet

recent studies, including UNESCO's "Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger", suggest that fewer young people are learning or regularly using these languages, placing many at risk of decline.

For Lara, promoting linguistic diversity is not simply about preserving the past; it is about ensuring a vibrant future. Languages carry memories, identities and distinctive ways of understanding the world. Their survival depends above all on being passed from one generation to the next. Families play a central role by using and transmitting their languages at home, while schools provide essential support by helping young people appreciate, learn and use them. Together, they can ensure that this extraordinary linguistic wealth continues to thrive for generations to come.

This publication has been developed as a resource for schools and educational institutions, as well as for general use. The ECML reserves the right to make any appropriate changes or updates at any time to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the content.

Language selection

This publication includes only languages assigned an ISO 639-3 code, which provides an internationally recognised standard for language identification and classification. ISO 639-3 is the most comprehensive part of the standard, assigning unique three-letter codes to individual languages and covering living, historical, extinct and constructed languages. These codes are widely used in linguistic research, language documentation and digital applications.

Here you can hear how the numbers and phrases are pronounced in the corresponding language.

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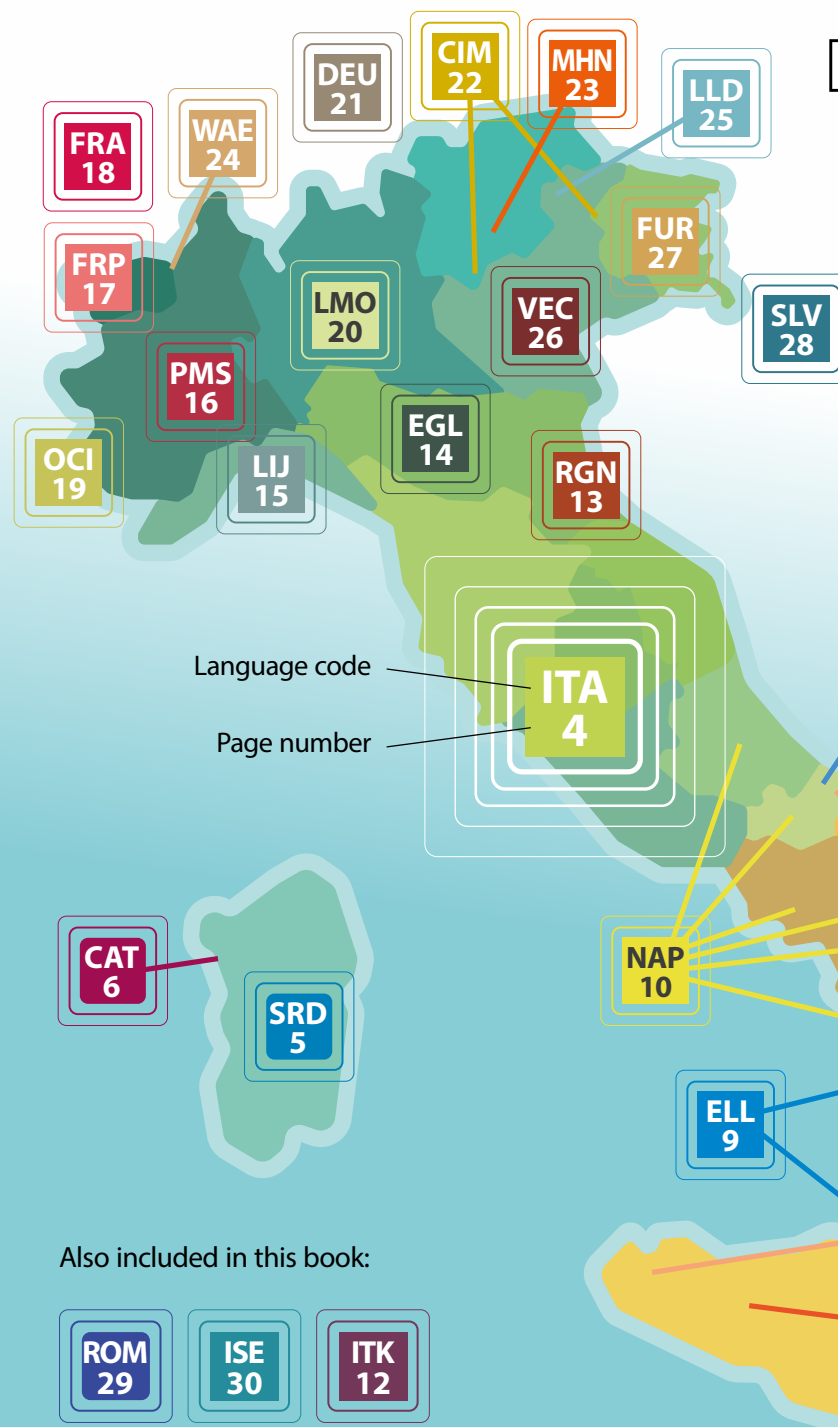


70 000 **75 000**

speakers in Italy

speakers worldwide

Speaker numbers are estimates and may vary depending on the source and definition of "speaker".



Language code

Page number

Also included in this book:



LANGUAGES LARA ENCOUNTERS ON HER JOURNEY

These are the languages Lara has encountered on her journey – however there are many more languages and dialects spoken in Italy!



Teacher's guide

ITA ITALIANO

👤👤👤 59 000 000 🌐 67 000 000

Come stai?

Ciao!

Grazie!

sì

no

- 1 uno
- 2 due
- 3 tre
- 4 quattro
- 5 cinque
- 6 sei
- 7 sette
- 8 otto
- 9 nove
- 10 dieci

How a Tuscan dialect became the language that united a nation

Italian is a Romance language that, like others, evolved from Vulgar Latin. Its history begins in the Middle Ages, but the true turning point occurred in the 14th century with Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. These authors chose to write not in Latin, but in Florentine, a local dialect of Tuscany. Thanks to the impact of their works and the political power of Florence, this specific dialect gradually became the model for the whole of Italy, transforming from a local tongue into a refined national language.

For centuries Italian still remained largely a language of literature, administration, and written communication. Most people continued to speak their local languages or dialects in everyday life. When Italy was unified in 1861, the linguistic divide was striking: historians estimate that only around 2–5% of the population could speak Italian. The vast majority were unable to understand the new country's language, creating a significant gap between written culture and daily life. It was only through compulsory education, military service, and later the widespread influence of radio and television in the 20th century that Italian gradually became the shared language of the nation.

Today, Italian is not only a symbol of national unity, but also a language of global cultural importance, carrying Italy's influence in art, music, literature, fashion, and cuisine around the world.

Ascolta il suono di queste parole >>>>

Photo: A café in the streets of Rome, Latium

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Do you want to feel like an ancient Roman?

If you want to experience what it felt like to be an ancient Roman, learning Sardinian is probably the closest you can get! Sardinian, spoken on the island of Sardinia, is considered the oldest Romance language still in use and is widely regarded as the closest living language to Latin. Despite sharing roots with Latin, most native Italian speakers cannot easily understand Sardinian.

Sardinian isn't just one language variety – it's a diverse family: Logudorese is spoken in the north-central region, Campidanese in the south, Gallurese in the north-east (with strong Corsican influences), and Sassarese in the north-west. Each variety has its own ISO language code, and there is debate among linguists about whether they are separate languages or dialects of Sardinian.

Apart from Campidanese, the number of Sardinian speakers has significantly declined as Italian became more prominent. Yet, there are ongoing efforts to standardise Sardinian and strengthen its role in the island's culture.

Currently there isn't a single written standard accepted by all speakers. Instead, multiple orthographies and forms exist, reflecting the unique traditions and identities of Sardinia's different areas. This linguistic diversity is a key part of the island's cultural heritage.

SARDU SRD

👤👤👤 1 200 000 🌐 1 200 000

The words and phrases on this page are from Campidanese, spoken on the southern part of the island.

eja

no

Cumentì
stais?

Saludi!

Gratzias!

- | | |
|----|--------|
| 1 | unu |
| 2 | dus |
| 3 | tres |
| 4 | cuatru |
| 5 | cincu |
| 6 | ses |
| 7 | seti |
| 8 | otu |
| 9 | noi |
| 10 | dexi |

◀◀◀ Ascuta su sonu de custus fueddus

Photo: Li Cossi beach, Costa Paradiso, Sardinia

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CAT

CATALÀ

👤👤👤 30 000 🌐 10 000 000

The Catalan voice in Sardinia

Walking through the narrow streets of the beautiful coastal town of Alghero, visitors may be surprised to hear a form of Catalan being spoken. Alghero is often called a Catalan linguistic enclave because Catalan arrived here in the 14th century, when the town came under Aragonese rule. It is easy to imagine ships crossing the Mediterranean, carrying not only people and goods, but also languages, songs and traditions.

The Catalan variety spoken in Alghero is known as Algherese. It is related to Catalan, but centuries of contact with Sardinian, Italian and other local varieties have given it its own character. Languages can keep traces of the past while also changing over time. For example, people say “hola” for “hello” in standard Catalan, while many speakers in Alghero use “txau”. This shows how languages are shaped by the places and communities where they are spoken.

Today, Algherese remains an important part of the city's identity. Local associations work to keep the language alive through cultural events, educational activities and projects for schools and families. One example is the Rafael Sari Prize, a writing competition named after a local poet. It is one of the many ways in which the people of Alghero continue to celebrate and pass on their unique linguistic heritage.

sí

no

Com estàs?

Hola!

Gràcies!

- 1 un
- 2 dos
- 3 tres
- 4 quatre
- 5 cinc
- 6 sis
- 7 set
- 8 vuit
- 9 nou
- 10 deu

Escolta el so d'aquestes paraules >>>>

Photo: A colourful alley in Sardinia

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SICILIANU SCN

👤👤👤 4 700 000+ 🌐 5 000 000+

Comu va?

Salutamu!

Grazî!

- 1 unu
- 2 dui
- 3 tri
- 4 quattru
- 5 cincu
- 6 sei
- 7 setti
- 8 ottu
- 9 novi
- 10 deci

Sicilian includes not only the varieties spoken on the island, but also the Salento and southern Calabrian varieties. The words and phrases on this page are taken from the literary form of Sicilian used across the island.

An encounter of civilizations

Positioned at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, Sicilian is one of Europe's most fascinating Romance languages. It is spoken in Sicily, in central-southern Calabria, in Salento, and among communities of the vast diaspora in the United States, Argentina, Australia, and elsewhere. From contact with English came "Siculish," a curious and playful blend of Sicilian and English used by emigrants and their descendants.

Sicilian's prestigious literary tradition begins in the 13th century with the Sicilian School of Poetry at the court of Frederick II, one of the earliest major examples in Italy of a vernacular being used as a language of culture. Since then, writing in Sicilian has never ceased: from Vitale's monumental "La Sicilia Liberata" to major authors such as Veneziano, Meli, Tempio, Martoglio, Buttitta, and the Nobel laureate Pirandello.

Despite decades of historical stigma that discouraged its use in schools and limited institutional support, Sicilian continues to be written and spoken with deep pride and remains a strong marker of identity.

sì

no

edl.ecml.at/sounds



<<< Ascuta la pronunzia di sti palori

Photo: Ancient theatre of Taormina with Mount Etna in the background, Sicily

AAE ARBËRESHE

👤 100 000 🌐 7 500 000

This figure relates to Albanian speakers, including Arbëreshë speakers.

Si rri?

Falem!

Të haristis/
Ghracji!

- 1 një
- 2 dy
- 3 tre
- 4 katër
- 5 pesë
- 6 gjashtë
- 7 shtatë
- 8 tetë
- 9 nëntë
- 10 dhjetë

o/arà/ëj

jo

Arbëresh Albanian – a living bridge to the past

In southern Italy, the Arbëreshë communities speak Arbërisht, a historic variety of Albanian. Their ancestors settled in regions such as Calabria, Sicily and Abruzzo between the 15th and 17th centuries, fleeing the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans. They brought with them not only their language, but also their traditions, songs and customs.

Over the centuries, Arbërisht developed its own character. While closely related to Albanian, it has been influenced by Italian, Greek and local dialects. The language remains closely connected to the Byzantine tradition, an important part of Arbëresh identity.

Today, Arbërisht is a symbol of resilience and belonging. Traditional songs such as “O e bukura More” and the lively “vallje” dances keep memories of the community’s origins alive. More than 500 years after their arrival in Italy, the Arbëreshë continue to preserve a unique language and cultural heritage across generations.

Notable figures of Arbëresh descent include political leader Francesco Crispi and Hollywood actor Danny DeVito.

Dëgjoni tingullin e këtyre fjalëve >>>

Photo: Woman in Arbëresh costume (AI generated)

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The Griko language is predominantly written in the Latin alphabet (especially in Salento) due to a lack of a single official standard. Historically, both Greek and Latin alphabets were used, but modern publications prefer Latin characters with special symbols or marks.

- 1 èna
- 2 dìo
- 3 trìa
- 4 tèssera
- 5 pènte
- 6 èksi
- 7 eftà
- 8 okhtò
- 9 ennèa
- 10 dèka

Jassù!

Ti kànni?

Efharistò!

ne

oi / dè

<<< Akouse ton icho afton ton lexeon >>>

ELLINIKA ELL

👥 20 500 🌐 13 200 000

This figure relates to Greek speakers including Griko and Grecanico.

When Ancient Greek still sings!

In southern Italy, Greek is not only the language of ancient temples and philosophers – it is also still spoken today in a few small communities. Two historic varieties survive: Griko in the Salento peninsula of Apulia and Grecanico (Calabrian Greek) in parts of Calabria. Their origins are still debated, but both preserve a remarkable link to Italy's Greek past, reflecting centuries of history, migration and cultural exchange.

That heritage can also be seen in places such as Crotona, where the philosopher Pythagoras founded his famous school more than 2,500 years ago. Hearing Griko or Grecanico today is like listening to echoes from that distant past. Yet these are not museum languages. They continue to be spoken in families and communities and are celebrated through festivals, music and local traditions.

Groups such as Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino help keep the language alive, while the lively pizzica dance brings people together with its fast rhythms and energy. These traditions remind us that a language survives not only in books, but also in songs, stories and community life. Through music, dance and shared memories, the voices of the past continue to inspire new generations.

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Photo: Castello de' Monti in Corigliano d'Otranto, Apulia

NAP NAPULITANO

👤👤👤 5 700 000 🌐 5 700 000+

A language of songs, stories and pizza

Neapolitan is one of Europe's oldest Romance languages. It evolved from Vulgar Latin and preserves traces of the ancient Oscan language, together with strong Greek influences that reflect Naples' long and multicultural history.

Its earliest written record appears in the Placito Capuano of 960 AD, one of the first legal documents including a Romance language rather than fully in Latin. Neapolitan has a rich literary tradition and was the language of Giambattista Basile's "Lo Cunto de li Cunti" (The Tale of Tales), a 17th-century collection that contains some of the earliest written versions of stories such as Cinderella, Rapunzel and Puss in Boots.

The language is also celebrated through music, helping to spread Neapolitan culture around the world. Famous songs such as "O sole mio" and "Torna a Surriento" became international classics, while playwrights and performers including Eduardo De Filippo, Totò and Raffaele Viviani shaped its theatrical heritage.

Neapolitan is closely linked to one of the world's most celebrated culinary traditions. The language of pizza makers, traditional recipes and everyday food culture reflects a society where food, family and community are deeply connected.

Today, millions of people speak some variety of Neapolitan in southern Italy and in diaspora communities across the globe, particularly in the United States, Argentina and Brazil, where it remains an important part of their cultural identity.

Comme
staje?

Cià/Ué!

Grazzie!

sì

no

Neapolitan includes the varieties spoken in Campania and in various regions of Italy (such as Northern Calabria, Basilicata, Molise, Abruzzo, Central and Northern Puglia). The words and phrases on this page are taken from the language of the city of Naples.

- 1 uno
- 2 ddoje
- 3 tre
- 4 quatto
- 5 cinche
- 6 seje
- 7 sètte
- 8 otto
- 9 nove
- 10 diece

Siénte 'o suóno e 'sti pparole >>>

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Photo: Diego Maradona murals, Napoli, Campania

MOLIŠKOHRVATSKI SVM

👤 1 000 🌐 5 600 000

Molise Croatian – a time-capsule language

In the small villages of Molise in south-eastern Italy, people still speak Molise Croatian, also known as Slavomolisano. Its speakers are descendants of Croats who migrated from Dalmatia in the 15th and 16th centuries, seeking refuge from the Ottoman expansion and establishing new communities in southern Italy.

Because the language developed for centuries far from other Croatian-speaking areas, it preserved some older features while also being influenced by Italian and other local languages. It is mainly spoken rather than written down and has no single standard form. This makes it both unique and fragile, carrying traces of the past while continuing to evolve.

Some of the speakers in the hill villages of Acquaviva Collecroce, San Felice del Molise, and Montemitro call their language “na-našo”, meaning “our way”. The name reflects a strong sense of identity and belonging. Writers, poets, festivals and web radio projects help keep the language alive. Some of the street signs and official markers in the villages appear in both Italian and Croatian.

“The Little Prince” was also translated into Molise Croatian, proving that a minority language can carry stories known around the world as well. Sometimes, a few villages can hold an entire world of memory, poetry and pride!

The words and phrases on this page are in Molise Croatian. The language evolved completely in isolation from modern Standard Croatian and incorporated terms from the neighbouring regions such as informal Italian-derived greetings “Čao” (Ciao) and “Kaka gre?” (literally “How goes it?”), mirroring the Italian “Come va?”.

This figure relates to Croatian speakers including Molise Croatian.

Kaka gre?

Dobar dan/
Čao!

Hvala /
Grazie!

da

ne

- 1 jedan
- 2 dva
- 3 tri
- 4 četiri
- 5 pet
- 6 šest
- 7 sedam
- 8 osam
- 9 devit
- 10 deset

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<<< Poslušaj kako zvuče ove riječi >>>

Photo: Molise landscape

ITK ITALKIAN

👤👤👤 200 🌐 250

Come stai?

Shalom!

Todà /
Grazzie!

- 1 uno
- 2 due
- 3 tre
- 4 quattro
- 5 cinque
- 6 sei
- 7 sette
- 8 otto
- 9 nove
- 10 dieci

sì

no

The words and phrases on this page are presented in Giudeo-Romanesco, the last surviving variety of the Judeo-Italian language group. Because the language is severely endangered and not fully standardised, common expressions often combine Romanesco and Hebrew elements.

A meeting place of Italian and Hebrew

Judeo-Italian is not a single language but a group of traditional Jewish varieties that developed in Italy over centuries. Spoken by Jewish communities across the country, they combined local Italian dialects with vocabulary from Hebrew and Aramaic.

In Rome, Livorno, Venice, Piedmont and elsewhere, daily speech followed the grammar and pronunciation of the local dialect while incorporating Hebrew words, particularly in religious, cultural and family life. In the past, these varieties were often written in the Hebrew alphabet, even though they sounded largely Italian.

The best-known varieties include Giudeo-Romanesco in Rome and Bagitto in Livorno. Together, they form part of the wider family of Judeo-Romance languages, alongside languages such as Judeo-Spanish (Ladino).

Most regional varieties disappeared during the 19th and 20th centuries as Jewish communities became increasingly integrated into wider Italian society. Only Giudeo-Romanesco survives, spoken by a very small number of people, while many traditional words and expressions live on in family memories, cultural traditions and historical texts. With only a few hundred speakers remaining worldwide, Judeo-Italian provides a unique insight into centuries of Jewish life and multilingualism in Italy.

Ascolta come sonano queste parole e frasi >>>

Photo: Rome's Jewish Ghetto district, Latium

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RUMAGNÔL RGN

👤👤👤 200 000 🌐 200 000

Com a
vala?
A t salut!
Grêzia!

- 1 on
- 2 du
- 3 tri
- 4 quàtar
- 5 zencv
- 6 si
- 7 sèt
- 8 öt
- 9 nôv
- 10 diś

The words and phrases
on this page are
from the Romagnol
variety spoken in the
north-western part of
Romagna.

sè

nò

From the Adriatic Sea to the Tuscan Apennines

Romagnol, like most of Italy's regional languages, has its roots in the Latin once spoken by ordinary people in ancient times. Over the centuries, this popular form of Latin gradually evolved, shaped not only by local traditions but also by the many peoples who arrived as conquerors, settlers, and traders. Each brought new words, customs, and cultural influences, leaving their mark on the language and contributing to the rich linguistic heritage of Romagna. For many centuries, it was a purely oral language, and after Latin, it was influenced also by the Celts, Lombards, and Byzantines. Contact with all these foreign populations facilitated the language's gradual evolution and helped shape it into the language it is today. The first written work in a Romagnol variety dates back to 1545 and is a comedy intended to amuse the rich. In the 1900s, poets such as Raffaello Baldini, Tonino Guerra, Aldo Spallicci, Sante Pedrelli and many others emerged and wrote in the language.

Spoken from the Adriatic Sea to the Tuscan Apennines, Romagnol is the soulful, earthy language of sun-drenched beaches, legendary hospitality, and the cinematic worlds of filmmaker Federico Fellini. Phonetically, it is remarkable: while standard Italian has 7 vowel sounds, Romagnol features up to 20 distinct vowel sounds and clipped endings, giving it a rapid, rhythmic punch that completely surprises standard Italian speakers.

Today, although UNESCO considers Romagnol an endangered language, it remains fiercely alive, studied, and spoken by communities dedicated to preserving its rich, vibrant heritage.

<<< Sent la prononzia d' stal paròl

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Photo: Ravenna, the historical and cultural heart of Romagna, is famous for its mosaics, Emilia-Romagna

EGL EMIGLIÂN

👤👤👤 2 000 000 🌐 2 000 000

Cm
andòmia?
Adìo!
Grâsia!

- 1 ûn
- 2 dû
- 3 trî
- 4 quâter
- 5 sînch
- 6 sê
- 7 sèt
- 8 ôt
- 9 nōv
- 10 dēş

sé

nò

The language of Italy's motor valley and culinary heartland

Emilian is a Romance language spoken by around two million people across the historic heart of northern Italy, including Bologna, Ferrara, Modena, Parma and Reggio Emilia. Its earliest written records date back to the Middle Ages. Over the centuries it has developed a rich mosaic of local varieties and literary traditions. Rather than having a single unified standard, each province has traditionally adopted its own spelling conventions based on local pronunciation.

The language originated in western Emilia but gradually spread across the Emilian plain and neighbouring regions. Because the area was historically divided among different states with shifting borders before the unification of Italy, Emilian forms a linguistic continuum with Romagnol, Lombard, Piedmontese and Venetian, without clear boundaries. In the Apennines, however, the transition to Tuscan and Ligurian is more distinct due to natural geographical barriers.

Emilian is also the language of a region renowned worldwide for its culture and innovation: this is the home of Ferrari, Lamborghini and Maserati, as well as celebrated culinary traditions such as Parmigiano Reggiano and balsamic vinegar. Today, the language remains an important part of local identity. Supported by linguistic research, cultural initiatives, digital projects and educational materials, Emilian continues to be spoken and understood in family life, the arts and community activities throughout the region.

The Emilian variety on this page is written in the "Arşân" variety, following the spelling standard of the Ferrari-Serra dictionary.

Scolta 'l sòun ch gh à cal parôli ché >>>>

Photo: Parmesan hard cheese production in Parma, Emilia-Romagna

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The language of Columbus and Genoa's seafaring empire

Ligurian, with Genoese as its prestige variety, is a language deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the region from which it takes its name. Its rich literary tradition dates back to the late 13th century and has continued uninterrupted to the present day. Alongside Latin and later Italian, Ligurian was also used as a language of administration by the Republic of Genoa in the 14th and 15th centuries.

The language is closely associated with Genoa, the powerful maritime republic that dominated much of western Mediterranean trade and rivalled Venice for control of the seas. Christopher Columbus himself is believed to have written some of his final letters in his native Genoese. Thanks to Genoa's commercial influence, Ligurian became known and used across large parts of the Mediterranean, prompting the saying: "Wherever a Genoese goes, they build a new Genoa."

Today Ligurian remains an important marker of regional identity. It is still spoken not only in Liguria but also in Carloforte and Calasetta in Sardinia, in Bonifacio in Corsica, and in the Principality of Monaco, where the local variety, Monégasque, enjoys official recognition and has been specifically codified.

The Ligurian text on this page is in Genoese, the language's most widely spoken and written variety.

<<< Senti a prononça de ste poule

Photo: Riomaggiore, Liguria

LIGURE LIJ

👤 500 000 🌐 500 000+

Comm'a
va?

Scignoria!

Gracie!

- | | |
|----|----------|
| 1 | un |
| 2 | doî/doe |
| 3 | trei/træ |
| 4 | quattro |
| 5 | çinque |
| 6 | sëi |
| 7 | sette |
| 8 | eutto |
| 9 | neuve |
| 10 | dexe |

sci

na

edl.ecml.at/sounds



PMS PIEMONTEIS

👤👤👤 1-2 000 000 🌐 1-2 000 000

The language of the kings who unified Italy

Piedmontese is a Gallo-Italic Romance language born at the foot of the mountains in northwest Italy. It shares deep structural ties with French and Occitan.

The language derives from Latin and has been enriched over the centuries by various influences resulting from contact with other peoples and cultures.

Piedmontese holds a fascinating historical irony: it was spoken at the court of Savoy, the dynasty that successfully unified Italy in the 19th century and made Turin its first capital. While the kings and aristocracy spoke Piedmontese in their palaces, the new unified state chose standard Italian (based on Tuscan) for administration. This gradually pushed Piedmontese into the background.

Its literature flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the 20th century, there was a revival, driven by the "Compania dij Brandé", thanks to which the Piedmontese language has a consolidated norm called "Grafia dij Brandé".

Although UNESCO classifies it as endangered, 1 to 2 million people still speak Piedmontese. Its reach extends far beyond Europe – thanks to past waves of emigration, you can still hear it spoken in communities across Argentina. Today, the digital age is breathing new life into the language!

é

nò

Com a va?

Cerea!

Mersi!

- | | |
|----|---------|
| 1 | un |
| 2 | doi/doe |
| 3 | tre |
| 4 | quatr |
| 5 | sinch |
| 6 | ses |
| 7 | set |
| 8 | eut |
| 9 | neuv |
| 10 | des |

Sent la prononsia 'd coste paròle >>>>

Photo: Galleria Grande at the Palace of La Venaria Reale in Turin, Piedmont

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FRANCO-PROVENÇAL/ARPITAN FRP

👤👤👤 70 000 🌐 157 000

ouè

na

- 1 on
- 2 dou
- 3 trî
- 4 cattro
- 5 hinc
- 6 chouï
- 7 satte
- 8 ouètte
- 9 noou
- 10 guî

edl.ecml.at/sounds



←←← Acoutta lo sòn di paròlle qui chouryon

Photo: Extreme skiing close to Mont Blanc, Europe's highest peak, Aosta Valley

A link between French and Italian?

Despite its name, Franco-Provençal is not a mixture of French and Provençal Occitan. Instead, it is a distinct Romance language spoken across parts of Italy, France and Switzerland. It is also known by names such as Arpitan and Patois.

In Italy, Franco-Provençal is most closely associated with the Aosta Valley, where French and Italian are official languages but local patois remain an important part of everyday life. According to a local saying, there are as many varieties of Franco-Provençal as there are church towers in the valley, with each village preserving its own unique way of speaking.

Surprisingly, Franco-Provençal is also spoken far to the south, in the Apulian villages of Faeto and Celle di San Vito, where it has survived for centuries after being brought there by settlers. Today, festivals, theatre performances and cultural events such as the "Printemps Théâtral" continue to keep the language alive, showing that a language thrives through the voices and stories of its speakers.

Comèn te
reste?

Tchao!

Mersi!

FRA FRANÇAIS

👤👤 70 000 🌐 76 800 000

Ça va ?

Bonjour !

Merci !

- 1 un
- 2 deux
- 3 trois
- 4 quatre
- 5 cinq
- 6 six
- 7 sept
- 8 huit
- 9 neuf
- 10 dix

oui

non



A language through valleys and memory

The Aosta Valley is the only region in Italy where both French and Italian are official languages. Surrounded by the Alps, the region has long been shaped by close cultural and historical ties with the French-speaking world.

For centuries, French was the language of administration, education and writing, while Franco-Provençal/Arpitan remained the language of everyday community life. After the Second World War, the Aosta Valley gained autonomous status, and French was recognised as a co-official language alongside Italian, helping to preserve the region's unique linguistic heritage.

Today, French is still visible in public administration, laws and place names, although Italian is the dominant language in daily life. Local French also has distinctive features, for example using "septante" and "nonante" for 70 and 90, just as in parts of Switzerland and Belgium. Small differences such as this remind us that languages preserve the history and identity of the communities that speak them.

Écoutez le son de ces mots >>>

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Photo: A bilingual street sign in the Aosta Valley

OCCITAN OCI

👤👤👤 40 000 🌐 600 000

Cossí vas ?

Bonjorn !

Mercé !

òc

non

- 1 un
- 2 dos
- 3 tres
- 4 quatre
- 5 cinc
- 6 sièis
- 7 sèt
- 8 uèch
- 9 nòu
- 10 dètz

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<<< Escotatz lo son d'aqueles mots

Photo: The village of Chianale in the Varaita valley, Piedmont

The echo of the troubadours in Italy

Occitan is a Romance language traditionally spoken across southern France, the Val d'Aran in Spain and parts of Italy. In Italy, it is recognised as a historical linguistic minority and is still spoken in several Alpine valleys of Piedmont.

Known as *lenga d'òc*, Occitan has a rich cultural history. During the Middle Ages, it was the language of the troubadours, whose poetry and songs of love, courage and adventure became famous throughout Europe. In Italy, the Vivaro-Alpine variety has long been spoken in valleys such as the Maira, Varaita and Po valleys. Further south, the town of Guardia Piemontese in Calabria preserves a unique Occitan-speaking community founded by settlers centuries ago.

Today, Occitan is considered endangered, but dedicated speakers and communities continue to keep it alive through festivals, literature, music and cultural events. The traditional song "Se Chanta", often regarded as Occitania's unofficial anthem, is still widely sung. Occitan is more than a language – it is a living link to history, culture and identity, connecting generations across mountains, valleys and borders.

LMO LOMBARD

👤👤👤 2 000 000 🌐 2 500 000

The language of Europe's early merchants

Lombard is spoken in northern Italy, southern Switzerland and in some emigrant communities by around 2.5 million people. It is a Gallo-Italic Romance language that is actually close to French and Occitan, featuring sounds that are uncommon for standard Italian speakers.

Long before modern financial centres emerged, merchants and moneylenders from northern Italy, a region then known collectively as "Lombardy", helped lay the foundations of European banking. Their influence was so great that "Lombard" became synonymous with banker, a legacy still visible today in the City of London's Lombard Street.

Lombard has a rich literary tradition dating back to the Middle Ages. From medieval poetry and scientific translations to the works of the celebrated 19th-century poet Carlo Porta, it has remained a vibrant cultural language. Theatre, music and cinema in Lombard flourished in the 20th century and continue to thrive today.

Today, a growing movement of activists is promoting written and spoken Lombard through social media, Wikipedia and Wikisource, YouTube, publications, conferences, translations, apps and open-source projects. Supported by some academic linguists, they also use Lombard in research and other scientific activities.

The spelling system used in the words and phrases on this page is Scriver Lombard, a shared writing standard designed to represent all Lombard varieties uniformly while allowing speakers to think the text in their local variety.

Comè
va-la?

Bondì!

Grazia!

aè

no

- | | |
|----|--------|
| 1 | vun |
| 2 | duu |
| 3 | tri |
| 4 | quater |
| 5 | cinq |
| 6 | ses |
| 7 | set |
| 8 | vot |
| 9 | noev |
| 10 | dex |

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Scolta el son de qei parole qì >>>

Photo: Vittorio Emanuele II Gallery, Milano, Lombardy

Languages, legends and mountains

One of the first things visitors notice in South Tyrol is that many places have two names. Bolzano is also Bozen, the Tre Cime are the Drei Zinnen, and Alto Adige is Südtirol. These names reflect the region's multilingual character, where German, Italian and Ladin have long existed side by side. After the First World War, South Tyrol became part of Italy, and later agreements helped protect the rights of its German-speaking population.

German is the largest language community in the region and remains closely linked to local identity. Place names, official documents, schools and public services all reflect South Tyrol's multilingual character, making languages a visible part of everyday life.

South Tyrol produces many sporting stars, such as the tennis champion Jannik Sinner and well-known mountaineer Reinhold Messner – both, of course, bilingual. The region is also well known for its legends. A spooky tale recorded by the Brothers Grimm tells of a hidden wine cellar beneath Salorno Castle with 18 barrels of wine, inspiring the local tavern "Zum 18. Fass".

In South Tyrol, standard German is far more than a language of administration. This reflects the rich heritage of a region where several languages continue to thrive side by side.

DEUTSCH DEU

👤👤👤 350 000 🌐 95 000 000

The words and phrases on this page are presented in Standard German, but South Tyrol is also home to over 40 different varieties of the South Bavarian dialect, which are spoken in its numerous villages and valleys.

ja

nein

- | | |
|----|--------|
| 1 | eins |
| 2 | zwei |
| 3 | drei |
| 4 | vier |
| 5 | fünf |
| 6 | sechs |
| 7 | sieben |
| 8 | acht |
| 9 | neun |
| 10 | zehn |

Wie geht's?

Hallo!

Danke!

<<< Hör dir an, wie diese Wörter klingen

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Photo: St. Magdalena church in Villnöss, Dolomites, South Tyrol

CIM ZIMBAR

👤👤👤 300 🌐 300

Cimbrian, Mòcheno and Walser are Germanic minority languages of northern Italy and have preserved many ancient linguistic features thanks to centuries of isolation in mountain valleys, turning them into living windows on Europe's linguistic past. The words and phrases on this page reflect a standardised Cimbrian.

- 1 òan
- 2 sbéen
- 3 drai
- 4 viare
- 5 bümbe
- 6 zèkse
- 7 zìbane
- 8 achte
- 9 nòine
- 10 sègane

Guuten
takh!

Bia
steesto?

Vorbàis
Gott!

ja

nìet

A medieval voice in the mountains

Cimbrian is one of Italy's oldest Germanic minority languages. Today, it survives mainly in Luserna (Lusérn) in Trentino and a few small communities in Veneto. Its origins date back around 1000 years, when German-speaking settlers established communities in the forests and high valleys of the Alps. Although they were once believed to descend from an ancient warrior people, they were in fact farmers, woodcutters and skilled carpenters. The name Zimbern may derive from Zimberer (literally timberer), reflecting this tradition.

Centuries of geographic isolation allowed Cimbrian to preserve words and sounds from medieval German that have disappeared elsewhere. As a result, the language offers a unique window into Europe's linguistic past and remains of particular interest to researchers.

Cimbrian culture is still celebrated in Luserna through festivals, traditional music, dance and local cuisine. One of the best-known traditions is the Burning of March (Bruciare di Marzo), when large bonfires mark the arrival of spring.

Today, however, Cimbrian is among Italy's most endangered languages, with only a few hundred speakers. During the 20th century, wars, migration from mountain communities and policies promoting the exclusive use of Italian contributed to its decline. Although it now benefits from legal protection, bilingual signage and cultural initiatives, its future depends on younger generations continuing to learn and use this remarkable Alpine language.

Lusteare bia dise beldar un sätze khlingen >>>

Photo: Dusk at the alpine village of Perpruneri, South Tyrol

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BERSNTOLERISCH MHN

👤👤👤 1 400 🌐 1 400

The language of a hidden valley

Mòcheno is spoken in the Fersina Valley (Bersntol) in Trentino, where a small German-speaking community has preserved its identity since the Middle Ages. The language was brought by settlers from Bavaria and Tyrol between the 12th and 13th centuries and belongs to the South Bavarian dialect group.

The valley's isolation helped Mòcheno retain phonetic, lexical and grammatical features of medieval German, while centuries of contact with Italian and local Trentino dialects shaped it into a unique language. Today, it remains a strong symbol of local identity and cultural heritage.

Traditional village festivals celebrate farming life, music, folk costumes and the Mòcheno language. One of the most distinctive events is the Carnival of Palù del Fersina, held on Shrove Tuesday. Three colourful characters, Der Bètscho (the Old Man), De Bètscha (the Old Woman) and Der Òiartroger (the Egg Collector), visit farms with costumed young people, collecting eggs before performing a traditional play.

Although spoken by only a small community, Mòcheno continues to be actively supported. It is taught in schools, appears on bilingual signs and is promoted by the Bersntoler Kulturinstitut, helping ensure that this remarkable linguistic heritage is passed on to future generations.

The words and phrases on this page follow the standard orthography used by the Bersntoler Kulturinstitut.

Bos geats
enk?
Grias de!
Vergèlts
Gott!

- 1 ains
- 2 zboa
- 3 drai
- 4 vier
- 5 vimf
- 6 secks
- 7 sibm
- 8 òcht
- 9 nain
- 10 zehn

jo

nètt

<<< Hear za bia de doi beirter ont saitn Klingen

Photo: Valle dei Mocheni, Trentino

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WAE WALSERTITSCH

👤👤👤 23 400 🌐 23 700

Walser does not have a single standard language covering all communities. The words and phrases on this page are based on commonly used Walser writing conventions and on forms documented for the Italian Walser varieties of Gressoney, Issime and Formazza.

- 1 eins
- 2 zwei
- 3 drii
- 4 vieri
- 5 fuf
- 6 sächs
- 7 sibu
- 8 achtu
- 9 nüüni
- 10 zächi

Wie geit's?

Götacho!

Merci
vilmal!

ja

nèi

The language of the alpine pioneers

Walser is spoken in several communities around Monte Rosa in the Aosta Valley and Piedmont. Unlike Cimbrian and Mòcheno, whose speakers came from the eastern Alps, the Walser migrated south from Switzerland's canton of Valais during the 12th and 13th centuries. Today, Walser is also spoken in parts of Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Austria.

The first Walser settlers established villages at altitudes above 1,500 metres, transforming rugged mountain terrain into thriving communities. Their long isolation helped preserve a language belonging to the Highest Alemannic branch of German, retaining medieval words and sounds that have disappeared from modern German.

Walser culture remains closely linked to mountain life. Traditional wooden houses, hay-drying barns ("Stadel") and distinctive customs continue to shape community identity. Across the Monte Rosa region, festivals celebrate Walser heritage through music, dance, local cuisine and language. During "Walser Nacht", the streets of Gressoney come alive with folklore performances, crafts and cultural activities. Visitors can also admire the traditional Walser costume, known for its bright red skirts and the ornate goldenè happò, a headdress decorated with gold and silver.

Today, only a small number of speakers remain. However, cultural associations, research centres, support organisations and local schools are working to ensure that this unique Alpine language and heritage continue to thrive.

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Loset, wiä dëschì Wört und Sätz tööned >>>

Photo: Typical ancient "Walser" house, South Tyrol

LADIN LLD

👤👤👤 40 000 🌐 40 000

There are 5 different dialects of Ladin. The words and phrases on this page are from the Val Gardena dialect.

Co vala pa?

Hoila!

De gra!

- 1 un
- 2 doi
- 3 trëi
- 4 cater
- 5 cinch
- 6 sies
- 7 set
- 8 ot
- 9 nuef
- 10 diesc

sci

no

<<< Scotu su coche sona chësta paroles

Photo: A cow in the Alps

A cocktail of ancient Latin and languages of the Alps

Ladin is a Romance language that developed from a mix of Latin spoken by the Romans dating back to the end of the 1st century B.C., when they conquered the Alps, and the language of the Dolomite mountain people at the time called Rhaetic. While developing unique characteristics over its 2,000-year history, Ladin maintains linguistic similarities with Latin, evident in its vocabulary, grammar, and structure.

About 40,000 people now speak Ladin in five valleys – Val Badia, Val Gardena, Val di Fassa, Livinallongo and Ampezzo. Each one of the valleys where Ladin is spoken has a standard language to be used for educational, institutional and official purposes. There are strong efforts to preserve and promote the language, such as the daily Ladin news programme TRAIL on RAI (Italy's national broadcasting company) and the weekly newspaper "Usc di Ladins", in the Ladin language.

Ladin is the native language of the famous composer, songwriter, and record producer Giorgio Moroder, who has worked with The Rolling Stones, Electric Light Orchestra, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Queen and Elton John, among others.

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VEC VENETO

👤👤👤 3 900 000 🌐 4 300 000

A language from the sea to the mountains and throughout the world

Venetian is a Romance language with its first written attestation dating back to the late 8th century. Dante Alighieri testified that, in 1300, it was spoken in the Duchy of Venice and in all the provinces of the Venetian mainland. Its area of origin lies within the borders of the Veneto Region (Venetia propria) but, over the centuries, the language has gradually spread to Friuli Venezia Giulia, Slovenia, the Croatian coast, Sardinia as well as Brazil, Mexico, Australia, Canada, Argentina, and beyond.

Its literature flourished between the 12th and 13th centuries and, supported by the political and cultural prestige of the Venetian Republic, experienced a further period of growth from the 15th century onwards. This included a rich production of scientific texts, theatrical comedies and songs. The 12th to the 16th century also corresponded to Venice's emergence as one of Europe's greatest economic and maritime powers. Today, Venetian is also used in academic linguistics textbooks, language-learning materials, Wikipedia pages, as well as social media platforms, messaging apps and open-source software.

The influence of Venetian can still be found in many modern languages. One of Italy's most famous words, "ciao", comes from the Venetian salutation "sciao" (literally "slave", and a shortened form of "I am your servant" used as an expression of greatly overstated reverence). Common international words such as "ballot", "gazette", "quarantine", "ghetto" and "arsenal" also have Venetian origins.

Since 2017, the Venetian language has had an official spelling recognised by the Veneto Region and it's also taught in various classes of primary and secondary schools in the region, based on the teaching principles of the Veneto Multistandard and on the values of multilingualism.

Ciao!

Come steto?

Grasie!

- | | |
|----|--------|
| 1 | un |
| 2 | do |
| 3 | tre |
| 4 | cuatro |
| 5 | sincue |
| 6 | sie |
| 7 | sete |
| 8 | oto |
| 9 | nove |
| 10 | dieze |

sì

nò

Scolta la pronunsia de 'ste parole >>>

Photo: Grand Canal Gondolas at the pier, Venice, Veneto

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FURLAN FUR

👤👤👤 600 000 🌐 600 000+

Cemût
stâstu?

Mandi!

Graciis!

- 1 un
- 2 doi
- 3 trê
- 4 cuatri
- 5 cinc
- 6 sîs
- 7 siet
- 8 vot
- 9 nûf
- 10 dîs

There are several varieties of the Friulian language: Western (Concordiese), Central-Eastern (including Udinese and Goriziano), and Northern (Carnian). The words and phrases on this page are from the Udinese dialect.

sì

no

The resilient language of northeastern Italy

Friulian, a Rhaeto-Romance language, is spoken in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy's northeasternmost region, and some municipalities of Veneto. It has grown through the centuries in a crossroads of cultures, where Latin, German and Slavic influences converged. This interaction contributed to the rich and unique vocabulary and grammar of Friulian today.

Although Friuli has gone through turbulent periods of invasion and occupation, the Friulian language always survived, forging a strong identity bond among its inhabitants. Today, strong efforts are being made to strengthen its use among younger generations. The Regional Agency for the Friulian language (ARLeF – in Friulian: Agjenzie Regionâl pe lenghe furlane) seeks to protect and promote the Friulian language and its historical and cultural heritage. It is also taught in schools across Friuli-Venezia Giulia, helping to protect its future.

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<<< Scolte il sun di chestis peraulis

Photo: Devil's bridge, Cividale del Friuli / Cividât, Friuli-Venezia Giulia

SLV SLOVENŠČINA

👤👤👤 85 000 🌐 2 500 000

Kako si?

Živjo!

Hvala!

- 1 ena
- 2 dve
- 3 tri
- 4 štiri
- 5 pet
- 6 šest
- 7 sedem
- 8 osem
- 9 devet
- 10 deset

da

ne

Prisluhnite zvoku teh besed >>>

A region where languages meet

Travelling east to Friuli-Venezia Giulia, you enter a region where mountains, borders and languages meet. Slovene has been spoken here for centuries, particularly in the provinces of Trieste, Gorizia and Udine near the Slovenian border. Despite changing borders and political history, Slovene-speaking communities have preserved their language and traditions across generations.

Alongside Standard Slovene, many local varieties are still spoken. One of the most distinctive is found in the Resia Valley, where the Resian dialect reflects the valley's unique history and identity. In nearby Val Canale, Italian, Friulian, German and Slovene have coexisted for centuries. Many locals describe the way they speak as "po našem" ("in our own way"), highlighting the close connection between language, community and belonging.

Today, Slovene remains an important part of everyday life in the region. It is taught in schools, celebrated through the Slovene Permanent Theatre in Trieste and supported by organisations such as SLORI. Festivals, music and literature continue to ensure that the Slovene language and culture flourish in Italy today.

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Photo: Castello di Miramare, Trieste, Friuli-Venezia Giulia

A language that travels with people

Romani is a unique part of Italy's linguistic landscape. Unlike most minority languages, it is a non-territorial language, meaning it is not linked to one specific region. Instead, it is spoken by Roma and Sinti communities whose history stretches across Europe. In Italy, an estimated 120,000 to 180,000 people speak Romani or one of its many related varieties.

Rather than being a single language, Romani is a family of closely related varieties. Some, such as Sinto, are mainly spoken in northern Italy, while others reflect the history of Roma families who arrived from the Balkans and Central Europe. Although there is no single written standard, the language has been passed down for centuries through conversation, storytelling, music and family traditions.

For many Roma and Sinti people, Romani is far more than a means of communication – it is a vital part of their identity and cultural heritage. Across Europe, schools, cultural organisations and international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, support efforts to preserve and promote the language. Films such as “A Ciambra”, set in a Romani community in Calabria, have also helped bring Romani culture to a wider audience.

Romani reminds us that languages are not always tied to places on a map. Sometimes they travel with people, carrying stories, traditions and memories across borders and from one generation to the next.

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<<< Ašun kadala svaturja

Photo: Romani dance

ROMANI ČHIB ROM

👤👤👤 120-180 000 🌐 3 500 000

va

na

Sar san?

Lašo d'es!

Najis tuke!

- 1 jekh
- 2 duj
- 3 trin
- 4 štar
- 5 panž
- 6 šov
- 7 efa
- 8 oxto
- 9 iňa
- 10 deš

ISE ITALIAN SIGN LANGUAGE

👤👤👤 40 000



A language of hands, face and space

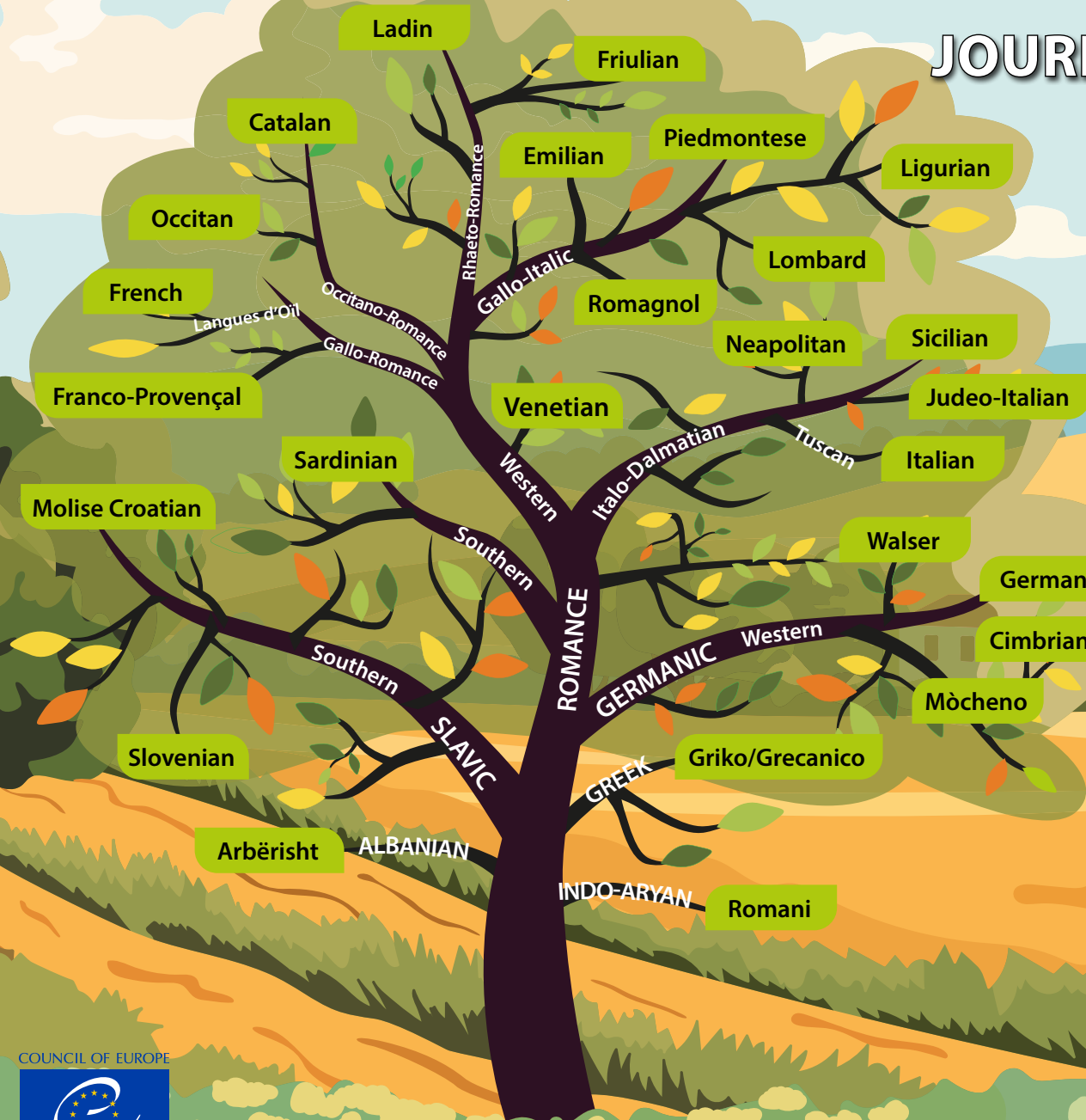
The final stop on this journey is different from all the others. Italian Sign Language (LIS) is not spoken but signed. LIS has its own grammar and vocabulary, just like any spoken language.

Sign languages are not universal. LIS is different from the sign languages used in other countries, and meaning is expressed through hand movements, facial expressions, eye contact and the use of space. LIS is used by around 40,000 deaf people in Italy, as well as by many hearing people. Although related to the French Sign Language family, LIS has developed independently over centuries and reflects Deaf Italian culture and traditions.

In 2021, Italy officially recognised both Italian Sign Language (LIS) and Tactile Italian Sign Language, used by deafblind signers and those involved in this community. Television programmes frequently include sign language interpretation and subtitles, as required by law, to ensure equal access to information. Like many spoken languages, LIS also has regional variations. It reminds us that languages are not only spoken or written – they can also be signed, seen and felt, opening new ways to communicate, connect and understand one another.

LARA'S LANGUAGE JOURNEY THROUGH ITALY

These are the languages Lara has encountered on her journey through Italy, but of course there are many more fascinating languages and dialects in Italy!



*Linguistic advisor:
Wolfgang Moser
(Urania Steiermark)*

ITA

SRD

CAT

edl.ecml.at/languagejourney

Italy is a true linguistic mosaic, where languages and varieties shaped by different histories, cultures and communities coexist. From indigenous traditions to historic minority languages, this rich diversity is an essential part of Italy's cultural heritage.

Developed by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe as part of the European Day of Languages initiative, this publication offers an engaging insight into Italy's multilingual heritage. We extend our thanks to the Coordinamento Lingue Regionali e Diritti Linguistici (CLIRD) and to the many experts whose knowledge and support helped bring this eye-opening resource to life.



Developed in collaboration with Aurelio La Torre, European projects coordinator and Director c/o the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Italy.

For more information on the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe and the European Day of Languages see www.ecml.at.

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SCN AAE ELL NAP

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LIJ PMS FRP FRA

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FUR SLV ROM ISE



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