

Italink aims to repopulate southern Italy’s villages

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NAPLES — New online portal Italink, that aims to revive southern Italy’s emptying villages by offering work in fading towns, restoring abandoned buildings, and guiding new residents through paperwork, was unveiled on May 29, 2026.

Italink was launched by Asmel, the Association for Subsidiarity and Modernisation of Local Authorities, which groups more than 4,860 Italian public bodies. It targets Italy’s inner areas, remote zones far from everyday services.

“From a cultural perspective, Italink is of vital importance,” Edwin Garrubbo, Italian American culinary author and attorney living in Rome, told Italy Now. “These towns are full of rich culinary history and tradition that must be preserved.”

They are also part of the ‘1,000 unique villages’ mosaic that is Italian cuisine,” said Garrubbo, known for his best-selling Sunday Pasta and Garrubbo Guide to Living in Rome which he wrote after taking 20 years to slowly relocate to his grandparent’s homeland due to the bureaucracy of residency, relocation and work permits.

Depopulation affects more than 4,000 Italian municipalities, on figures drawn from Istat, the national statistics agency. Among the 100 inner-area towns that shrank most between 2001 and 2020, the population fell by about 41 percent, two thirds of them in the south, in Calabria and Abruzzo. In Schiavi di Abruzzo, the resident population roughly halved between 2001 and 2020, from 1,403 to 701.

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/italink-aims-to-repopulate-southern-italys-villages/

“Inner-area municipalities are short of staff too,” Francesco Pinto, secretary general of Asmel, told Italy Now. “It’s a portal run by mayors to connect business owners with foreign workers who want to come to Italy on a regular employment contract.”



Village evenings (*Credits: Italy Now*)

Italink combines three strands. Italie targets *italo-discendenti* (people of Italian descent abroad) who want to return to ancestral towns. Italnext instead supports foreign workers seeking jobs and residency, with no family link needed. Italand regenerates *borghi* (historic villages) and revives unused property.

The first strand rests on new legislation passed last year governing the return and mobility of Italians abroad. Inland areas face a paradox, because even as a shortage of work is blamed for the exodus to cities, the firms that stay struggle to find staff.

“As a descendant of Italians, I hope Italy will be filled with young people,” said Ailén Romina Acevedo, president of the Union of Descendants of Italians Worldwide, told Italy Now.

“I love this project,” said Acevedo, who offers services and legal support to those affected by a

recent change in Italy’s citizenship laws that restricts citizenship by descent, limiting eligibility to those with an Italian parent or grandparent and ending automatic recognition for many descendants born abroad.

How it works

Five lines of activity are running. They cover matching people with firms and councils, simplifying paperwork, training municipal staff, serving new residents, and restoring abandoned buildings. AI software helps foreign arrivals learn basic Italian, which Asmel says speeds integration.



Italian hilltop village (*Credits: Italy Now*)

Italink moved fast. Hundreds of firms and workers signed up before the official campaign began, and the first 20 hires went through on regular contracts. Maurizio Gasparri, who chairs the Senate’s foreign affairs committee, sent a video endorsement from Paris.

“The platform does important work of international connection, creating job opportunities and helping people with skills useful in the sectors where our country is short of labour enter Italy,” he said. “Creating work, building networks, valuing people. That is an important and concrete goal.”

A village that fills up again is a bet on whether Italy can keep its smaller communities alive.

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