

Foreign family assistants: rights, opportunities, and obligations

7. Tools for qualifying home care employment



Regione Emilia-Romagna



Assessorato alla Promozione delle politiche sociali e di quelle educative per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza.
Politiche per l'immigrazione. Sviluppo del volontariato, dell'associazionismo e del terzo settore.

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Entering and regularly residing in Italy

The Italian Law that regulates the methods of entry and stay in Italy for foreign citizens is constituted by Legislative Decree 286/98, modified by Laws 189/2002 and 271/2004, and by the by-law of the Decree of the President of the Italian Republic, 394/1999, modified by the Decree of the President of the Italian Republic, 334/2004.

Citizens not pertaining to the European Community

To enter Italy and work as a family assistant, the foreigner who lives in a Non-EC country must be included in the “entry quotas for foreign workers”, programmed by the Government, with one or more Decrees, throughout the year. With these Decrees, the Government might define quotas reserved for entry into the country for domestic or assistance employment: the Decree of the President of the Cabinet, dated 17.12.2004, has, for the first time, provided for a reserved quota on a national level, equal to 15,000 entries.

Therefore, the first matter to consider is that of waiting for the implementation of the annual Decree regarding **entry quotas** (quote d’ingresso), in order to begin the procedure for requesting entry and hiring of a foreign citizen for employment as a family assistant.

PROCEDURE

- The employer must present the **employment application request** (richiesta di assunzione) for one or more foreign employees at the Immigration Counter instituted in the Prefecture.
- If no difficulties are encountered, and the employer confirms the will to hire the foreigner, the personnel at the Immigration Counter will verify if there are entry quotas that have not been utilized. Only after this has been verified will an **authorization** (nulla osta) **for employment** (seasonal, subordinate on a definite or indefinite basis, or autonomous) be issued. The authorization will be issued to the employer or, upon request, will be directly sent to the Italian Consulate in the country of origin of the foreign employee.
- Through the diplomatic or consular representative, the foreign employee must request an **entry/work visa** (visto di ingresso), which will then be issued within the following 30 days.
- At this point, the foreign employee can enter Italy with:

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- a) passport or equivalent document;
 - b) entry/work visa;
 - c) documents stating the purpose of the trip
- Within the **8 days** following entry into the national territory, the foreign employee must visit the Immigration Counter to sign a **residence contract** (contratto di soggiorno) for employment, and must, afterwards, pick-up the residence permit (issued by Police Headquarters).

The duration of the **residence permit** (permesso di soggiorno) for employment is that provided for by the residence contract:

- maximum 1 year for subordinate employment on a definite basis;
- maximum 2 years for subordinate employment on an indefinite basis.

Renewal of a residence permit must be requested by the foreign employee through the Police Commissioner of the province of residency, at least:

90 days before the expiration of the employment contract stipulated for an indefinite basis;

60 days before the expiration of the employment contract stipulated for a definite basis.

OBLIGATIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

A) The employer must present a **nominative request** (on a special form) to the Immigration Counter, containing information regarding the following:

- complete personal data of the employer;
- complete personal data of the foreign employee;
- salary and insurance coverage (also indicated on the residence contract stipulation proposal);
- housing with prerequisites for adequate living and health conditions, or falling within the minimum parameters regarding public housing provided for by law;
- agreement to cover travel expenses for return to the employee's country of origin;

- agreement to communicate any variation in the employment relationship. The request must be accompanied by the stipulation proposal of a residence contract on an indefinite, definite or seasonal basis, with working hours that are, however, not inferior to 20 weekly hours, and in cases regarding domestic employment, a monthly salary not inferior to the minimum wage provided for by the welfare allotment check (approximately €374,97).

It is important to underline that Section 30bis, appended by the Decree of the President of the Italian Republic, 334/2004, provides that the ascertainment of the congruity of the economic capacity of the employer (valid, in general, for employers who hire immigrant employees), does not apply to employers who are infirmed or disabled, therefore, not self-sufficient, and who intend to hire a foreign employee for personal assistance.

B) In order to establish a new employment relationship, the employer must:

- undersign a new residence contract for employment at the Immigration Counter;
- within 5 days from establishing employment, notify the date of commencement and date of termination of the employment relationship established with the foreign citizen, always at the Immigration Counter.

New EC-member state citizens

From May 1st, 2004 to May 1st, 2006, citizens from new EC-member states can enter the Italian job market on the basis of reserved quotas established with special Decrees of programming.

The hiring process, in this case, follows the same procedure implemented for hiring foreign citizens, yet, it is simplified, since it does not require the issuance of an authorization for entry, nor the issuance of an entry/work visa, nor does it require that the residence contract include guaranteed housing or payment of travel expenses for return to the employee's country of origin.

An Italian or foreign employer, regularly residing in Italy, who intends to establish subordinate employment, in Italy, on a definite or indefinite basis, with an employee from a New EC-member state, must present a request for authorization of employment (work permit) at the Provincial Employment Office (where employment will occur) containing: the personal data of the applicant, along with the employment conditions offered (collective labor

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agreement applied, qualification and level of placement, monthly gross salary, working hours, place of employment, type of contract: indefinite, definite or seasonal), attaching the employment contract stipulated with the New EC-Member citizen, conditioned by the actual issuance of the authorization of employment and by the request of a residence card.

The Provincial Employment Office, once having ascertained the availability of quotas, issues the authorization and sends it to both the applicant and the authorized Police Headquarters in the territory, where the employee must then present himself/herself, so that a **residence card** (carta di soggiorno) for employment can be issued.

Rejoining family members

If one is the bearer of a residence card or a residence permit, with validity not inferior to one year, a request for authorization can be presented for rejoining family members with:

- a spouse that is not legally separated;
- children with a dependent status who are under 18 years of age;
- children of age with a dependent status who are entirely disabled;
- parents with a dependent status if they do not have other children in their country of origin, or parents who are older than 65 if their other children cannot support them due to certified serious health problems.

The **request** must be presented to the Immigration Counter in the Prefecture of the province of residence of the interested party, specifying the personal data of the applicant and of those who will be rejoining the applicant, including documents, which attest:

- availability of **housing**, in conformity with the parameters provided for by public housing standards, (certified by the authorized municipal office), or with a health certificate issued by the Local Health Unit (ASL). In cases regarding children under the age of 14, the consent of the occupant of the dwelling where the minor will live is sufficient;
- availability of an annual **income** (for the applicant, plus family members already living together) not inferior to the annual sum of the welfare allotment check (€ 4.874,61 for the year 2005) if requesting one family member (double for two family members);

- possession, on behalf of the applicant, of a residence card or **residence permit**, with validity not inferior to one year;
- family (parentela) relationship, proof of a minor age, and family status.

For parents and adult children with a dependent status, the following must be attested:

- total disability (for adult children);
- serious health problems (that impede other children - brothers/sisters - from supporting parents who are over 65);
- economic conditions in the country of origin.

Copy of the request, with official stamp from the Immigration Counter, along with the signature of the office clerk, must be sent to the family living abroad, in order to be presented to the Italian diplomatic or consular representative when requesting an **entry/work visa**.

Once having received the authorization from the Immigration Counter (usually issued within 90 days), or if 90 days have passed from the request (even without having acquired authorization from the Immigration Counter), and if all the prerequisites provided for by the current regulations in force are existent, the consular authorities will issue the entry/work visa for rejoining family members within 30 days from presentation of the request for the visa.

Stipulating a regular employment contract

A national contract for “Family Assistants” does not exist, therefore, the collective labor agreement for “domestic employment” is taken as reference.

This contract provides for 4 levels of **PROFESSIONAL PLACEMENT**:

- **1st plus category** (for those with a diploma or a professional certificate (attestato) validated by a public agency);
- **1st category** (for those who work in full autonomy (autonomia) and responsibility, explicitly appointed by the employer);
- **2nd category** (for those who are employed with precise indications from the employer);
- **3rd category** (for those who carry out a generic job position with less than 14 months of service).

Note: for “family assistants” without a validated certificate, the 1st category is implemented.

SALARIES (trattamento economico) vary in relation to the professional placement acquired and the types of services offered and is updated on an annual basis, in agreement with the employers and unions (in relation to variations in the cost of living registered by the ISTAT (Central Statistics Office) on the 30th of November of every year).

Live-in employees are entitled to room and board (vitto e alloggio). Those who are not live-ins and work at least 6 hours per day, are entitled to a meal per day.

TRIAL PERIOD (periodo di prova) is considered:

- 30 days working from hiring for 1st plus category and 1st category employees;
- 8 days working from hiring for 2nd category and 3rd category employees.

WORKING HOURS (orario di lavoro) are considered:

- 10 non-consecutive hours per day (max. 54 hours per weeks) for live-in employees;
- 8 non-consecutive hours per day (max. 44 hours per week) for those who are not live-ins.

Part-time employment is allowed for 25 weekly hours for live-ins, only if they are students between the ages of 16 and 29, attending courses that will terminate with a valid diploma or degree, issued by the State or by public agencies once completed.

YEARLY VACATION DAYS (ferie annuali) are equal to **26 working days**, with daily pay equal to 1/26 of the monthly salary, including room and board if compensated.

If requested by the employees, and in agreement with the employer, vacation days can be accumulated within a time period of a maximum of two years.

PAID LEAVE (permessi retribuiti), or paid days off, provided for by the contract, is equal to **16 hours** per year for live-in employees, and 12 hours per year for those who are not live-ins and work at least 30 hours per week.

These days can be used for documented **medical visits**, which coincide with the relevant working hours.

Additional paid leave is allowed up to a maximum of 3 days for serious family matters and in the event of the **death** of a family member. A male employee to whom a **child** is born is entitled to 2 days off.

Employees with at least 20 weekly working hours are entitled to the same hours of leave, but these hours are not reimbursed.

If the employee is going to be **married** (matrimonio), leave of 15 calendar days is allowed.

Note: When attending specific **professional training courses**, the contract provides for 40 yearly hours paid for full-time employment on an indefinite basis, with seniority of at least 18 months employed with the same employer.

The contract must include **Christmas bonuses**, **severance pay**, and a day off during the week (riposo settimanale).

If **employees become ill** (malattia), certified with a physicians note, in relation to their seniority, they have the right to maintain their positions and salaries, in accordance with the methods illustrated in the table below.

>Stipulating a regular employment contract

Sick Leave

Seniority	Maintaining the job position	Paid days per year for sick leave		
		Total days paid	First 3 consecutive days	Days to follow
Up to 6 months	10 yearly calendar days for sick leave	8 days	50% total salary	100% total salary from 4th to 8th day
From 6 months to 2 years	45 yearly calendar days for sick leave	10 days	50% total salary	100% total salary from 4th day to 8th day
More than 2 years	180 annual calendar days for sick leave	15 days	50% total salary	100% total salary from 4° day to 15th day

Note: **Accidents or injury** (infortunio) **in the workplace must be declared to the INAIL** (Labor Accident Insurance Institute) (filling out form 117-I) within 24 hours or by telegraph (in the event of a deadly accident), or within two days from the accident.

Absence for Injury

Seniority	Maintaining the job position	Salary	
		First 3 days	Days to follow
Up to 6 months	10 yearly calendar days for absence for injury	100% total salary (charged to the employer)	INAIL workmen's compensation
From 6 months to 2 years	45 yearly calendar days for absence for injury	100% total salary (charged to the employer)	INAIL workmen's compensation
More than 2 years	180 yearly calendar days for absence for injury	100% total salary (charged to the employer)	INAIL workmen's compensation

In the event of a **MATERNITY** (maternità) leave, the employee cannot be fired, save for just cause, from the beginning of the pregnancy (if she has become pregnant during the working relationship) until the end of the mandatory period of absence from the job (3 months after labor).



Aspects of social security and insurance

If regularly residing in Italy for employment, the worker has the right to both a regular employment contract and, if he/she meets the required requisites, also to social security and insurance services.

Contributions and pensions (Contributi e pensione)

Law n. 638, dated 1983, states that, in order to accrue a complete week of contributions, one must work at least 24 hours per week. If this does not occur, the contributions will be validated proportionally to the hours worked (the limit of 24 hours per week can also be accumulated by working for more than one employer).

A) Foreign family assistants who continue to live in Italy

Pensions paid by the INPS (National Insurance Funds Institute)

Foreign family assistants have a right to the same services as Italian employees, in particular, in relation to the following services related to the accrual of a minimum of contributions paid during the employment period:

- **old-age pension,**
- **retirement pension,**
- **disability check,**
- **disability pension and continuative personal assistance check,**
- **survivorship annuity.**

Old-age pension

An old-age pension can be obtained when age requisites (requisiti) are reached, which are currently equal to 65 years of age for men, and 60 years of age for women, with a minimum of 20 years of contributions.

Retirement pension

A retirement pension can be obtained before having reached the retirement age if there exist particular conditions regarding age and contributions paid (minimum 35 years of contributions).

Ordinary disability check (invalidità) and disability pension

Received by employees affected by physical or mental disabilities, whether partial or total, with particular contribution requisites (5 years of contributions with at least 3 in the five-year period preceding the request).

Survivorship annuity (superstiti)

A pension is received, with a minimum of contributions paid, by the spouse, or by minor or adult children who are students or who are disabled, upon the death of the insured or retired employee.

Additional disability services

If fired or unemployed, those with a residence card who have not reached the minimum contributions to obtain the above stated pensions, in the presence of serious forms of illness, can present a request for civilian disability registration to the medical Commission of the Local Health Unit, and in more serious cases, a request for a caregiver allowance can also be presented.

B) Pensions for repatriated Non-EC employees

If a non-EC employee has been repatriated (rimpatrio), a pension can be obtained in relation to the contributions paid in Italy, at the age of sixty-five, for both men and women.

Additional rights are conceded, among which the sum of contributions also paid in other countries (principle of totalization), if the employees are EC citizens or citizens of States that are bound to Italy through bilateral or multilateral agreements regarding Social Security.

- areas interested by the enforcement of European Community regulation n. 1408/71: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxemburg, Holland, Portugal, United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland (since June 1st, 2002), Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary (since May 1st, 2004).
- areas interested by bilateral agreements: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada and Quebec, Capo Verde, all Ex-Yugoslavia territories (for Slovenia, from August 1st, 2002, in relation to an autonomous convention), Jersey and other Channel isles, Monaco, San Marino, Tunisia, Turkey (since April 12th, 1990, in relation to the European Convention on Social Security), Venezuela, Uruguay, USA, Vatican City, and Croatia since November 1st, 2003.

In these cases, the rights to pension, insurance, and coverage are governed in relation to the criteria established by the respective conventions.

>Aspects of social security and insurance

Additional social security and insurance services

Mandatory Maternity Leave

Family assistants have a right to be absent from their place of employment:

- 2 months preceding the presumed date of childbirth, save for any anticipated time provided for by law or by particular health conditions;
- 3 months after the date of childbirth.

Contribution requisites for right to maternity allowance

The right to an allowance is due if the employee, in the 24 months preceding the maternity period, has paid 52 weeks of contributions.

Alternatively, if in the 12 months preceding the beginning of the maternity period the employee has paid at least 26 weeks of contributions, it is always recommended that the request be presented, even if the minimum contributions have not been paid.

The maternity allowance is equal to 80% of the conventional daily salary (reduced with respect to the actual salary), used for calculating the INPS (National Insurance Funds Institute) contributions.

The allowance is paid directly by the INPS, with request by the employee, and must always be presented to the INPS within 6 months from childbirth.

Family assistants do not have a right to:

- family leave (period of voluntary absence required to assist the child after birth);
- daily rest time (breastfeeding hours);
- leave of absence if the child is ill.

ILLNESS

If the employee is absent from work for illness, the INPS (National Insurance Funds Institute) does not pay any type of allowance. The employment contract, however, provides for an integration from the employer.

It is, nevertheless, useful that a doctor's letter be sent to the INPS office, since it is required for the social security contributions regarding days of absence from work for illness (so called "figurative" contributions).

IMPORTANT: The employee must immediately notify the employer from the beginning of the period of illness and must also present a doctor's letter (certificate medico) to the employer within 3 days. The law provisions in relation to verification visits by the authorities are enforced (mandatory hours at home, etc.).

ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES

If an accident or injury occurs in the workplace, and the employee is absent from work for more than 3 days, wages are due to the employee from the INAIL (Labor Accident Insurance Institute).

Additional rights

Family assistants, like other dependent employees, with regards to various requisites of the law, have the right to:

- allowances for **ordinary unemployment** (disoccupazione), or with **reduced requisites**, if fired from the job;
- **checks for family**, and spouse, as well as for children who are minors with a dependent status;
- **allowances** in the presence of a **tubercular disease**;
- **thermal treatments** for particular illnesses, provided for by law.

Problems and difficulties a family assistant may encounter

Initial difficulties

In the relationship with the person in care, the factor that most frequently creates problems is the possible initial attitude of refusal (rifiuto), of non-acceptance, which the elderly person might express with different behaviors. It could be useful, in this first phase, if family members are available and present, in order to ask the relative closest to this person to aid the family assistant and act as a “mediator” (mediazione), favoring communication and reciprocal understanding between the two, also informing them in relation to their respective responsibilities.

It might occur that family members underestimate the seriousness of the situation of their relative, and do not see improvement or do not appreciate the importance of the close, personal relationship that can grow between the elderly person and the family assistant. This behavior can provoke negative feelings, such as anger or disappointment, if one’s commitment is not recognized or appreciated, or it can nurture the belief that one is not suited for this type of employment. Confronting others who are in the same profession and who have encountered the same initial difficulties can help to understand and overcome these problems. Acquiring experience in relation to the main problems that are typical in this field of employment as family assistants, and the awareness (consapevolezza) of the technical and relational competence required, is essential, in order to improve one’s own professional capacities.

Caring for the elderly

Caring for the elderly means, above all, improving their well-being (benessere) and their quality of life, and not necessarily recuperating their functional and cognitive capacities: the important contribution given by family assistants is that of keeping those they are assisting in their own environment, guaranteeing an adequate protection for them in various aspects of daily life.

However, encountering need, unease, or pain can attack the sense of ability of one’s own work, with the possibility of producing a state of depression (depressione) and a sense of impotence. It is of utmost importance to know the health conditions and complete state of the person in care by taking advantage of the help given by family members and by experts (physician, social worker, welfare worker). Joining a caretaking project (progetto di cura), where all those involved are aware of their personal duties, can aid the family

assistants in scaling down their expectations, therefore, allowing them to perform their jobs at their best.

Taking care of yourself

When assisting a person who is not self-sufficient, the risk is in adapting one's own lifestyle to those of the elderly person in care: the living-in conditions sacrifice the privacy of both involved, and the need to guarantee continuity and diligence in the caring process reduces the time that the family assistants have to dedicate to their own lives. It is important to take advantage of any free time and personal spaces, in order to cultivate one's own interests, care for one's own health (i.e. exercise classes), emerge from the solitude of the relationship created with the person in care by frequenting places of socialization (socializzazione) with friends and people with whom one can share feelings, as well as maintain connections with associations for immigrants, so as to overcome the distance felt, the insecurities stemming from migratory conditions, and be able to have a support system to resolve practical problems (i.e. replacements during vacation time, temporary housing during transfers).

Isolation, solitude, weariness, and depression can oftentimes lead to seeking easy solutions (i.e. alcohol (alcolici), tranquilizers, drugs, etc.) aimed at lessening the sense of weariness. This can then lead to habits that do not resolve the underlying problem, but worsen the situation. One must not underestimate these types of behavior and must talk to others (such as a family doctor).

Rest periods, or leaves of absence provided for by the contract, are also important to allow for psychological-physical recovery and should not be waived.

Additional difficulties

- Taking care of a person means entering that person's most intimate sphere. Often, certain gestures or behaviors by elderly men might cause unease (disagio) and embarrassment. In this case, it is important to try to clarify one's professional role with the person in care. Being able to speak of these situations with those who are in the same profession might help understand that they can be part of the work experience. On the other hand, the case is different when it comes to actual sexual harassment (molestie sessuali), or repeated behaviors, gestures or phrases of a sexual context, by the elderly person in care

>Problems and difficulties a family assistant may encounter

or by family members, which offend the dignity of the family assistant. To be subjected to this for fear of not being believed, or for fear of being fired, creates a climate of intimidation, which leads to further psychological suffering. When facing such situations, one must react and confront the situation by speaking to others, such as one's own physician or a social worker.

- The family assistant can have the difficult task of accompanying the person in care towards death. The death (decesso) of an elderly person is a highly destabilizing factor for the assistant who, along with the mourning period and the sorrow felt, must confront the loss of a job, home, and economic security. One can seek assistance through public services (i.e. Employment Office), or private services (i.e. Volunteer Associations, Associations for Immigrants, etc.) that are active on a local level (see List of Services attached).

In conclusion

1) One must acquire professionalism (professionalità). Professionalism increases the value of the work carried out, it improves its quality, and aids in confronting problems with greater awareness, especially those related to relationships and emotions.

2) It is important for migrant workers to be in contact with people, groups and associations, in order to build friendship, solidarity (solidarietà), and assistance relationships, therefore, also becoming more easily acquainted with opportunities related to entertainment, training, socialization, and mutual aid offered throughout the territory.



Health Services for immigrant women

Foreign citizens present in the regional territory have the right to health assistance.

WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO REGISTER WITH NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES

The following have the right to be registered with National Health Services:

- non-EC citizens with a valid residence permit for subordinate and autonomous employment purposes, for family reasons, for request of asylum and/or political and humanitarian asylum, for awaiting adoption and foster care, and for acquisition of Italian citizenship;
- non-EC citizens with request for renewal of a residence permit;
- EC citizens if renewing a residence permit for autonomous, subordinate employment with documents proving the pending suit towards an eventual appeal against the refusal provision for the renewal; or receipt of registration for the presentation of the request for renewal; or in the event of a registration that is not documented with an appropriate receipt, copy of a recently expired or almost expired residence permit, self-certification that proves the request for the renewal of the residence permit, and self-certification proving the employment status;
- EC citizens residing in Italy or domiciled for employment purposes.

Registering with National Health Services is free and allows to select a general practitioner (medico di famiglia) or family pediatrician (pediatra).

Those registered with National Health Services are issued a health **services card** (tessera sanitaria): a personal document on which all personal data is recorded, along with the tax code of the bearer. This document has the same validity as the residence permit and is required when requesting health/medical assistance (for example: doctor's visits, exams, hospital stays). Methods of payment are the same as those applied to Italian citizens.

Health assistance is also extended to family members who are dependents of the person registered with National Health Services, regularly residing in the country.

What is needed to register with National Health Services

To register, visit the Health Services District (Distretto dell'Azienda Usl) where one resides or is domiciled (domicile indicated on the residence permit), along with:

- document of identity (i.e. identity card/passport);
- residence permit or receipt for request of renewal, and a copy of the previous permit (see above);

WHO DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO REGISTER WITH NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES

Non-EC citizens without a residence permit DO NOT have the right to register with National Health Services. Instead, an STP card (tessera a codice STP) (Temporarily Present Foreigner card) is issued, which allows for urgent and essential cures for illness and injury, interventions of preventive medicine, and related medical services, in particular: interventions for pregnancies and maternity; protection of the health of minors, immunizations and treatments; interventions for the prevention, cure, and rehabilitation of various stages of drug addiction; nutrition training/retraining classes (Regional Law 11/2003). The STP card is temporary (6 months) and can be renewed. Methods of payment are the same as those applied to Italian citizens.

How to obtain an STP card

- The STP card is issued during the first health service requested.

Operators who assist a non-EC citizen with an STP card do not have to notify the authorities.

Non-EC citizens in Italy with a residence permit for tourism (turismo), DO NOT have the right to register with National Health Services. All health services are provided upon payment in all Hospitals according to the current fees in force.

EC citizens who temporarily reside in Italy, with a European insurance **card or with a temporary certificate** (permesso di soggiorno per turismo), have the right to all necessary health services, with direct access, including services related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Foreigners regularly residing in the country (EC and Non-EC citizens) who do not fall among those necessarily registered with National Health Services, must be insured for illness, injury, and maternity through an Italian or foreign insurance policy, valid through the national territory, or through voluntary registration with National Health Services, also valid for family members with a dependent status.

HEALTH ASSISTANCE FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

(ALLE DONNE E AI BAMBINI)

FOR WOMEN

If registered with National Health Services, one has the right to specialized visits, lab tests and instrumental exams (i.e. sonograms, colposcopies, x-rays, etc.) within **district and hospital clinics** (poliambulatori distrettuali ed ospedalieri) and in **Family Consultories** (consultori familiari). A request from a general practitioner or from a specialist registered with National Health Services is required, along with an appointment.

One can directly access the Family Consultories even if not in possession of a residence permit (see paragraph regarding the STP card).

The Consultories, prior to an appointment, with free access, offer gynecological visits, obstetric consultations, as well as psychological and sexual education assistance (regarding problems tied to sentimental relations and those related to sexual contexts). Assistance is guaranteed for pregnancy, post-partum period, voluntary interruption of pregnancies (abortions), adolescents, contraception, menopause, and health education activities.

The Clinics, prior to an appointment, with free access (without a physician's request), offer dental check-ups and eye exams.

Through Family Consultories, Public Health Services, and Infectious Diseases Clinics, one has access to visits and tests required for the prevention and cure of infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Furthermore, within the Family Consultories, one can find services related to **Immigrant Women and their children** where prevalently female personnel assist women who have recently immigrated, only in possession of an STP card. These Services are particularly dedicated to women who are not very familiar with the Italian language and with the organization of the health services offered. A physician's request is not required, and the presence of a cultural mediator (mediatrici culturali) helps to facilitate relations with women and children who request assistance.

Through these Services, women can undergo the same types of health/medical visits and exams offered in the Family Consultories. For children, the services offered by the Community Pediatrician are the same.

In some provinces (i.e. Parma and Reggio Emilia), these Immigrant Health Services are open to both men and women, without a residence permit, for primary health assistance, and they can be accessed for visits, prescriptions, and exams.

Pregnancy (Gravidanza)

In Italy, **in the event of a pregnancy**, all women registered with National Health Services, or with an STP card, have the right to free check-ups provided on a national level, for every month of pregnancy (specialized visits, lab tests, instrumental exams), if these are carried out in public or in accredited private structures.

If not yet legalized, by presenting a medical certificate, which attests the pregnancy, one can request a residence permit for health reasons through Police Headquarters, deemed valid for a stay in Italy during the pregnancy and for the 6 months following childbirth.

All newborns must be registered with the municipal registry office within 10 days from birth.

In the event of economic difficulties, and in possession of a residence permit, but without economic support for maternity, one can request welfare support through the Social Services of the Communes and Provinces before the birth of the baby, for a maximum period of 5 months, and for the period following the birth. In relation to paying contributions for maternity insurance coverage, one can contact the INPS office to request a maternity check within 6 months from childbirth.

If not accompanied or alone, Social Services can assist in finding housing for both the period of pregnancy, as well as for the period following the birth of the baby, and can also facilitate acceptance into nurseries.

If a decision is made to give up the baby, Italian law allows for the mother to legally refuse the newborn at birth, and the baby can be left in the hospital, while still protecting the anonymity (anonimato) of the mother and the health and life of the newborn. When hospitalized, the mother can, therefore, decide not to declare any personal information and does not have to present a document of identity. At the time of birth, she must specify, with the obstetrician, her intention to refuse the baby, who will then be registered with the Registry Office as “born by woman who does not want to be identified”. All babies left in the hospital usually find a family in a brief pe-

>Health Services for immigrant women

riod of time. Since the decision to leave the baby in the hospital is definite, to receive counseling and assistance, one should speak to a social worker in the hospital or any other located in the territory.

If a decision is made to terminate the pregnancy, Italian Law 194/78 allows for the voluntary interruption (interruzione volontaria) of a pregnancy, which must occur within 12 weeks and 5 days from conception. Within this time period, the woman must visit a Family Consultory or her general practitioner with a document of identity and a positive pregnancy test carried out in an analysis lab. After a visit and a detailed meeting, if the woman's decision does not change, the physician issues a document, which allows the woman to undergo an abortion in a hospital.

Oncological screening

Screening programs for the prevention of uterine, breast, and colon-rectum cancer (prevenzione dei tumori), promoted by the Emilia-Romagna Region, are free-of-charge and allow for the early diagnosis (and cure) (diagnosi precoce) of any tumors detected through simple tests such as a pap-test, mammogram, and the search for blood in the feces.

Those who are interested can visit the Family Consultories and Oncological Screening Centers and undergo the check-ups provided for in the regional screening campaigns:

- **pap-test:** an exam for the prevention of cervical tumors carried out every three years for women between the ages of 25 and 65;
- **mammogram:** an exam for the precocious diagnosis of breast tumors carried out every two years for women between the ages of 50 and 70;
- **test for blood in the feces:** an exam for the prevention of colon-rectum tumors for men and women between the ages of 50 and 70.

FOR CHILDREN (PER IL BAMBINO)

All mandatory and recommended immunizations (vaccinazioni obbligatorie) can be carried out through Community Pediatricians. Furthermore, in collaboration with family pediatricians, **Community Pediatricians** in the clinics issue certificates for special diets for children who attend school, for total or partial exemptions from physical activities, and for readmission to school after being cured from an infectious illness.

Specialized visits and other tests carried out in the Consultory clinics of the Community Pediatricians, as well as all recommended immunizations carried out in the Immunization Services Clinics, are free-of-charge.

Foreign children without a residence permit and who, therefore, do not have a pediatrician, can visit the Community Pediatrician for medical check-ups.

If a child is registered with National Health Services, with the request of a personally chosen pediatrician, one can undergo specialized visits, lab tests, and instrumental tests in District or Hospital Clinics. These are free of charge till the age of 6 if the family income is less than €. 36.151,99.

For the addresses of Clinics, Family Consultories, Community Pediatricians, and Screening Centers, contact the **Toll-free number** (Numero Verde) of the **Regional Health Service: 800-033-033**. This number can be called from both a line phone, as well as a mobile/cell phone. Qualified operators will answer on work days, from 8:30am to 5:30pm, and Saturday mornings, from 8:30pm to 1:30pm.

Training and professional development opportunities

Raising children, assisting those who are ill, caring for the elderly, have always been tasks that all women throughout the world have carried out in a free and invisible manner within one's own family or within one's own home. Assistance that is carried out for one's own family does not require specific training, since what is sufficient is the knowledge that stems from sentimental ties and from sharing a common history.

However, when care must be given, through paid employment, to strangers affected, among other things, by serious infirmities or disabilities (which a family alone cannot handle), the caregivers must be professionally qualified, also through special training courses.

This is even more necessary if the family assistants are, moreover, employed outside of their own countries and, therefore, outside of their own cultural context, of their own traditions and habits, and in contact with lifestyles (*stili di vita*), and care and eating habits unknown to them, along with new, often complex problems, illnesses, and disabilities, (such as Alzheimer's Disease or senility [*demenza senile*]), or with which, however, they have never come into contact.

Assistance activities require special knowledge and abilities for aiding the assisted person in moving, personal hygiene, prevention of various risks, and in stimulating the residual capacities of this person. However, competence in handling relationships is also required, in order to establish good communication and a correct rapport with both the person in care, as well as the family members, favoring reciprocal awareness and trust, and being able to better interpret and understand the needs that are not always clearly expressed.

The knowledge of having to learn and recognize that one must be helped, in order to ensure quality assistance, above all, when having to ensure good personal hygiene for a bedridden elderly person, assisting elderly people with serious movement impediments, taking care of elderly individuals affected by Parkinson's Disease or by senility, is a sign of intelligence, maturity, sense of responsibility (*responsabilità*), and motivation towards one's own work.

Therefore, one should not be afraid to voice any training needs and should request to attend a course or to require technical home assistance that can help in carrying out one's own job with greater competence.

Surely, the elderly person assisted and, above all, the family members of

this person, are the first from whom one must learn, but also the nurses, the social assistance personnel, and the physicians involved in home assistance for the elderly person in care are available for information, instructions, and suggestions useful in improving the quality of the assistance offered.

The first important training requirement is the **language** (lingua): learning the Italian language is not only a right, but it is also an obligation for those who become family assistants, since one cannot assist, listen, keep company, read prescriptions, or establish a relationship if there are language difficulties. Being that these activities constitute the content of the work an assistant must carry out, if the language is not learned, then one's work cannot be properly performed.

It is, therefore, essential to make a personal effort and learn the Italian language, not only for employment purposes, but because learning the language will help in feeling part of this country and integrating in its social context.

Fortunately, free Italian language courses for foreigners are often organized by the Communes, Unions, associations, and training institutes (see List attached).

With regard to the actual **professional training** (formazione professionale) required, the Emilia-Romagna Region has elaborated a training itinerary of 120 hours for the qualification of private family assistants, on the basis of which Professional Training Centers organize classes in their various provinces.

A requisite for attending these classes is a minimum knowledge of the Italian language, in order to be able to follow and participate in the lessons.

The training itinerary is articulated in 6 Training Units, that is, distinct modules that treat the main problems involved regarding assistance and how to orient oneself in a social context and with local services, as well as the principles of professional ethics, how to communicate properly, how to assist those who are not autonomous in their movements or personal hygiene, how to prepare meals combining personal tastes and nutritional needs, how to aid in feeding, and how to ensure hygiene in the household.

The training itinerary takes into consideration the various needs and knowledge of the individual to whom it is addressed and, particularly, the scarce amount of free time to dedicate to training outside of the workplace. Therefore, the hours can be flexible, and 30% of the course hours can be carried out through individual tutoring and lessons at home.

>Training and professional development opportunities

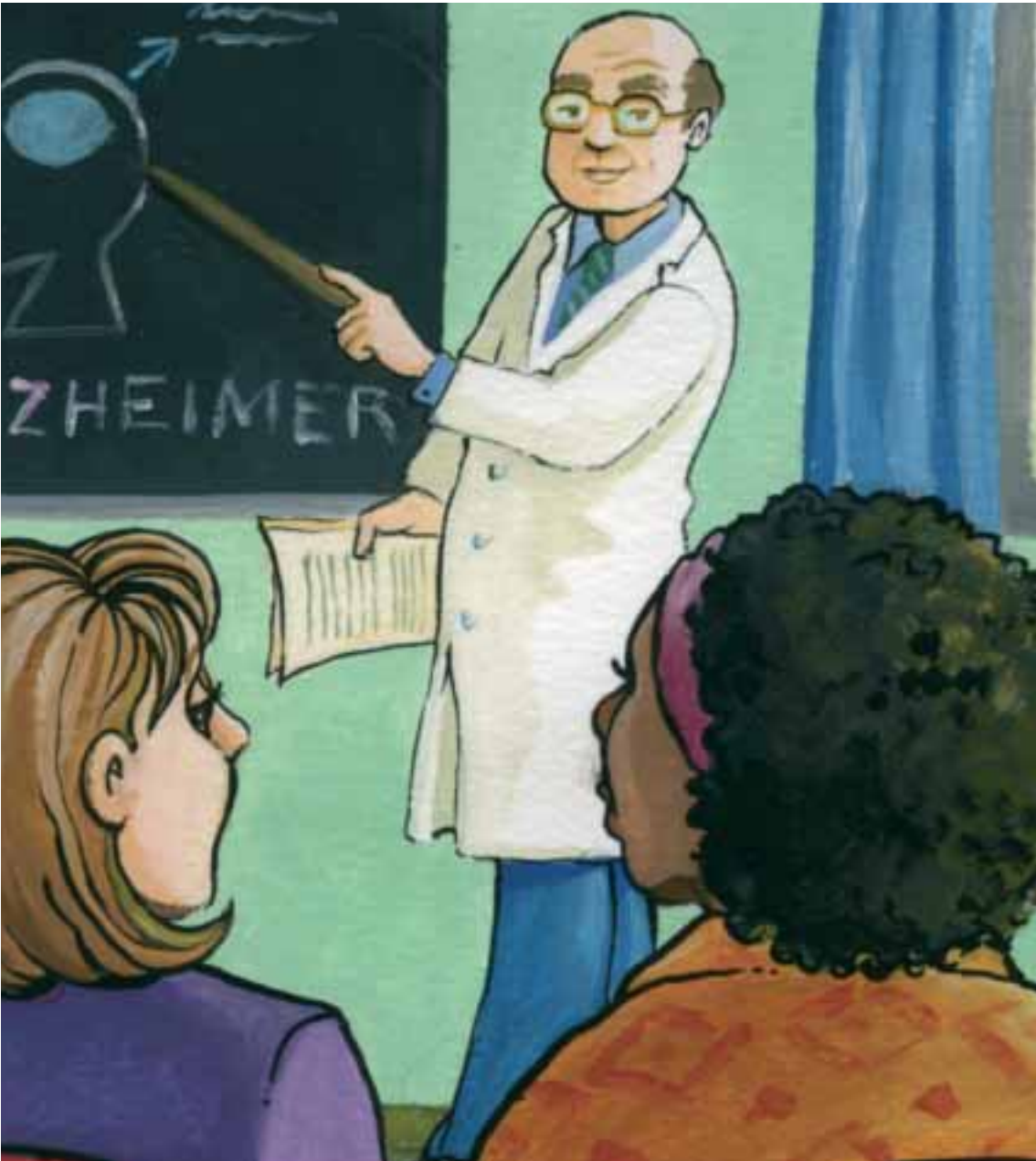
Attending these regional courses entitles the individual to receive a “proficiency certificate” attesting to the training hours attended and the knowledge acquired, as well as the accrediting of **training credits** (crediti formativi), a sort of “point system”, which certifies the training received. These credits can be used to attend training courses for Sical-health Operators (OSS), a professional figure that is very diffuse throughout assistance services for the elderly, in nursing homes (Shelters, RSA), in day centers, in social coops, and also in hospitals and clinics.

Furthermore, the Region has funded other training initiatives, generally realized by the Communes, which offer basic courses held over a shorter period of time (issuing an attendance certificate) and has also promoted, throughout the entire regional territory, the selection of training, orientation, and consultation points regarding private home assistance for both family assistants and families of those being assisted, with support for individuals or small groups, as well as home tutoring.

Throughout several territories, interesting training experiences are developing through home tutoring now offered, in particular, by various assistance services for the elderly in the provinces of Modena, Reggio Emilia, and Parma.

The training method for **home tutoring** (tutoring domiciliare), which consists in hands-on teaching ensured on the workplace for family assistants, and carried out by expert personnel from the home assistance sector, can be an opportunity for those assistants who do not attended training courses, and allows to, however, maintain the quality of home care offered to the elderly who are assisted at home.

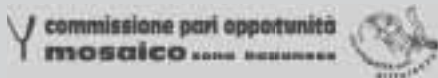
The home tutor has the responsibility to guide, personally teach, and aid the assistant on the workplace, especially in the initial problems involved regarding placement and situations regarding complex assistance cases, at the same time, the tutor is an important reference for all those needs connected to placement in social services sectors and knowledge of the territory.



Realized by: General Management – Health and Social Policies – Emilia Romagna Region Planning and Development Services for Health and Social-Health Services – Elderly and Disabled Sector – within the framework of the initiatives of the integrated project for sustaining the emersion and qualification of family assistants in favour of the elderly and the disabled.

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Tracce s.r.l.

The pamphlet, in Italian, and translated in: Russian, Polish, Romanian, Arabic, Albanian, English, French, and Spanish, can be downloaded from the website:

<http://www.emiliaromagnasociale.it/wcm/emiliaromagnasociale/home/anziani.htm>

