

EMIGRATION BETWEEN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

9.1 | A central theme in the history of San Marino

From the early nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth, emigration involved a substantial share of San Marino's population. Today, roughly one third of Sammarinese citizens are **descendants of emigrants** and still reside in the principal destination countries of the past.

By virtue of geographical proximity, shared language, and similar customs, **Italy** consistently absorbed the largest number of emigrants. Other major destinations included Argentina, France, the United States, and Belgium.

Since 1979, **Sammarinese abroad** have been organized into **25 communities** established by law: 10 in Italy, 7 in Argentina, 5 in France, 2 in the United States, and 1 in Belgium. A precise quantitative reconstruction is difficult, however, because emigrants were often registered on arrival as "**Italians**," owing to their native use of Italian and to border officials' unfamiliarity with the existence of the Republic of San Marino.

Outflows diminished by the late 1960s, when employment opportunities expanded within the Republic itself.

Emigration has played a fundamental role in the **economic history** of San Marino, with **remittances** ensuring the

A land of emigration

An engine of
development

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Remittances are the portion of wages that workers abroad send home to support their families.

subsistence of families who remained at home. Upon their return, emigrants significantly contributed to national **development**, **investing their savings** in construction, industry, commerce, tourism and artisanal production. Alongside financial capital, they also brought back valuable **human capital**: new professional training and innovative skills that had been acquired abroad and that proved essential to the country's progress.

The causes of emigration

> Chapter 3, *The 20th century and the present time*

The main causes of emigration are rooted in the **subsistence economy** that long characterised San Marino. As discussed in Chapter 3, until the second half of the twentieth century the Sammarinese economy rested upon a **low-yield agrarian system**: most farmers possessed insufficient land to sustain their families, while the widespread **sharecropping system** – the dominant form of tenure – impeded the development of entrepreneurial initiative, as sharecroppers were excluded from any decision-making process.

Within this framework, from the nineteenth century onwards, **demographic growth** was not matched by an internal economy capable of supporting the resulting increase in food requirements. Artisan trades likewise generated **minimal income** (often remunerated through agricultural products), as did the work of stonemasons in the quarries or miners in the sulphur mines – activities typically undertaken as a complement to farming. Moreover, industrial production and the tourism sector remained negligible until the 1960s. Between the 1920s and 1940s, during the Fascist period, economic hardship was increasingly compounded by **political pressures** affecting those who opposed the regime's totalitarian ideology.

9.2 | Emigration to Italy, Europe and the Americas

Seasonal emigration to Italy

Adverse economic conditions initially favoured **seasonal migration**. The first documented departures to the **Italian countryside** date to 1810 and intensified thereafter. In 1842, Oreste Brizi wrote in his *Quadro storico-statistico della serenissima Repubblica di San Marino*: “The Republic of San Marino has about 7,000 inhabitants [...]. This population varies **because of the emigration of many hundreds farmers** who, during the six cold months – since the

republican land is insufficient to feed them – go to the countryside around Rome; and because craftsmen and labourers, being unable to find work at home, seek it in neighboring areas during the summer. The population therefore increases or decreases according to the abundance or scarcity of harvests or employment”.

At the Grand and General Council meeting of 2 March 1874, the *Capitani reggenti* reported that the **winter’s emigration** “was much greater than usual, due to critical conditions, namely the sharp rise in the cost of necessities.”

Sammarinese and Italian emigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries developed in parallel, sharing motives, destinations, and routes. San Marino’s seasonal outflows formed part of the broader movement “**from mountains to lowlands**” characteristic of the pre-Appennine regions of central-northern Italy, merging especially with migration from Marche **towards the Tuscan-Lazio areas and the Ravenna coast**. Sammarinese **labourers** left in autumn and winter for Montefeltro and Romagna, the Ravenna plain, and the Pontine **countryside**; **summer departures** were also common for **harvesting** and **threshing**. These absences increased the burden on **women**, who replaced men in arduous fieldwork while maintaining childcare and household responsibilities. By the late nineteenth century, Alpine **railway tunnel** excavations offered further seasonal employment, while the cities of north-central Italy provided temporary work in ports, construction tied to urban expansion, and craft workshops.

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, several **factors** facilitated movement to other European states and the Americas.

Railway development made long-distance travel possible for those without resources – people who previously could move only **on foot**, lacking horses or carriages. **Trains** transformed mobility and enabled emigration within **Italy** and to **France** and **Switzerland**. Advances in **maritime transport** established regular transoceanic connections and increased flows to South America and the United States. Before **steamships** and **transatlantic liners**, emigrants travelled on **sailing ships**, often uncertain of duration and even of

The movement “from mountains to lowlands”

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Labourers are workers who provide physical labour (unskilled or semi-skilled work) in exchange for wages, often paid on an hourly or daily basis.

Trains and ships: emigration to distant destinations

landfall, as sea and wind dictated routes. In the first decade of the twentieth century, steamships replaced sail, reducing travel time and fares and thereby encouraging **mass emigration**: from Genoa, the voyage to New York took about 20 days; to Brazil and Argentina, nearly 40. > **Fig. 1**

The Office for
Emigration in
San Marino

These transformations intensified Sammarinese migration. By 1905, 184 families – 2,300 individuals out of a population of 9,617 – lived permanently abroad.

That same year, Pietro Franciosi – humanitarian socialist and prominent figure in San Marino’s political and associational life – advocated an **Emigration Office** to provide information on contracts and secure travel subsidies and benefits. He observed: “Formerly there were only a few isolated cases of farmers and craftsmen seeking short-term employment in Rome, Genoa, Tuscany, and Trieste during the winter months. In 1897 an emigration of **entire families of tenant farmers and labourers** began (to Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and the United States); since 1900 they have moved towards Greece, Germany, Austria, France, and Egypt; since 1904 towards

Fig. 1
San Marino’s people
emigrating to the United
States, 1928.



Switzerland.” Active from 1 January 1907, the Office for Temporary Emigration to Europe later, from the 1920s, also handled transoceanic departures.

From the late nineteenth century onward, the emigration flow from San Marino, paralleling that of Italy, increasingly turned toward transoceanic destinations. **Brazil** was among the earliest to attract migrants: following the abolition of slavery in 1888, landowners sought to recruit **inexpensive labour** from southern Europe **to replace enslaved workers**. During 1895-1896, approximately five hundred Sammarinese departed – primarily large, impoverished families drawn by the prospect of **free passage** and the promise of **housing and employment**.

South American destinations: Brazil

In South America, additional destinations included **Uruguay** and, above all, **Argentina**, whose economic policies aimed to transform the country into the **world’s leading wheat producer**. Between 1875 and 1895 cereal and livestock production increased substantially, positioning Argentina as a new actor in the international economic sphere.

Sammarinese in Argentina

To encourage European immigration, the Argentine government enacted a series of laws granting newcomers the possibility of acquiring colonial plots and eventually becoming landowners. However, Sammarinese farmers arrived when this opportunity had already passed and thus could no longer obtain land directly from the State. They were consequently compelled either to enter into **sharecropping** agreements on an estancia – that is, a large agricultural estate – or to work as labourers employed by private landowners. One notable example was **the estate of San Patricio**, in the department of Pergamino, where a sizeable number of Sammarinese migrants settled.

In South America, Sammarinese emigrants were primarily engaged in **agricultural** and **livestock-related** occupations, with only limited exceptions. One such case occurred in Vielma, in Patagonia, where many practised trades connected to commerce and the catering sector. Migration to Argentina from San Marino ceased permanently in 1957.

The migratory chain

As elsewhere, emigration to Argentina followed “**chain migration**”: **relatives or friends** already abroad sent news, secured employment, and served as points of reference for newcomers. This pattern explains the concentration of Sammarinese in specific areas of destination countries.

Emigration to France

European countries were the destination of sustained **migratory flows** from the nineteenth century until the late 1960s, when employment opportunities in San Marino began to expand. Samma-



Fig. 2
Sammarinese bricklayers
in Paris, 1957.

rinese emigrants travelled primarily to **France**, where they initially found work in **mines** and on **marginal agricultural land** abandoned by French peasants during the industrialisation process that, already in the early twentieth century, offered new positions to domestic labourers.

During the First World War a new phase of emigration emerged. Sammarinese workers – originally recruited to **replace French soldiers** were employed on construction sites, in chemical industries, steelworks, paper mills, mechanical factories, the automotive and aero-

nautical sectors, and in catering. > **Fig. 2**

Women’s emigration, both to France and elsewhere, was concentrated chiefly in domestic service and personal care.

Other destinations

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The **Italian Empire in East Africa** included the colonial possessions of Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia, which was occupied by Italian fascists in 1936.

In the 1930s, further flows went to Ethiopia – after San Marino recognized the **Italian Empire in East Africa** – and to nazi **Germany**, where living and working conditions were particularly harsh. Later European destinations included **Switzerland** and **Belgium**. Following the 1946 agreement between Italy and Belgium, Sammarinese **miners** were initially hired under Italian contracts but without equivalent social protections. A 1955 convention between San Marino and Belgium regulated Sammarinese workers’ professional and social rights. Departures to Belgian **mines** peaked in 1953 and 1957 and ceased in 1962.

Migration to Italian and other European cities was sometimes **irregular**, lacking proper authorizations and documents – an added source of **insecurity**, as family letters attest: “If you want to know, I

am happier now that I have papers, because without papers things go badly” (Pietro F., 1919).

In the early twentieth century the United States became an increasingly important destination, and departures intensified between **1920 and 1930**. Sammarinese peasants – like their Italian counterparts and unlike emigrants from northern Europe – did not seek employment in agriculture; instead, they worked predominantly as labourers, bricklayers, carpenters, and joiners, or found positions in the catering industry. **Women** were employed in textile and food-processing factories or managed small **boarding houses**, accommodating a limited number of fellow migrants within their homes. > **Fig. 3**

During the 1920s the United States introduced a series of restrictive laws to curb immigration, which also affected departures from the Republic of San Marino; beginning in 1924 a quota of 100 annual entries was assigned. **Migration chains** played a crucial role, as **entry visas** were issued only upon presentation of a letter from a relative or acquaintance already residing in the United States who could

Emigration to the United States

Fig. 3

Group photo taken in the Barney tailor shop, New York, 1956. Some Sammarinese workers are also present.



guarantee food, accommodation, and employment. Applicants were further required to provide a certificate of “good political conduct” issued by the Sammarinese authorities.

From labourers to entrepreneurs

Sammarinese migrants settled primarily in **Detroit** and **New York**. From the 1950s onwards – after several decades of work in subordinate and unskilled positions in restaurant kitchens or on construction sites – they progressively improved their economic circumstances, opening their own restaurants and **construction firms** and creating new employment opportunities.

The United States represented the final major destination of Sammarinese emigration: with travel increasingly undertaken by air, departures came to an end in the late 1960s.

Repatriation

Although Sammarinese emigrants retained strong ties with their homeland, they became fully **integrated** into the societies in which they settled. Subsequent generations attained **high levels of education**, enabling access to diversified professional careers. While many Sammarinese established permanent residence abroad – forming what is now recognised as the community of “**Sammarinese abroad**” – the period between 1960 and 1980 saw the return of approximately five thousand individuals. A further **wave of repatriation** occurred between 1998 and 2001, when about 150 descendants of Sammarinese emigrants returned from Argentina, then severely affected by economic crisis.