Vatican

Vatican News



Italian President Sergio Mattarella, right, welcomes Pope Leo XIV as he arrives at the Quirinale Presidential Palace in Rome, Tuesday, Oct. 14, 2025. (Roberto Monaldo/LaPresse via AP)

Nicole Winfield

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The Associated Press

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Pope Leo XIV thanked Italy on Tuesday for its efforts to combat human trafficking but urged the country to remain open to welcoming and integrating migrants as he took part in a pomp-filled meeting with the Italian president.

Leo completed the rite of passage for every new pope by travelling across Rome to the Qurinale Palace for a meeting with President Sergio Mattarella. Escorted by the presidential horse honor guard into the palace courtyard, Leo thanked Italy especially for its welcome of pilgrims during the 2025 Holy Year, which has seen millions of extra tourists pouring into the Eternal City.

Wearing his formal red cape and brocaded stole, Leo thanked Italy for its "generous assistance" to migrants and its efforts to combat human trafficking.

"I encourage you to keep alive your attitude of openness and solidarity," he said. "At the same time, I wish to emphasize the importance of constructive integration of newcomers into the values and traditions of Italian society, so that the mutual gift realized in this encounter of peoples may truly enrich and benefit all."

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It was a reference to Italy's role at ground zero in Europe's migration debate, given its proximity to North Africa — making it the preferred destination for smuggling operations setting off from Libya and Tunisia.

The right-wing government of Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni has made cracking down on illegal migration a priority, including by sending migrants back home or to detention facilities in Albania and prosecuting alleged smugglers. Meloni and her hard-line minister Matteo Salvini were in the front row of the audience, held in a gilded reception room of the palace with extra-tall palace guards standing at attention.

Italy's hard-line stance on migration has often conflicted with Pope Francis' call for wealthier countries to welcome, defend and integrate newcomers, a position Leo repeated as recently as last week in his first main teaching document.

Tuesday's encounter was evidence of the close ties between Italy and the Vatican, a 44-hectare (110-acre) city state in the heart of Rome. The location itself underscored the unique and intertwined relationship: The Quirinale Palace was for centuries the summer residence of popes until 1870, when Rome was captured from the papal states and annexed into the newly unified Kingdom of Italy.

After decades in which popes were essentially prisoners of the Vatican, Italy and the Holy See normalized relations in 1929 with the Lateran Treaty, which is still in effect.