



**Caritas CARES!
country report 2019**

Italy

**Access to services by vulnerable groups:
barriers, obstacles and good practices**

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Published by Caritas Europa, September 2019.



This study has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020).

For further information please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>

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What this report is about

Caritas Organisations are essential actors in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and the fight for social justice. They do so by assisting and providing services to people in need, as well as by presenting alternatives to address unfair structures, policies and measures.

The Caritas CARES country reports are an important instrument in this endeavour. Caritas informs local, regional, national and European authorities and formulates recommendations, based on its daily work with people experiencing poverty.

The country reports have been compiled on the basis of a questionnaire, designed in consultation with the participating member organisations. It will ensure that the voice of the weakest members of our societies is heard and it will support the advocacy efforts of Caritas at national and at European level.

This report is focused on the analysis of availability, accessibility, affordability and adequacy of services addressing poverty, and the promotion of social inclusion and activation in European countries, and it attempts to identify concrete causes of non-access to services by the most vulnerable members of our society.



About Caritas in Italy

Caritas Italiana helps about 700 thousand people, in different situations of social hardship, through different forms of help. Diocesan Caritas promote and/or run approximately 1,500 social assistance services across the country: canteens, dormitories, food aid and basic aid distribution centres. They also run 3,366 counselling centres (Centri di Ascolto - CdA). Innovative actions are also promoted, such as community development, active involvement, work promotion, network actions, volunteering and civil service promotion, etc.

The number of beneficiaries (direct or indirect) in 2018 was 729,297 people, almost equally divided between males (49.4%) and females (50.6%). In terms of age, people between the ages of 35 and 65 prevailed (65.5%) but the age group of under 34 years old was also well represented (23.6%). They were primarily foreigners (56%), mostly from Morocco (18.6%) and Romania (11.5%). Refugees or asylum seekers represented 7.8% of these foreigners. The proportion of Italians versus foreigners is very sensitive as a geographic variable (in southern Italy, 67.9% are Italian). More than half of the beneficiaries (51.2%) live with family/relatives. Situations of extreme poverty and homeless people are the minority, accounting for 19.4% of the total. For the production of our data and statistics, we regard all recipients of our services as beneficiaries, including people attending counselling centres, those in different situations of social hardship, and those seeking any kind of help.

Poverty monitoring is carried out through the production of own data and also by consulting public statistics. Through a permanent online system of data collection in 2,465 counselling centres, diocesan and national Poverty Observatories can observe and study poverty phenomena, highlighting stock data and historical trends, at both national and local level. Caritas Italiana also relies on official statistics, mostly from domestic sources (e.g. Istat, the Welfare and Work Minister, National Insurance Institute, etc.) and European sources (Eurostat, and some civil society/NGO sources).

Recent publications

Recent publications by Caritas Italiana can be downloaded at the following link: http://www.caritasitaliana.it/home_page/area_stamp/00007847_17_ottobre__presentazione_Rapporto_Poverta_in_attesa_.html

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Executive summary

Italy is a **rapidly ageing** country, with declining numbers of children. The population at working age is stable, and the number of elderly people is increasing. The population is also changing for reasons of **migration flows**, as the proportion of third country nationals living in the country is quite significantly above the EU average, due to the number of asylum applicants before and since the peak of 2017. This **socio-demographic change implies new emerging needs for the near future and in the long run**, both from the perspective of an ageing population with increasing care needs, and also from the perspective of migrant populations that, beyond their immediate and urgent humanitarian needs, also need integration policies for those who intend to reside in Italy. The society and care services should therefore be prepared to tackle these challenges.

Concerning **poverty**, Italy has a **much higher rate of population at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in comparison to the EU average** with more than 17 million people living in conditions of poverty or social exclusion, of whom 2.7 million are children. **Children, especially with a migrant background**, are particularly at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The **expenditure for social protection benefits** is in line with the EU average but it is **ineffective at reducing poverty**.

Caritas Italiana has established that, within the complex set of measures and services available, different groups of vulnerable people face considerable barriers and obstacles in accessing them. Among the policies and services analysed are the following:

- Early childhood education services are a universal social right only for children from 4 years and older.
- The low level of effectiveness of job-insertion provided by the public employment services produces a low level of take-up.
- Housing policies implemented by local authorities and public bodies are unable to offer a response to people seeking a stable and permanent home.
- Counselling services are widespread but huge numbers of poor people don't receive adequate accompaniment and guidance.
- Trade Unions, parishes, and associations provide an increasing number of after-school services for children and adolescents, often in agreement with the local authorities.

Recommendations

Caritas Italiana recommends that the national and European authorities promote changes and reforms in particular in the following areas:

- Recommendation 1:** Support EU Member States to improve the scope and effectiveness of information on social services.
- Recommendation 2:** Extend mandatory education in Italy up to age 18 and promote LLL (Long Life Learning) programmes for adults.
- Recommendation 3:** Promote universal access to minimum income, maintaining a set portion for housing related expenses.
- Recommendation 4:** Tackle unemployment and access to job opportunities through a major public investment programme.
- Recommendation 5:** Childcare and work–family life balance: maintain the already existing legislative measures for parental-leave and kindergarten-benefits, and introduce new opportunities to help young parents, mostly women, to re-insert themselves into the labour market.

1. The evolution of the socio-economic context

Between 2009 and 2018 the population in Italy grew by 2.5%, with an increase of 1,483,387 people. **It is a rapidly ageing country**, and the data show that while the number of children have decreased by 2.8%, and the population at working age has remained stable, it is the elderly (>65) that have increased by 13.9% (+1,669,833) and **the over 85s by 42.9%**.

The population is also changing for reasons of **migration flows: in 2018, 3,581,561 third country nationals were living in the country, equal to 5.9% of the population, above the EU average of 4.1%**. In 2018 53,700 asylum applicants registered in Italy, a relevant reduction from the peak registered in 2017, when 128,850 asylum seekers registered.

This **socio-demographic change implies new emerging needs for the near future and in the long run**, both from the perspective of an ageing population with increasing care needs, and also from the perspective of migrant populations that, beyond their immediate and urgent humanitarian needs, also require integration policies for those who intend to reside in Italy. The society and care services should be prepared to tackle these needs.

After a year of weak growth was registered in 2017, in 2018 the Italian **economy** slowed down due to weak productivity and a reduction in household consumption. At the same time, over the last few years, the **employment rate has shown a moderate increase**, and in 2018 it reached 63%, +1.4 percentage points in comparison to 2008¹ and +0.7% in comparison to 2017. It is true that this employment growth is **based on temporary contracts**, that grew

by 11.6%, between 2017 and 2018, **while permanent jobs declined** by 1.0%.² The **unemployment** rate continued to decline gradually from a peak of 12.7% in 2014, reaching 10.6% in 2018. However, it remains above the EU 28 average (6.8%).³

Concerning **poverty**, Italy has a **much higher rate** of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion (**AROPE**) in comparison to the EU average: in 2017 it was at 28.9% versus an EU average of 22.5%.⁴ This rate, after a constant increase over the decade and the peak of 30% reached in 2016, decreased slightly during 2017.

With more than 17 million people living in conditions of poverty or social exclusion, of whom 2.7 million are children, this still represents a serious challenge for the country. **Children, especially with a migrant background**, are particularly at risk of poverty or social exclusion (32.1% in 2017, down from 33.2% in 2016). Another important issue relates to income inequality, which in Italy is above the EU average. There are also wide **regional differences in poverty and social exclusion**, among the biggest registered across Europe.

The **expenditure for social protection benefits** in Italy has been **slowly increasing** over the years and it is almost in line with the EU average: it has increased from €7,154 per inhabitant (at constant prices) in 2008 to €7,463 in 2016 (the latest available data) in comparison to €7,377 at EU level. The real problem is **its ineffectiveness in reducing poverty**. The impact of social transfers on poverty reduction is, in fact, like Greece, the lowest in the EU, being at 19.4% while the EU average is at 34%.

¹ Eurostat, 2019, Employment - annual data.

² European Semester country report https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-italy_en.pdf.

³ Eurostat, 2019, Unemployment - annual average.

⁴ Eurostat, 2019, People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex.

2. Characteristics of the welfare system

The Italian social protection system mainly consists of provisions of monetary benefits. According to Istat⁵ the social protection system in Italy has three basic dimensions:

- a) pensions and social security spending (48.7%);
- b) health services (28.7%);
- c) social assistance (28.2%).

It is characterised by a fragmentation of measures to support household incomes: these are divided by category and by territorial level, with some regions and municipalities providing additional measures to the national ones, and others not, leaving millions of families without protection, especially young people. The system shows a prevalence of expenditure for the elderly, persons receiving disability pensions, and social pensions delivered by the central state. Social assistance benefits and services are provided by municipalities.

3. Access to key social rights and to services by people experiencing poverty or social exclusion

The main goal of this Caritas CARES country report is to analyse if and how living in poverty or in conditions of social exclusion hinders access to social rights and to services.

Several EU initiatives have been promoted in recent years to tackle inequality, poverty and social exclusion, both in general terms and for specific target groups. The European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission have taken several policy initiatives to strengthen the social dimension of the European Union, and the most recent initiative in this context is **The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**. Another highly relevant instrument is the (revised) **European Social Charter (ESC)** of the Council of Europe. Both the Pillar and the Charter state the right to access to some specific social rights related to equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, access to social protection and inclusion.

The **European Pillar of Social Rights** sets out 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. They are fully described here: [Link](#).⁶ Several of the rights cited by the European Pillar of Social Rights specifically relate to the conditions of people in poverty and social exclusion. This is particularly the case of PRINCIPLE 4 - Active support to employment; PRINCIPLE 11 - Childcare and support to children; PRINCIPLE 14 - Minimum income; PRINCIPLE 16 - Health care; PRINCIPLE 19 - Housing and assistance for the homeless; and PRINCIPLE 20 - Access to essential services.

Another highly relevant instrument is the (revised) **European Social Charter (ESC)** of the Council of Europe. The most relevant articles of the European Social Charter related to access to services are listed below (Box 1).

⁵ Annuario statistico italiano, 2018.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en.

Box 1 – Ratification and implementation of the Revised European Social Charter (1996) related to access to services and minimum income

Italy has ratified the 1996 Revised European Social Charter.

The following articles could have an impact on access to services and minimum income:

- The right to vocational guidance (Article 9)
- The right to vocational training (Article 10)
- The right to protection of health (Article 11)
- The right to social and medical assistance (Article 13)
- The right to benefit from social welfare services (Article 14)
- The right of the family to social, legal and economic protection (Article 16)
- The right of elderly persons to social protection (Article 23)
- The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion (Article 30)
- The right to housing (Article 31)

Italy has accepted the **Additional Protocol** providing for a System of Collective Complaints.

More information on the provisions accepted by Italy can be found in the **Country Factsheet**.

On the basis of its experience, Caritas Italiana asserts that access to some of these rights remains difficult.

While **healthcare** is considered fully accessible to all (ranked 5 out of 5), **active support to employment is not adequate** (rated as 2), and **housing** and **assistance for essential services** do not fully respond to the needs of the vulnerable groups of the population living in Italy. The main

problems described refer in particular to the fact that **refugees and asylum seekers, homeless and undocumented people, elderly people living alone, and families with low cultural capital are unable to orient themselves within the complexity of the welfare system.**

In the following section the difficulties in accessing a few of the services available for those in need are described in detail.

4. An assessment of the availability, accessibility, affordability and adequacy of key services and benefits in Italy

Caritas Italiana's research shows that within this complex of measures and services, different groups of vulnerable people face considerable **barriers and obstacles in accessing them**.

In this section Caritas Italiana describes the main strengths and weaknesses in access to five important services. Three services selected for analysis are common to all Caritas CARES country reports (**public employment services, housing policies, and early childhood education and care services**) and two have specifically been chosen

by national Caritas as particularly relevant in Italy: **Counselling services** and **education and lifelong learning**. Particularly interesting is also the fact that the provision of **homecare services for the elderly, children, and disabled persons**, etc., which are provided by local authorities under the national welfare system, are not granted to all applicants, due to the limited resources available.

Services are analysed under four main criteria: adequacy, accessibility, availability and affordability:

ADEQUACY: the service is of good quality and is satisfactory: it is able to respond to the needs of the user;

ACCESSIBILITY: the service can be reached or obtained easily, and it is easy to understand and to use;

AVAILABILITY: the service exists and it is available for those who need it;

AFFORDABILITY: the service is cheap enough for people who need it to be able to afford it.

The survey has been ranked on a scale ranging from 1 (the lowest mark, meaning that the service is completely inadequate, or inaccessible, or unavailable or unaffordable) to 5, which means that it is completely positive.

According to the scores assigned, adequacy (ranked 2.2 out of 5) seems to be the main problem

among the services analysed, while affordability (3.6) is the least problematic aspect, but they are highly differentiated when examining the details of each service. **While housing policies are completely inadequate but highly accessible and affordable, public employment services are affordable, being free, but are not adequate to support people in difficulty.**

	Adequacy	Accessibility	Availability	Affordability	AVERAGE
Public employment services	2	3	3	5	3.25
Housing policies	1	4	3	4	3
Early childhood education/ECEC	2	2	2	3	2.25
Counselling services	3	3	4	3	3.25
Education and lifelong learning	3	3	2	3	2.75
AVERAGE	2.2	3	2.8	3.6	

a. The low level of effectiveness of job-insertion provided by public employment services produces a low level of take-up

Public employment services help people to find a suitable job by providing soft skills tools, and offering support mainly on CV writing and orientation to training opportunities.

Access is free, but public employment services are not widespread enough in the territory, and the limited human resources available cannot respond to the amount of requests coming from unemployed people. The low level of effectiveness of job-insertion services produces a low level of take-up (potential beneficiaries freely decide not to contact the service).

The most important problem reflected in the survey is adequacy (ranked 2). On the contrary, the job insertion service has been evaluated as completely affordable (rated 5 out of 5).

The groups most affected by these barriers/obstacles are, in particular, migrants and ethnic minorities.

In the last few years **the service has worsened**. A testimony can help to illustrate access to this service:

Antonio is a 55 year old man, living in a small town in Abruzzo. Three years ago, after the Call-centre company, where he had been working for more than ten years, had to reduce the number of employees, he found himself with no occupation and income. He is not married, but he has to attend to his elderly parents, who are retired and who receive a low pension. He was offered by his company the opportunity to move to a town in Northern Italy, or even abroad, to Albania (with a lower salary), if he wanted to keep on working. He had to refuse, because he is the only child, and he has to assist his parents. He wasn't the only one that was made redundant, as the company sent more than a hundred dismissal letters. Together with other former colleagues, Antonio decided to start a so-called "class-action", a common lawsuit against the company in which they had worked. And the legal case is still ongoing. But because the word of the class action had spread, he realised that local companies tended to avoid hiring people involved in such legal cases. All his applications for recruitment and interview were rejected. When he applied to the employment centre, they only offered general orientation and

some soft-skills' training opportunities (e.g. how to write a CV; foreign language courses run by social cooperatives, etc.). The Employment Centre had a good section dedicated to job placement of young people, as part of the Youth Guarantee programme, but they had no opportunities for unemployed adults. On applying to his local Caritas, Antonio was offered some job opportunities within the framework of a European project: maintenance of public green areas. But this is only a temporary job, and Antonio is still waiting for a better opportunity.

b. Housing policies managed by local authorities and public bodies are not able to offer a response to people seeking a stable and permanent home

For many years in Italy we have observed a lack of legislation and policy on housing. Housing policies developed by local authorities and public bodies are unable to offer a response to people seeking a stable and permanent home. **There is**

a lack of social and public accommodation: the stock of available social housing is poor and most public dwellings are in bad conditions. Private rental market prices are very high, especially in big towns and cities, and public measures to reduce high costs have so far been unsuccessful. **Also, economic support for living expenses varies in amount and quality throughout the country,** and we observe different standards.

The vulnerable groups identified as most affected by these barriers/obstacles are **young people, asylum seekers and refugees, undocumented persons, migrants, ethnic minorities, families in general and those with children,** as well as workers with bad working conditions, and those without financial guarantees.

According to the Caritas survey, the main problem is **adequacy** (ranked as 1 out of 5); on the other hand **the service is regarded as accessible and affordable.**

In most municipal offices there are desks in charge of housing problems. **The problem is not the availability of a service or a desk to apply at, but the lack of effectiveness of the responses given.**

In the last few years **the service has worsened.**



A testimony can help to illustrate access to the service:

Giuseppe's family is composed of five people, his wife and three children (7, 13, and 16 years old). They live in Rome and until one year ago they were a normal family. He had a professional activity as a window-maker, with a well-run small factory. Because of the economic crisis he had a decreasing volume of orders, and he had to close down the factory. Since that time Giuseppe has been living off the sale of second hand clothes at open air markets, but now he can't afford the rent anymore. They moved to a smaller flat, but only for 3 months, and after that they had to change house every month, sometimes far from the place where they used to live, because Giuseppe had no salary guarantees to ensure a permanent housing contract. Changing house every month caused severe impact on daily life: first of all, his sons started to have bad results at school, as they felt their family's hardship. In particular, one of the kids often skipped classes, because of moving home, until he reached the legal limit of daily absences, and he had to stop attending school (even though legal obligations impose school attendance up to 16 years of age). Giuseppe tried to ask for social housing at the municipal Social Services, but he realised that, because of the successive moves, the family had lost an opportunity for residence: the municipality had been trying to contact them, but they were in fact untraceable. Because of the untraceability they couldn't present an official request for social housing. They also feared that Social Services would take their son away, because of the non-fulfilment of compulsory school education. Parish and local Caritas are now helping them. Just one month ago he was offered a job as a sacristan, and the Centro di Ascolto could solve the issue of residence documentation. After a difficult period, now a new perspective is at hand. Thanks to the job and the residence, now they will ask again for social housing, albeit without much hope that they will ever receive it.

c. Early childhood education services are a universal social right only for children from four years of age

Educational poverty is a cause for many situations of social hardship in Italy, both for young people and adults, and existing services for promoting higher levels of training/education are not able to reach most of the applicants and people in need.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services are not a universal guaranteed right in Italy. The main services in this field are day kindergartens for children under four, but they are not part of the stock of "minimum standard level social interventions" accessible for free or with a social contribution. **Starting from 4 years of age, access to daily infant school is instead offered for free, in all Italian municipalities, representing a**

universal social right. But other forms of ECEC are not widespread (e.g. contributions to compensate families for external caring service expenses, homecare services, small size neighbourhood kindergartens, etc.).

The service for children under four is regarded as not adequate, accessible and available (ranked 2 out of 5).

In the last few years the **service has improved as the decreasing birth trend, jointly with the development of new services run by cooperatives and private actors, in agreement with local authorities, have been producing a better level of take up locally.**

A testimony can help to illustrate access to the service:

Esther is a 24 year old woman from Nigeria, welcomed into a Caritas house, in a north eastern region, near the border of Slovenia. Some four years ago Esther came to Italy through the mediation of a woman from her village who was involved in human trafficking for sexual exploitation. With the complicity of the families, young women become victims of human trafficking, with a form of oath that obliges them to obey their protectors. Esther came to Italy and for two years has been involved in prostitution, on different Italian city streets, until she became pregnant and was intercepted by a roadside assistance group promoted by a religious congregation. Since that moment Esther has lived in the house with her now three year old son, together with a group of young women with severe social problems, not always connected to sexual exploitation. As long as Esther stays in the house she will have the opportunity to be hosted and to have a form of care for her little child, who this year is also attending a kindergarten. As she has no stable residence in Italy, her permit to stay is about to expire in less than six months. Her main problem is to obtain childcare assistance, and avoiding the risk of being separated from her child.



d. Counselling services are widespread but huge numbers of poor people doesn't receive adequate accompaniment and guidance

People in poverty often have to tolerate low educational and cultural capital. For these people it is not easy to navigate the Italian public welfare system. Because of this obstacle, **many social rights are inaccessible and people in situations of poverty and social exclusion are ineligible.**

Another aspect to underline is that, besides the material needs of these families, their basic problems are often connected to a **lack of sense and life motivation**, something that cannot be given only through material aid.

Orientation and counselling services could give these people sustainable life targets to reach, in the mid and long-term, but it is not always easy to identify good quality motivation and orientation services in the country. Secondly, these services are not always able to reach people affected by hidden poverty, or belonging to minority or disadvantaged groups. **Although orientation**

services are quite widespread in Italy, a huge number of poor people don't receive adequate accompaniment and guidance, also because social assistance is biased towards material aid.

The most vulnerable groups affected by these barriers are young people, the elderly, migrants and ethnic minorities.

According to the Caritas survey this service has been evaluated as available (ranked 4) but not completely adequate, accessible and affordable (ranked as 3 out of 5).

In the last few years **the service has improved**, as there has been a growing number of orientation actors, thanks to the presence of services promoted mostly by Church organisations and Trade Unions that offer free professional orientation, especially to low income families.

A testimony can help to better illustrate access to this service:

Martina is a young single mother, with a four year old daughter. She lives in a big town in Sicily, in a disadvantaged suburb, not well connected to the city centre by local transportation. Martina's family of origin was involved in small local criminal activities, and her mother was a single parent too, at the same age as Martina. Now Martina lives in a community, run by the local Caritas, whose expenses are also supported by the municipality. The main problem for Martina is the low level of education she attained: she stopped going to school when she was 14 years old, and she has only a "Terza Media" (lower intermediate) certificate. She has never had a permanent job and she has always lost job opportunities and assistance because of her incapacity of orientation within the welfare and employment system. Before going to the community she used to live with her former boyfriend, her daughter's dad, but they broke up and she lost her home because she could not keep up with the legal procedures for paying outstanding bills. Therefore she was welcomed by a local welfare institute. The main problem for Martina is finding an orientation for her future, and identifying sustainable targets to reach, for her and for her daughter. One opportunity is getting involved in a training course, with the aim of finding a stable job. Her current situation is characterised by a multiplicity of problems, for which an overall and global approach is needed.



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e. Trade Unions, parishes, and associations provide an increasing number of after-school services for children and adolescents of deprived contexts, often in agreement with local authorities

On average, Caritas users have a low level of education at their disposal, mostly because of irregular schooling experiences during their childhood. This aspect negatively influences the search for a job, both for young people and for adults. It is not only a matter of being able to achieve a certain degree or of fulfilling the educational obligation, but also of being able to undertake a path of professional retraining.

Local authorities' action in this field is not adequate, as professional training and school recovery courses that enable people to make up for lost schooling are not widespread in the country; they require enrollment at specific

times of the year; and they **are not always easily accessible to people in poverty and social exclusion.**

According to the Caritas survey the main problem is related to availability (ranked 2). **This service has improved in the last few years.** Trade Unions, parishes, associations, etc. provide an increasing number of after-school services for children and adolescents, often in agreement with the local authorities. Less often, education services are oriented to an adult audience, and in most cases on a voluntary base, without the possibility of achieving certification useful for job insertion.

The vulnerable groups most affected by these barriers/obstacles are young people, migrants and ethnic minorities.

A testimony can help to illustrate access to these services:

Doris is a 28 year old woman, belonging to a nomad Roma group. She has lived in a north eastern town, for many years. When she was 14 she arrived in Italy from Bosnia, where her family used to live. At the outbreak of the war in the former Yugoslavia her family started travelling around Europe, and after some years in Austria, they settled down in Italy, but never in a permanent residence. Doris hasn't got Italian citizenship, in fact she is stateless, as many times over the years she has had to go back to Bosnia for family reasons, thus interrupting the continuity of her residence. Now she has 4 children between 4 and 12 years of age, and they are all supposed to be in school, but they have huge problems attending lessons. Doris's current husband does not have a permanent job, as he is working on call, for some local small companies handling waste recycling and cellar clearing. Thanks to a project aimed at school attendance, and promoted by the local authorities in liaison with a social cooperative, Doris's children have been included in the project and they are taken every day to school by minivan. Doris and her family don't live in the nearby nomad camp, but in a small abandoned house, in the countryside, which they have illegally occupied for several years now, but they are in contact with the camp community. At school, the presence of gypsy children is not welcomed by their Italian schoolmates and their families. Because of stories about the illegal behaviours of nomad groups, Italian families don't offer positive feedback about the project, and often complain about its presence. In some cases, Italian families have asked that Roma children are not authorised to participate in school trips and other after-school activities. Because of this attitude, Doris is thinking of not sending her children to school anymore, even though the parish Caritas she is in contact with is trying to convince her to continue participating in the project.

5. Use of the minimum income as a measure of inclusion and activation

Principle 14 of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** states that:

“Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market.”

According to the approach put forward by EU initiatives (in particular the Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market, promoted in 2008 by the European Commission⁷), minimum income schemes have to be viewed through the perspective of the **active inclusion approach**: they are expected to be universal and to provide integrated support in the form of adequate cash benefits, effective access to enabling goods and services, and to include an activation component for beneficiaries.

⁷ Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2008 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32008H0867>.

Minimum income is implemented in Italy and is called “reddito di cittadinanza” (citizenship income).

It is considered both a financial support and a measure intended to promote active inclusion. The activation approach is expected to promote, as

a positive impact, a reduction in dependency on assistance in favour of activation of beneficiaries. A risk remains in the difficulty of implementation because different institutions are involved (employment and social services) and they do not always cooperate.

6. Progress made towards achieving EU and national social targets

The **Europe 2020 strategy** sets the EU's agenda for growth and jobs for the current decade, having as its main objective the promotion of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as a way of overcoming the structural weaknesses in Europe's economy and tackling the main European inequalities. The Strategy sets out the **EU TARGETS** to give an overall view of where the EU should be by 2020, based on key socio-economic parameters. The EU targets are then translated into national targets so that each EU Member State can check its own progress towards each goal. The ones particularly relevant for this study are those referring to employment and poverty and social exclusion.

In relation to **EMPLOYMENT, the target set at EU level is that, by 2020**, 75% of people aged 20–64 are expected to be in work. For Italy this indicator has been set at between 67–69%. Eurostat data shows that, in 2009, it was about 61.6% and in 2018 it reached 63%. The data indicates that the target will probably not be met.

Concerning **POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**, the EU target foresees a reduction of at least 20 million people in or at risk of poverty/social exclusion. The target set for Italy was a reduction of 2,200,000 by 2020. Having as a reference the year 2008, in 2017 not only was there no reduction, but people in or at risk of poverty/social exclusion increased by

2,325,000 people.

Eurostat indicators do not fully reflect the reality. The content of the Italian National Reform Programme⁸ does not reflect the reality because, since the NRP publication date, a new anti-poverty measure has been introduced. Italian targets regarding poverty reduction are far from being reached; with just one year remaining for the 2020 targets, the Italian population in poverty is decreasing only slightly: the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion is equal to 28.9% (approximately 17.4 million individuals), down compared to the previous year (30%). The 2020 target (of less 2,200,000 in poverty) is ever elusive: compared to 2008 (the base year), the total number of poor people has increased by 2,325,000. Also, the employment rate target (67% of the 20–64 age group by 2020) is far from being reached (in 2017, the average rate of employment in Italy was 62.3%), still very far from the European target (75% by 2020).

The Italian Government is working to reduce the gap but it is still wide. As for employment policies, signs of improvement and recovery in the labour market are visible, but the assessment of the effects of the new pension reform (“Quota 100”) will be very important. This reform foresees, in the next three years of experimentation, a total of 973,000 people retiring. In the minds of legislators, this large

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/business_economy_euro/economic_and_fiscal_policy_coordination/documents/2019-european-semester-national-reform-programme-italy-it.pdf.

number of people leaving the labour market should create new job opportunities, mostly for young people (in coordination with new tax benefits for employers that have been recently introduced alongside the new Reddito di Cittadinanza).

To achieve the targets, the Italian Government has promoted, over the years, programmes and reforms in line with the EUROPE 2020 Strategy.

Within this framework the evolution of the socio-economic context in Member States is described each year within the Commission Staff Working Document European Semester Country Report.⁹ In 2019 the report shows that Italy still faces challenges on many indicators of the Social Scoreboard supporting the European Pillar of Social Rights. In particular:

Labour market conditions are only slowly improving and the persistently high unemployment has had a strong impact on the social situation. Youth unemployment, as well as the NEET rate, remain among the highest in the EU. The gender gap is extremely high, but a comprehensive strategy to promote the participation of women in the labour market is still missing.

The impact of social transfers on poverty reduction is limited and the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion remains very high.

Despite improvements in the labour market, in-work poverty is rising. Access to social protection for self-employed workers is limited.

The provision and coordination of social services remains under-developed.

In addition to these challenges, access to social housing is extremely limited.

One positive aspect is that the outcome of the health system is, in general, good, despite below-EU average spending.

- In May each year the European Commission assesses the progress made and issues **COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS**¹⁰ (CSRs) to propose new actions. The recommendations provide policy guidance tailored to each EU country on how to boost jobs and growth,

while maintaining sound public finances. The recommendations focus on what can realistically be achieved over the next 12-18 months. In 2018 the Recommendations issued for Italy and referring to social inclusion are the following:

⁹ Here you can download the most recent available recommendations, https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2019-european-semester-country-reports_en.

¹⁰ Here you can download the most recent available recommendations, https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2018-european-semester-country-specific-recommendations-commission-recommendations_en.

1. Reduce the share of public spending on old-age pensions to create space for other social spending.

4. Step up implementation of the reform of active labour market policies to ensure equal access to effective job-search assistance and training. Encourage labour market participation of women through a comprehensive strategy, rationalising family-support policies and increasing the coverage of childcare facilities. Foster research, innovation, digital skills and infrastructure through better targeted investment and increase participation in vocational-oriented tertiary education.

According to Caritas Italiana, for poverty and unemployment, most of the CSRs do not reach the core of the problems, as they mostly regard macroeconomic aspects and do not define clear and sustainable targets to be reached in a social policy context.

The draft 2019 Country Specific Recommendations invite the Italian Government to “Step up efforts to tackle undeclared work. Ensure that active labour market and social policies are effectively integrated and reach out notably to young people and vulnerable groups. Support women’s participation in the labour market through a comprehensive strategy, including through access to quality childcare and long-term care. Improve educational outcomes, also through adequate and targeted investment, and foster upskilling, including by strengthening digital skills.”¹¹

Caritas Italiana positively regards this recommendation, despite its generalistic approach. Caritas Italiana regrets the exclusion from the recommendation of adult and long-term unemployment, a growing phenomenon, which requires special attention, as the privileged attention of public institutions and European programmes focuses on young people.

Within the NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMME¹² each country describes the planned reforms to reach the targets set at EU level. The reforms foreseen in 2019 to promote social inclusion, social protection and health challenges are the following:

- Actions to **increase social inclusion, to reduce poverty, to support the inclusion of the inactive population into the labour market.** The Citizenship Income (Reddito di Cittadinanza) is a tool with a dual purpose: to combat poverty and support families, young people and the elderly (with the Citizenship Pension); but also to activate the beneficiaries in terms of job searching and training paths;
- Actions to improve **education and training;**
- Measures aimed at **reducing job insecurity**, discouraging excessive use of fixed-term contracts and promoting the use of permanent contracts;
- The **role of the Employment Centres (CPIs)** will be strengthened with investments in human and technological resources and will become the pivot of this new social policy.
- **The revision of the pension system** will allow workers with long contributory histories to more easily access early retirement, favouring generational turnover and improving the innovation and productivity of companies and the public administration.

¹¹ Draft CSR 2019: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0512&from=EN>.

¹² Here you can download the most recent available information, https://ec.europa.eu/info/2018-european-semester-national-reform-programmes-and-stability-convergence-programmes_en.

According to CARITAS ITALIANA the reforms foreseen in the NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMME are not considered adequate and implementable (ranked 2). Greater effort should be made towards unification of the several financial measures against poverty that still exist in Italy, both at local and national level.

The most relevant policy reform related to the social inclusion/social protection system implemented in Italy in the last two years, and considered as **having had mostly a positive impact** on the reduction on poverty and social exclusion, is the introduction of an 'Inclusion Income' (**Reddito di inclusione**), a form of minimum income/income support, long awaited in Italy. In a few months it was substituted by a new measure, called 'Citizenship Income' (**Reddito di Cittadinanza**). This new measure has replaced a small number of measures, where it would

be necessary to channel most of the available resources towards a single form of financial benefit for poor people. **The Reddito di Cittadinanza has introduced eligibility criteria that exclude some very widespread situations of poverty: foreigners must have a long-term residence permit, or residency in Italy for at least 10 years as well as income certification validated by the embassies of origin in order to gain access to the measure.** Minimum income should be more accessible in all situations of poverty, without discrimination on the basis of nationality.

On the other hand the most relevant policy reform considered as having had mostly a negative impact is the 'Security Decree' (Decreto Sicurezza) which is clamping down on asylum rights and hardens security measures, while also compromising the level of social integration of immigrants.

7. The use of EU Funds 2014-2020

In the multiannual financial framework of 2014-2020, within the Europe 2020 strategy, the fight against poverty and social exclusion has been considered on an equal footing with other EU targets and objectives. In the regulations adopted for this new period, more measures have been put in place to ensure that the challenges around social inclusion are addressed: 20% of the European Social Fund (ESF) should be dedicated to policies and measures aimed at promoting social inclusion, and a specific fund has been implemented to support Member States in the fight against poverty and social exclusion: the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).

In Italy the ESF funds have been used not only to promote employment but also to finance the National Operational Programme (NOP) for Inclusion 2014-2020.

According to Caritas Italiana the ESF and FEAD resources have been adequately used to fight poverty and social exclusion (both ranked 4 out of 5) and Caritas has been directly involved in the implementation of both of FEAD and the ESF.

8. Caritas Italy promising practices

Two positive and innovative practices, that have proved to be particularly successful, have been recently implemented by Caritas Italiana. These relate to the promotion of (active) inclusion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion:

1. The first one is **Azioni di Sistema** (System Actions) and refers to integral community development. The problem that it intends to address is social hardship in poor regions. Through concrete **collaboration between employers, universities, schools, social workers and local institutions, new job and employment opportunities are created**, targeting the whole local community, not only people in need. The project is aimed at improving the living conditions of people in need, while also rebuilding a network of social relations, fostering citizenship and social participation. The project is based in 3 dioceses (Turin, Modica and Messina). The innovative aspect of this project is that **it is not targeted at single persons/families, but rather intervention in situations of impoverishment in the region, allowing the best skills of people and places to emerge**. Expected results are: social participation, creation of community-based spaces, citizenship awareness, recovery of crafts or related activities with an environmental dimension, labour market inclusion for marginalised people, etc.

The target is an entire region, not a single beneficiary; human and social promotion is the key, rather than basic help. Read more about the service at the following link: <https://azionidisistema.it/#home>.

2. The second one is called **Orientation to Rel/RdC** and refers to income support/minimum income. It is a counselling activity that provides orientation and first information, delivered by the *Centri di Ascolto* (Caritas counselling services), to people asking for information on how to apply for the new national minimum income. People with low cultural and social capital have problems and difficulties in accessing the Italian welfare system. Expected, and already reached, results show an increasing number of Caritas beneficiaries and people in need who are eligible for minimum income and who have had access to the measure. Innovative features and success factors are the linking of municipalities and civil society organisations in a common effort for social communication and information. The webpage to the initiative is at the following link: http://www.caritasitaliana.it/home_page/area_stampa/0_0007847_17_ottobre___presentazione_Rapporto_Poverta_in_attesa_.html.

Conclusions

Caritas Italiana believes that, within the complex set of measures and services, different groups of vulnerable people face considerable barriers and obstacles in accessing needed services. Among those analysed:

- Early childhood education services are a universal social right only for children from four years of age;
 - The low level of effectiveness of labour market inclusion provided by public employment services produces a low take-up level;
 - Housing policies by local authorities and public bodies are unable to offer a response to people seeking a stable and permanent home;
 - Counselling services are widespread but a huge number of poor people don't receive adequate accompaniment and guidance;
 - Trade unions, parishes, and associations are providing an increasing number of after-school services for children and adolescents, often in agreement with local authorities.
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Recommendations

Caritas Italiana recommends that both national and European authorities promote changes and reforms, in particular in the following areas:

At national and European level

Recommendation 1: Support EU Member States to improve the scope and effectiveness of information on social services

Improve the scope and effectiveness of social information, by making use of social media, free access to the Internet, and a better geographical distribution of information and counselling services, in order to tackle the lack of communication on social opportunities and rights to services.

Recommendation 2: Extend the educational requirement in Italy up to 18 years of age and promote LLL (Long Life Learning) programmes for adults

Lower the minimum age of compulsory education to three years of age in order to better address educational poverty of people in need. Their low level of education makes it difficult to access job opportunities and makes it difficult for many Caritas users to understand the welfare system.

Recommendation 3: Promote universal access to minimum income

Eliminate some of the access requirements to the minimum income (*Reddito di Cittadinanza - RdC*) that exclude the poorest people on the basis of citizenship and years of residence in the country. At the same time, maintain a mandatory portion of the minimum income for housing-related expenses.

Recommendation 4: Tackle unemployment and access to job opportunities through a major public investment programme

Launch a major public investment programme, especially in the sectors of the green economy and social enterprises, capable of producing new jobs, especially for young people, and expanding the lifelong learning activities currently offered by public administrations. The EU could support the Italian Government with a new and focused EU programme aimed at funding training paths for new types of jobs in the green economy and the social economy innovation sector. Caritas could empower all actions around training and education, in coordination with other social actors.

Recommendation 5: Childcare and work/family life balance

Reinforce the system for a better work and family life balance, maintaining the already existing legislation measures for parental leave and kindergarten-benefits, and introducing new opportunities for helping young parents, mostly women, to re-enter the labour market. In addition, the actual system of childcare should be made more widespread and accessible throughout the country, also through the involvement of third sector organisations.



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