

Italy

Country Profile on the European Semester and COVID-19 crisis from a children's rights perspective

Contributor:

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30.6%

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in 2018

Children in Alternative Care - CiAC

Small group homes (SGHs)	Number of children in SGH 2017 ¹
	12,892

Family-based care (2017²)

Number of children in family-based/foster care:	14,219
Number of children in kinship care:	48%
Number of adoptions:	

- 1 Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali "Quaderni della Ricerca Sociale 46 - bambini e ragazzi in affidamento familiare e nei servizi residenziali per minorenni" - Esiti della rilevazione coordinate dei dati in possesso delle Regioni e Province autonome. Figures updated at 31 December 2017
- 2 Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali "Quaderni della Ricerca Sociale 46 - bambini e ragazzi in affidamento familiare e nei servizi residenziali per minorenni" - Esiti della rilevazione coordinate dei dati in possesso delle Regioni e Province autonome. Figures updated at 31 December 2017

Alternative Recommendations

Supporting children and families in the context of COVID-19 in the short term:

- The Italian government should ensure equal opportunities at school for all children, especially by providing computers, desks and internet connection for all children in poverty and funds for NGOs to support families in filling the computer technology knowledge and skills gaps.
- The Italian government should activate immediate measures to monitor families in vulnerable situations to prevent violence against children and provide adequate psychosocial support.
- The Italian government should ensure food is provided to all children in poverty, at school and at family/community level if school attendance is not guaranteed.

Supporting children and families in the context of COVID-19 in the long term:

- The Italian government should tackle child poverty in the framework of the more general measures against poverty. In particular, it should change the amount of funds directed to families with children and ensure the quality of staff in social services to implement the social inclusion pacts.
- The Italian government should include within the future Family Act measures to ensure the development of quality services for early childhood education and care, especially in the southern regions.
- The European Union should urge the Italian government to create a national plan to tackle child poverty within the national measures to combat poverty.



Summary of Ratings

Government's support for families and children during the COVID-19 pandemic:



Positive EU impact on more child-centred legislation at national level:



2020 Country-Specific Recommendations:



Child Poverty

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Negative developments

- Significant decrease in fundraising activities by individuals
- Increased difficulty in ensuring the safety of services' beneficiaries and staff
- Increased difficulty in providing support to children and families in poverty
- Very severe food poverty registered during the lockdown and the following period
- Exclusion of poor children from school when the learning process became digital
- Violence and tension in poor households where several family members live together

- Inefficient re-organisation of the school system:



- Inadequate allocation of extraordinary funds for tackling child educative poverty:



Good practice

- From the end of March to mid-September 2020, L'Albero della Vita delivered extra support to poor families by providing tablets and internet connection to 1,000 children and weekly shopping vouchers to 800 families in six cities.
- Several organisations provided food support to poor families delivering it at home, in distribution centres and with the support of National Civil Protection.
- Several organisations moved their psychosocial support activities online, providing educational, psychological and medical assistance in a very difficult situation.

Concrete examples of challenges in supporting families and children

The Zen2 district of Palermo witnessed an increasing number of robberies at local supermarkets by people wishing to protect their families: many children were seriously at risk of starving. Many parents had serious problems feeding their children for weeks. One mother developed the habit of lowering the blinds at 5.00 pm to simulate the arrival of the night in advance to avoid making her children hungry when she was not able to serve dinner. One family ate hard fried bread for over a week.

Policies for Investing in Children

National strategy to tackle child poverty

The measures to combat poverty are recent in Italy: they were first implemented in 2017 and have only indirectly dealt with children by providing a financial benefit for poor families. Unfortunately, there is no sign yet of the political will to put a different emphasis on child poverty on the political agenda. There are different reasons for this, such as the lack of understanding of the severity and the impact of child poverty. Moreover, the most recent measures were mainly focused on the voting population.

On a more positive note, in drawing up the new National Childhood Plan, the National Observatory for childhood and adolescence is giving great prominence to this issue and developing coherent proposals to be implemented in the 2021 budget law.

A national strategy to tackle child poverty would be relevant to focus on this crucial issue rather than generally on poverty, given that the current approach is not improving the condition of children in poverty.

EU influence on national developments

- **Insufficient involvement of the EU in promoting children's rights:** The EU should have urged the Italian government to create a national plan to tackle child poverty within the national measures to combat poverty.
- **The Country Specific Recommendations were disappointing:** Poverty and children are basically not mentioned. There are just a very few mentions of the socio-economic difficulties faced by the society.

Access to financial resources and services of high quality

The government has been very slow in putting into practice the new citizens' income, the so-called *Reddito di Cittadinanza*. This concerns in particular the social assistance that should be provided to poor families with children in a vulnerable situation. These families face a vast array of problems which goes much further than pure financial poverty.

It is crucial to support family members' mental health in order to ensure they keep or find a job and help stop the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Children in Alternative Care (CiAC)

Small group homes (SGHs) – main challenges

- Being able to redefine a daily routine that had suddenly completely changed and try to re-create a new context with the new routine;
- Being able to make sense of what was happening and let it be enough for the life of the community;
- Continue to work, while the world has stopped, and create a protective environment capable of containing uncertainty.

Family-based care

The restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic decided by the government, have prevented direct contact with children and families and caused the suspension of all activities aimed at the training and selection of foster families,

the promotion of foster care in the territories, as well as the beginning of new foster projects for minors.

It has been possible to monitor foster care in progress. In particular, foster families were supported through calls and video-calls in their struggles through this tough time and their efforts to make the best of it.

The main challenges for foster carers were:

- Living so close to one another 24 hours a day, especially for new foster families, that had just started their relationship and barely knew each other;
- Manage school activities at home especially when children are young;
- Smart-working with children constantly at home;
- Maintaining family contacts, which were guaranteed by means of video calls, both between birth

families and children and between siblings, with the promise of being able to re-embrace soon, but many children suffered from not being able to see their families;

- The social isolation faced by children who were deprived of all their daily relationships;
- Working with limited professional support, which was provided by means of telephone calls and video-calls, as professionals could not make direct visits.

For more information, please consult the [2020 Eurochild Report](#) or contact Enrico.Tormen@eurochild.org and Zuzana.Konradova@eurochild.org