

ITALY

# TOWARDS A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

POVERTY WATCH 2024







Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



# POVERTY WATCH 2024

## Poverty and social exclusion in Italy and Europe



*Edited by Giulia Segna*

## **TOWARDS A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO POLICIES OF SOCIAL PROTECTION**

1) Introduction

*By Nicoletta Teodosi - President of CILAP EAPN Italy*

2) Are the shortcomings of the social protection system in Italy of a structural or systemic nature? The conditions of the elderly, people with disabilities and minors *By Luigi Colombini*

3) What good practices exist? What solutions for more effective social protection? *By Vincenzo Maesano*

4) Stories and testimonies: interviews with people experiencing poverty *By Giulia Segna*

5) Austerity policies and stigmatization of the poor: analysis and reflections  
*By Alessandro Scassellati Sforzolini*

6) Conclusions and recommendations  
*By Paola Springhetti*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

By *Nicoletta Teodosi*

We are in the fifth edition of Poverty Watch and the Observatory on Poverty and Social Exclusion in Italy and Europe continues.

What is the observatory we are talking about? That of the daily activity of those who work in different capacities in the environments where people in poverty are found: the street, means of transport, stations, workplaces, social and health services. **People in poverty are everywhere**, because they are neither invisible nor transparent, **they are among us, they are us**. We are **professionals and volunteers** who, alongside our work, combine a commitment to look at the society around us and of which we are part with a critical and supportive gaze. Because not everyone has had the same opportunities and our society reinforces exclusions by making itself even more exclusionary.

And social, economic, labor, environmental, health or housing **exclusion brings inequality**: there are those who make it, but also those who fail to integrate, to get back into a circuit that leads them to a minimally dignified life.

Since the establishment of the European Anti-Poverty Network, Eapn, in **1990** and then to follow the national sections (the Italian one was established in **1992**) in the member states, we believed that poverty and social exclusion in Europe could be eradicated; then faced with the reality of financial and economic crises, wars even on the EU's doorstep, the goals set by the institutions became less and less ambitious; the time came for poverty reduction not its eradication, given the economic and social development and living conditions that have certainly improved, but not for everyone: poor health, lack of work, difficulty in finding housing, insufficient income. Social Europe has been shrinking and so has the model we hoped to build. Poverty has followed the ups and downs of national policies and European strategies. After Lisbon (the Treaty of) the Social Inclusion Strategy was launched, followed by the European Year for Combating Poverty (2000), and then the 10-year Strategies, the National Plans for Social Inclusion, the ad hoc funds for the deprived and deprived with distributions of basic necessities. Only one common result: **poverty has not been eradicated, nor has it decreased as per the targets set**. As nonprofit organizations, national and European networks, we believed in it, worked for it and became active so that a social model would be built in Europe that would be accepted and allowed in all countries. It would be better said by all governments. This has not been the case, however, something of that work has remained. All has not been lost. We are still there, because we firmly believe that much can be done. Some answers can be found within the chapters of PW 2024.

In **Chapter 2**, on the *Critical Analysis of the Social Protection System in Italy*, Prof. Luigi Colombini with a precise update of the laws on the subject, starting with the secularization of the State, makes us understand that the welfare system began with the Constitution with the recognition of the right of citizenship, the principle of subsidiarity and solidarity. The Social



Protection System is based on the identification of the role of the State (policy and coordination function), the Regions (legislation, planning and control), and individual or associated municipalities organized in Social Territorial Ambits. It is a system with expanded and complex Governance that requires high levels of expertise.

In **Chapter 3**, *“What good practices exist? What solutions for more effective social protection?”* Vincenzo Maesano presents the measures in favor of citizens initiated in 2024 especially the elderly, disabled and minors. The Integrated System of Social and Welfare Services, established by Law No. 328 of 2000, provides measures and interventions towards citizens, because it is universalistic, so anyone can apply for it, the more difficult it is to receive an adequate response. In fact, the problem is related to regional inequalities, between North-Central-South and Islands where the Integrated System is not the same for all territories, services are not present everywhere, peripheral and less urbanized areas experience depopulation processes and therefore a reduction in social and welfare services. A separate discussion is for those who do not have residency, such as undocumented immigrants, including Roma, the homeless who can access emergency health services but not the social services for which residency is required.

In **Chapter 4**, *Stories and testimonies: interviews with people experiencing poverty*, Giulia Segna listened to those who work directly with people who are homeless and find shelter in sheltered centers such as Casa Sabotino, Europe Consulting's Roman residence that takes in women, cisgender and transgender people in economic hardship or social marginalization, whose slogan is “Not enough is enough.” A project that, since its inception, has been oriented toward beauty: from its strategic location in the center of Rome to the modern design of the furnishings, from the choice of warm colors to the terrace that is always in bloom and the spaces that are cared for in every detail. The role of the operator is educational, “closer to the figure of the parent than the friend”: pedagogy at the center of the project, respect at the center of the relationship. Consistent with giving a voice to those who do not have one, the second interview was with Janek Gorczyca, from Poland to Italy, passing through the streets, prison and a novel. Arriving in Italy, in 1992, the intention was to do things right, but then something went wrong, from working as a welder for 600,000 lira per month, to the “stupidity” that led him into a bad business and then into prison: adrenaline, sense of freedom, good life, easy earnings. Years spent on the streets, as a guest of friends and acquaintances, in and out of prison, between courts, convictions and suspended sentences. Years in which he wrote a novel. *Storia di mia vita* (Sellerio, 2024).

**Chapter 5**, *“Austerity Policies and the Stigmatization of the Poor: Analysis and Reflections,”* by Alessandro Scassellati Sforzolini, is a cold shower in the Italian reality: “a precarious country, in which poverty has grown to record levels, purchasing power has collapsed, poor jobs have grown, wages are stagnant, plagued by inequality, and almost punitive for young people who study and/or work (so that every year more than 450 thousand young people between 18 and 24 years old drop out of school prematurely and about 55 thousand leave



Italy).” A relentless reading of Istat data, a comparison with EU countries, a snapshot of a country with a development model that fails to keep up with the expectations of its citizens. Involuntary part-timers, under-employed, term contracts, on-call and administered work show that the rhetoric that there are too many people who do not want to work is false. The description of a country that is falling back on welfare and where inequality is increasing after 30 years of restrictive policies and austerity.

PW 2024 has been contributing since this year to the implementation of the **“Goal in Rete” project** from funding for projects of national significance from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. “Goal in Rete” is a project promoted by a network of Third Sector organizations including MOVI, CIPSI, ACMOS, AICAT, CILAP and grassroots organizations such as Oghogho Meye, PHP, Casa dei Diritti Sociali.

The priorities of the project are:

- development and strengthening of active citizenship of legality and co-responsibility including through the protection and enhancement of common goods and property confiscated from organized crime;
- promotion of the participation and protagonism of minors and young people so that they become agents of change;
- development of Third Sector association networks and strengthening their functional capacity building for the implementation of the provision of support services to Third Sector entities.

The task of Cilap Eapn Italy in this project is to disseminate the themes of PW 2024 and interview volunteers engaged in the different areas of intervention (educational poverty; international cooperation; promotion of the culture of legality of peace among peoples, nonviolence and unarmed defense; cultural, artistic or recreational activities of social interest, including activities, including publishing, to promote and disseminate the culture and practice of volunteering; promotion and protection of human, civil, social and political rights, as well as the rights of consumers and users of general interest activities). Another step in the fight against poverty and social exclusion by those who do not hide behind false propaganda.

All this, and more in PW 2024.

## **2. ARE THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN ITALY OF STRUCTURAL OR SYSTEMIC NATURE?**

*By Luigi Colombini*

### **2.1 Preface**

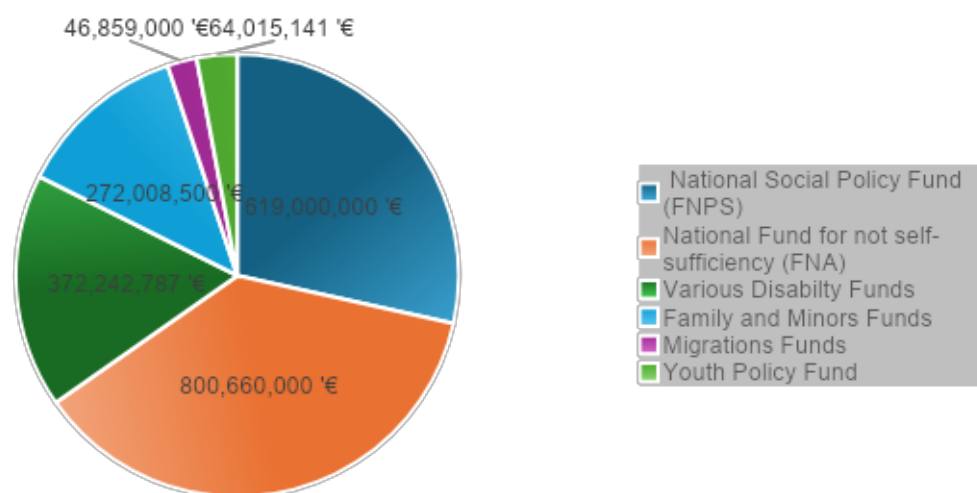
In the last century, within the framework of the complex issue of what over the years can be defined as the social protection system, assistance was understood as a right, on the same level as education, and considered a 'national debt'.



Over the course of thirty years or so, with Presidential Decree no. 616/77, no. 617/77 and Law no. 641/78, after the institution of the Regions (1970), in compliance with Articles 2, 3, 5, 32, 38 and 117 of the Constitution, a structured social protection system was built, more than 110 years after the first law instituting public charity (Law no. 6890 of 17 July 1890), in compliance with the following fundamental principles

- ° **vertical subsidiarity** with the prefiguration of health and social services closer and closer to citizens, through the identification of the institutional levels involved: the municipality, single or associated, the province, the Region, the State;
- ° **horizontal subsidiarity**, with the recognition of the expressions of civil society, starting from the family, up to the Third sector;
- ° **de-institutionalisation** and maintenance in the family and social environment;
- ° **domiciliation of interventions**; ° **overcoming of the welfare categories**; ° **universal access to social services**; ° **co-participation in the cost of services**; ° **social services system planning**;
- ° **State financing with co-participation of the Regions and Municipalities.**

## 2023 STATE SOCIAL EXPENDITURE BY AREAS OF INTERVENTION



## 2.2 Description of the Italian social protection system

**The institutional strategy tailored to the constitutional principles** and the consequent laws of reference for the social protection system and its actual construction, based on the identification of the role of the State (policy-making and coordination function), the Regions (legislation, planning and control) and individual or associated municipalities organized in social territorial areas (Ambiti Territoriali Sociali - ATS ), **was undermined by Constitutional Law no. 3/2001.**

**Assistance became an exclusive competence of the Regions**, coming to determine a profound imbalance between citizens, in relation to their residency, and their presence on a given regional territory rather than another. This has created serious prejudice to the provisions of Articles 2,3,



32, 38 and 97 of the Italian Constitution, which in fact should guarantee Italian citizens equal social rights and duties, the promotion of opportunities and the overcoming of obstacles that prevent the full realization of citizens, the impartiality of public administration and the overcoming of unequal treatment among citizens.

In this framework, three basic principles have been established as the pillars of the system:

- 1) **The State function** of guidance and coordination, with the definition of the Essential Levels of Performance (LEPs) and related financial requirements, with the identification of specific "funds" dedicated and financed by areas of intervention with reference to the relevant National Plans, and allocated to the Regions and ATSs on the basis of criteria and determined timelines.

The "Funds," currently in existence, referring to 2023, are as follows:

- National Social Policy Fund (FNPS)
  - National Fund for not self-sufficiency (FNA)
  - Fund for assistance to people with severe disabilities or those without family support (After us - Dopo di Noi)
  - Fund for the right to work for disabled people
  - Fund for the fight against poverty and social exclusion
  - Family Policy Fund
  - National fund for the integrated educational and teaching system from birth to six years
  - Youth Policy Fund
  - National fund for supporting access to rental housing (Until 2022, and abolished in 2023 replaced by "rent bonus")
  - Fund for policies related to rights and equal opportunities
  - National fund for asylum policies and services
- 2) **Recognition of the strategic and tactical function of the social territorial areas (Ambiti Territoriali Sociali - ATS)**, which represent the reference base for the design and implementation of social services and which are established through specific conventions or program agreements among the associated municipalities, with the identification of the lead municipality, in compliance with the principle of vertical subsidiarity.
  - 3) **Constitutional recognition of the Third Sector**, in accordance with the provisions of Article 117, second paragraph, letter i) of the Constitution, to promote the implementation of the principle of horizontal subsidiarity.

## 2.3 The structure of the system of social services

The Legislative Decree D.lgs n. 147/2017, in continuity with Law n. 328/2000, laid the groundwork for structuring the social service system, specifying that in each ATS had to be established both professional social service and social secretariat.

This provision was accompanied by the subsequent establishment of the National Poverty Alleviation Plan, which set specific funding for the recruitment of social workers to be employed in ATSS.

The ATSS are defined by the Regions and formed by the associated municipalities, through a convention or program agreement and choosing a "lead municipality," with the identification of the Ufficio di Piano (Social Planning Unit) for the elaboration of the Piano Sociale di Zona-PdZ (Local Social Plan), for the design and implementation of social services and interventions.

## 2.4 Considerations

**A first consideration** leads us to emphasize the importance of the State's function of guidance and coordination in such a complex matter as the construction of a system of national, regional and local social protection, which finds its cornerstone in the Essential Levels for the Exercise of Civil and Social Rights (LEPs<sup>1</sup>) that must be guaranteed throughout the national territory, as provided by Article 117 (m) of the Constitution.

**A second consideration** relates to the current institutional reference represented by the ATSS, which must be legally strengthened in their functions, with the definition and strengthening of the Plan Offices, endowed with adequate human (including the social planner) and financial resources, which are the fundamental cornerstone for the implementation of local social policies and which

- **support** the "Tavolo Politico" (Local Governance System) in all phases of the planning process;
- **manage** the acts resulting from the approval of the PdZ;
- **are responsible for** implementing the political level policies and choices;
- they **organize and coordinate** the phases of the implementation process of the PdZ, with the function of studying, processing and preliminary investigation of the consequent administrative acts.

In this regard, it should be noted that the Italian RRP, while specific indications have been given on the health system (community homes, community hospital, telemedicine, home care, community nurse), the same has not been done for strengthening the Plan Offices with the definition of guidelines, even though various decrees have identified the ATS need for social workers, for which a financial contribution is provided, but no structured economic coverage.

**A third consideration** leads to the constitutional affirmation of the Third Sector, which is embodied by the RUNTS (Unique Register for National Third Sector). The Italian Third Sector activities, for the performance of specific welfare and social activities are dependent from tenders, calls, expressions of interest, protocols, for which Regions are in any case in charge of evaluating, approving or rejecting the projects submitted.

---

<sup>1</sup> Social Minimum Standard



This highly bureaucratic condition leads to a state of instability and uncertainty among Third Sector entities and operators, which also affect the continuity of interventions, especially for volunteering organizations.

## 2.5 The breakdown of social policies into intervention areas

Over twenty-five years, were taken specific actions that, starting from law 328/2000, led to the definition of guidelines and funding for **specific areas of intervention** (which are listed below in alphabetical order), in order to build a structured system of social policies, on the basis of specific national plans in compliance with the above-mentioned principles:

- elderly people;
- family and minors;
- migrations;
- people with disabilities;
- poverty;
- inequalities.

### A) Elderly people

For what concern elderly people, at the state level has been privileged the complex of interventions and actions for non-self-sufficiency and, since 2007, the Fund for non-self-sufficiency has been established and financed, accompanied by the Plan for non-self-sufficiency 2022-2024. It has outlined the offer of the social-health services and interventions system, with the identification of the areas of intervention (distinguishing between very serious disabilities, independent living, caregivers) of the institutional subjects involved: the Regions for planning and funding, the ATSS for implementing the interventions, the Local Health Systems (ASLs) for social-health integration.

The recent legislative decree of 15 March 2024, no. 29, containing: “Provisions on policies in favor of the elderly”, has defined a complex set of interventions and actions, that can be summarized as follow: **promoting dignity and autonomy, social inclusion, active aging and the prevention of elderly population fragility**, through access to unified multidimensional assessment, preventive health tools and telemedicine at home, combating isolation and relational and affective deprivation, solidarity-based co-housing for the elderly (**senior cohousing**) and **intergenerational co-housing**.

**Observations:** in the last 50 years, i.e. since their establishment, **the Regions** have paid particular **attention to the elderly population**, both with regional laws and in the context of social planning acts; **they have defined the implementation of broad social policies aimed at them: active aging, social agriculture, elderly centers, recreational and social activities, cultural activities, universities of the third age, social housing, employment, etc.**

Therefore, the policy of centralizing the actions and interventions addressed to the elderly population at the State level ignores the principle of vertical subsidiarity and the observance of

Articles 5 and 117 of the Italian Constitution, confining the role of the Regions and Local Authorities to the mere expression of opinion on the matter, and accentuating the role of the INPS (National Social Security Institute) as the body providing economic benefits, not taking into consideration what the Regions already do in this regard.

## **B) Family and minors**

The process on family policies was started with the enactment of the first reform laws, Law no. 1077/71 on nursery schools managed by the municipalities, that represents the first step in the development of specific interventions in favor of families and working women, thanks to the passion and commitment of Congresswoman Adriana Lodi.

Then, with Law 405/75 was obtained the institution of “family advisory centers”, as a measure for supporting and sustaining the family in the performance of psychological and social assistance activities; for their nature, they represent a functional reference suitable for defining the framework of family policies. Nonetheless, it should also be emphasized that the recent shift and unbalancing of the “family advisory centers”’s activities towards the health sector has made them increasingly characterized as a counseling and healthcare service, rather than a place to fully address family issues.

With Legislative Decree no. 230 of 21/12/2021, was established the “single and universal subsidy for dependent children”(in force from 1 March 2022), which is an economic benefit granted to family units on the basis of the economic condition of the unit, according to the indicator of the equivalent economic situation (ISEE).

Lastly, Law no. 32 of 07/04/2022 provides for specific legislative decrees for the adoption, reorganization and strengthening of provisions aimed at supporting parenthood and the social and educational function of families, to counteract denatality, enhance the harmonious and inclusive growth of children and young people, support the independence and financial autonomy of young people, as well as to encourage the reconciliation of family life with the work of both parents and support, in particular, women's work.

In fact, it is worth to be mentioned that the **phenomenon of denatality** in Italy reaches **distressing levels** (from more than 900,000 births in 1971 to 379,000 in 2023, 527,000 fewer), failing to ensure the natural balance of the population; as does the dependency ratio of the elderly on the young, and the prospect of a reduction in social services for children. Moreover, over the course of fifty years (1971-2021), **single-parent families quadrupled**, those without children doubled, those with one child increased by a quarter, those with two to three children increased by 10-15%, and those with four children and more decreased dramatically, to 80% less over the fifty-year period. Similarly, over the same period, marriages fell from 440 thousand registered marriages in 1971, to 189 thousand in 2022, i.e. 251 thousand less.

**Observations:** during the fifty years or so that have characterized family policies, the last references are constituted by the provisions of Constitutional Law no. 3/2001 with the recognition of the family as the first sphere of horizontal subsidiarity, and Article 16 of Law



no. 328/2000 which marked the start and the main lines of decisive family policies, confirmed in the First National Plan of Social Services and Interventions of May 2001.

This choice has led to identify **family**, also in the light of what is stated by the Italian Constitution, as **the primary social organization of reference**, which has its own specificity also in economic terms. The basic reference for calculating the minimum subsistence level must be commensurate with the economic potential expressed by the family “nucleus”, thus the family itself becomes the fundamental reference for determining the equivalent economic situation (ISEE) for access to social services.

Moreover, the framework of the financing of interventions and services addressed to the family is still open, and in this perspective it is considered important to define and pursue an organic plan of interventions that involves the definition of a “family package” that can be identified through the family's social assistance essential levels (LIVEAS). In the “family package” are comprised all those policies of protection and opportunities that can constitute in themselves the added value given to the family to guarantee its constitutionally recognised functions, and all the interventions and services addressed to each family component (parents in conditions of poverty, housing hardship, fragility, minors in of fragility, educational poverty, persons with disabilities, non-self-sufficiency).

In this regard, the recent measures of the current Government have unpacked the family dimension, identifying it on the one hand as the basic reference for the disbursement of the Inclusion Allowance (which has replaced the Citizenship Income), according to absolutely low income limits and on the other hand, identifying even poorer families with a very low income, to whom grant a one-off food assistance allowance of €500.00, for a period expiring on February 2025<sup>2</sup>.

What is lacking, in any case, is a National Plan for the family, to programme and plan, with the involvement of the Third Sector and respecting the competences pertaining to the State, the Regions, and the Local Authorities, the set of strategies to strengthen family fundamental social role, marking a change of pace with respect to the past.

### **C) People with disabilities**

In the fifty years since the first law no. 118/71 to introduce a policy to promote the rights of Persons with Disabilities (albeit with the various definitions that have intervened over the years that have characterized its connotation), legislation has addressed various areas of intervention (health, education, training, work, etc.), having in mind the complexity and cross-sectional nature of the issues represented by the existential conditions in which the same persons live, which in any case require an organic legislative recomposition of the various provisions.

---

<sup>2</sup> Decree of 4th June 2024, Identification of households in need, beneficiaries of the economic contribution provided for in Article 1, paragraphs 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Law no. 213 of 30 December 2023

Moreover, Law no. 18/2009, which implements the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, can be considered an absolutely agreeable reference, also in relation to what has been carried out at the State level with the two "Biennial action Programmes for the promotion of the rights and integration of Persons with Disabilities".

**Observations:** like law 104/92 and law 328/2000, it is desirable to define a 'framework law', to be understood as a rule that the Regions and Local Authorities must observe in order to carry out, in compliance with the autonomy envisaged by Article 5 of the Italian Constitution and in the light of the principles of the recognition of the rights of Persons with Disabilities, the programmes, interventions and actions aimed at them, and from which the necessary translations in terms of legislation, programming, financing, monitoring and verification would follow.

This provision, moreover, would initiate at the State level the redefinition of lines of intervention that are already in operation and that concern specific sectors of the condition of Persons with Disabilities (**independent living, during and after us, work, education**, etc.) and that should result, as already indicated in Law 328/2000, in the formulation of the organic planning of the whole set of interventions, already contained in the 2013 and 2017 Biennial Programmes.

This integrated and coordinated regulatory definition, accompanied by adequate funding by areas of intervention, and by specific guidelines (already in effect in the form of special Ministerial Decrees and Prime Ministerial Decrees) would have its own impact on the Regions, which, similarly to what happened in the seventies with the law on nursery schools, family advisory centers, mountain communities, and the National Health Service, should, with special regulatory acts, dictate the provisions for their implementation.

It should be emphasized that in the face of specific programmes and funding already in place (National Social Plan, National Plan for non-self-sufficiency, caregiver programme, 'during and after us' programme, independent living programme, etc.), the Regions respond promptly and with high-level measures to the directives and indications issued by the State, which then resumes a decisive action of direction and coordination, necessary to guarantee to all Italian citizens the uniform enjoyment of social rights.

#### **D) Poverty**

For more than 30 years, starting in 1997 with the legislative decree of 18 June 1998, the minimum income for integration proposed by then Minister Livia Turco was introduced on an experimental basis in some regions. In the long silence of successive governments **from 1998 to 2015**, it was only with the "**Support for Active Inclusion (S.I.A.)**"<sup>3</sup> that an organic plan to fight poverty was launched. Legislative Decree No. 147/2027 introduced the "Rei" (Inclusion Income) identified as an essential level, and therefore compulsory throughout the whole national territory, overcoming previous experiments, followed by two National Plans for the

---

<sup>3</sup> Introduced by article 1, paragraph 386, of Law no. 208/2015



fight against poverty, prefiguring a system based on the ATS. In this regard, it is emphasized that the "Rei" was intended as an organic reference for the implementation of concerted policies to fight and contrast poverty, and connected to the European strategy for Active Inclusion, aimed at promoting significant programmes aimed not only at monetising income support interventions, but above all at fostering and supporting processes of social inclusion.

Decree-Law of 28 January **2019**, no. 4 established the **Citizenship Income**, which is connected to a social protection policy that indicates, according to an orientation that is present in various studies and analyses conducted both at a European and National level, the opportunity to overcome outdated models of combating poverty (among which the measures that refer to the use of food scraps to be destined for the 'overt' poor are particularly questionable), to initiate, with the help and guidance of competent professionals (social workers), actions aimed at overcoming the condition of 'welfare stagnation' in order to build their own project of inclusion and fulfillment.

In this context, the '**Pact for Work and Pact for Social Inclusion**' was introduced, which takes on the characteristics of the customized project articulated on the social interventions and services under the municipalities' competence.

According to the data of the National Social Security Institute (INPS) Observatory on Income, between April 2019 and December 2023 (when the measure ceased to exist), an average of 1,121,690 families received the subsidy each month for an average amount of €540.38 per month.

In **2023**, a decisive action was taken to redefine the parameters for the fight against poverty, which were articulated on various levels: a first level consisted in the **clear separation between families in a proven condition of hardship with elderly and disabled people inside, with an ISEE** (equivalent economic situation) **of less than € 9,360**, for which was introduced the "**Assegno di Inclusione**" (ADI) provided as of 1 January 2024<sup>4</sup>, as a national measure to fight poverty, fragility and social exclusion of the weaker groups through social inclusion paths, as well as training, employment and active labor policy.

According to the first data released by INPS as of 30 June 2024, for the Assegno di Inclusione (ADI), 698,000 applications were accepted. For Job Training Support, a measure introduced for deprived citizens able to work with an ISEE below € 6,000.00, 96,000 applications were accepted.

For families in conditions of absolute poverty with an ISEE of less than € 15,000 and with at least three members, the 'Social Card' was introduced in 2023, i.e. the card 'dedicated to you' made operational as of July 2023, with an amount of € 382.50.

---

<sup>4</sup> Introduced by decree law no. 48/2023, article 1, paragraph 1

Since September 2004, the 'card' has been financed by a € 500 million *ad hoc* fund and a second allocation of € 100 million, reaching 1.2 million households in 2023 and 1.3 million in 2024, with an allocation per household of € 500, usable until 28 February 2025.

## 2.6 Final observations

From the overall picture of social protection policies over the years, and in any case with reference to the current situation, the following can be noted:

- a number of national plans (national social plan, non-self-sufficiency, poverty) expire in the course of 2024, and the recent measure on differentiated autonomy (Law No. 86/2024) for ordinary statute regions raises questions about the prospects for the universality and uniformity of health and social services, and the uniformity of education and transport services;
- the pursuit of specific actions and measures for specific areas of intervention (the elderly, families, minors, persons with disabilities, dependent persons) are merely sketched out and not fully defined and concretised;
- We have witnessed a regulatory doggedness on poverty, breaking the poor into categories and sub-categories, in relation to the 'wealth' possessed on the basis of the ISEE, to which the benefits are to be allocated, no longer indicated as essential levels, but as paternalistic and provisional disbursements, variable from year to year, and entrusted to a single disbursing body, the INPS, with the role of the municipalities in charge of the list of poor people directly transmitted to the INPS itself. According to Caritas, poverty today is at an all-time high and is to be understood as a structural phenomenon of the country. The preliminary ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics) estimates released last March, and referring to the year 2023, state that 9.8% of the population, one in ten residents, live in a state of absolute poverty. A total of 5 million 752 thousand residents are in a state of absolute poverty, for a total of more than 2 million 234 thousand families.
- There has been a similar regulatory fury against immigrants, who are still partly protected by legislative decree 289/98, and who are subjected to limitations, obstacles, very expensive internment measures, expensive surety to be paid in order not to be interned, lack of genuine reception policies, especially for unaccompanied minors (MNSA), while they continue to die with an agonizing trickle of human lives.
- We inherited social protection policies initiated by previous governments (universal child allowance, the 0-6 years old children's education system, family caregivers, gender-based violence, people with disabilities, as well as financial interventions to local authorities through the Solidarity Fund for the development of specific social services and nursery schools) and the Poverty Fund for the recruitment of social workers, based on funds already allocated by previous governments.
- At present, it is evident that there are Regions that pursue decisive social protection actions, also with reference to specific planning acts identified in the Economic and Financial Regional Documents (DEFR). All the Regions between 2022 and 2023, have

approved their DEFRs and relative updating notes, and in this context, with greater or lesser intensity, defined commitments and prospects in terms of legislation, programmes, implementation plans, according to specific areas of intervention: welfare; the elderly; dependencies; family; youth; minors; migrations; non-self-sufficiency; persons with disabilities; poverty and social inclusion; Third sector.

A decisive resumption of the guiding and coordinating State function is deemed absolutely necessary and cannot be postponed, to be achieved with the relaunch of multiannual social planning, for the implementation of adequate structural and system policies, with the definition of the Essential Levels of Performance (LEPs) and related financing, and the decisive role of the Regions and local authorities associated in the Local Governance System (ATSs).

### **3. SOCIAL PROTECTION: WHAT GOOD PRACTICES EXIST IN ITALY? WHAT SOLUTIONS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE POLICIES? By *Vincenzo Maesano***

#### **3.1 Elderly people**

Among the good practices currently existing in Italy, with particular regard to the elderly population, legislative decree no. 29 of 15 March 2024, implementing delegated law no. 33/2023, which envisages a comprehensive reform of policies in favor of the elderly, deserves special attention. The cardinal principles are the recognition of the right of the elderly to determine their own independent, free, informed and conscious decisions regarding their care; the recognition of the right to continuity of life and care at home, the latter principle is achieved through a multidimensional assessment of the social and health capacities and needs of the elderly.

But in order to simplify and integrate policies in favor of the elderly, it is necessary to reorganize, simplify and coordinate social assistance activities with those of a healthy nature, envisaging interventions on inclusion tools, with the activation of projects that touch every sphere of life.

Among the interventions envisaged it is appropriate to focus on:

- a) **Promotion of active aging of elderly people's autonomy and prevention of their frailty**, which is possible with different solutions such as, for example, encouraging exchange between young people and elderly people in order to strengthen intergenerational ties, recognizing the elderly as resources for the community, as well as repositories of historical and cultural heritage and different forms of knowledge and crafts. Regions and local authorities should promote green therapy projects, such as local agriculture; tending urban gardens in collaboration with young people; initiatives to combat loneliness; volunteerism; financial education and enhancement of maintaining proper lifestyles and good health; and projects to promote slow and wellness tourism. Also of importance are the

information literacy measures designed to promote the full civic and social participation of the elderly through the use of digital services of public administrations; an objective, which can be pursued through the provision of training courses by high schools, including through the involvement of students, as tutors.

- b) **Interventions for the reorganization, simplification and coordination of social and socio-health care activities for the non-self-sufficient elderly.** Of central importance in this perspective is the establishment of the National System for the Non-Self-Sufficient Elderly Population (SNAA), that is, the integrated set of social, care and assistance services and benefits necessary to ensure adequate and appropriate support for the needs of those who, also in view of their age and previous disabilities, are in a condition characterized by serious limitations or loss of autonomy in the basic activities of daily life. To this end, it is envisaged that the Ambiti Territoriali Sociali, health agencies and health districts will coordinate in the exercise of the functions of providing services and interventions under their jurisdiction, ensuring the effective integration of processes. The ultimate goal is to ensure the activation of interventions aimed at concretely implementing the continuation of life in conditions of dignity, through coordinated services of basic home care, as defined by the Individualized Plans of Integrated Care (PAI).
- c) **Introduction of the “universal benefit,” on an experimental basis, from January 2025 to December 2026.** This is a single social and welfare benefit, graduated according to specific welfare needs, and payable in the form of a monetary transfer, envisioned in order to promote the gradual expansion of home care services.
- d) **Rationalization of the discipline dedicated to family caregivers,** whose high social value to the entire community is recognized. They are given the opportunity to participate in the unified multidimensional assessment and the development of IAPs (and the care and assistance budget). In addition, with the caregiver's consent, caregivers are to be provided with information about the cared-for person's problems, needs, and requirements by social services.

### 3.2 People with disabilities

A good practice with a change of course from the past is represented by the approval of the **Disability Decree**, which introduces important **innovations** to the Italian national landscape, ranging from the **definition of disability** to the redefinition of **disability assessment systems**, and even including the issue of **reasonable accommodations and life projects**. The decree entered into force on June 30, 2024, and provides that some provisions, related to later



fulfillments, will become effective and apply from January 10, 2025. In addition, a trial phase will be put in place throughout **2025**, with sample application of the provisions on basic assessment and **multidimensional assessment**.

The enabling law on disability is part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRP) Mission 5, Component 2, which calls for the adoption of a “**Framework Law for Disabilities**.” Its main objective is to ensure the **recognition of the condition of disability and related civil and social rights**, including the right to **independent living**, by reforming the entire current regulatory system to bring it more in line with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The decree finally approved by the Council of Ministers represents a significant step toward the **full social and labor inclusion** of people with disabilities, in line with the principles of self-determination and non-discrimination. The decree in question introduces several significant innovations:

**-Reforming the definition of disability, its assessment, and the individual life project.**

The decree focuses on redefining the condition of disability and its assessment procedures, adopting an innovative perspective that goes beyond the mere medical view of the impediment. It introduces a definition of disability based on the interaction between people and the behavioral and environmental barriers that limit social participation. Major innovations:

- 1) Adoption of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and the WHO's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF).
- 2) Unified assessment procedure entrusted to INPS, with unification of the certification of disability status with other assessments (now separated into: disability - handicap disability ex Law 68/99).
- 3) Introduction of multidimensional assessment for the preparation of the individual life project, actively involving the person with disabilities and the actors of the social context.
- 4) Recognition of the right to reasonable accommodation to ensure the exercise of civil and social rights.

**-Determination of the Essential Levels of Benefits (LEP)**

Establishment of a Steering Committee (composed of institutional and third sector representatives) at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for the definition of the Essential Levels of Benefits (LEP), it is responsible for:

- 1) Identifying essential services for people with disabilities.
- 2) Proposing guidelines for the identification of OELs, including the individual life project as an essential level.
- 3) Coordinating the integration of the OELs with the Essential Levels of Care (LEIs) and ensuring the full implementation of the protections provided for people with disabilities.

### **-Modifications to existing legislation**

Finally, the legislative decree approved on April 15, 2024, introduces significant changes to existing Italian legislation on disability and assistance. The main changes concern laws such as No. 104 of 1992 and other provisions related to assessments of civil disability, blindness, and deafness, as well as regulations for school inclusion and employment integration of people with disabilities.

These reforms are geared toward greater social inclusion, an updating of assessment criteria and a personalization of support measures, reflecting a concrete commitment to ensuring equal opportunities and full participation in social and economic life for all people with disabilities.

### **3.3 Minors**

#### *The pilot project in Italy*

The European Child Guarantee System for Vulnerable Children aims to ensure that **children and adolescents** in vulnerable situations **have access to quality services**. The first phase of the initiative was launched in **2015** with a European Parliament Resolution calling for the development of a **Child Guarantee Program** to combat multidimensional poverty. Five areas were involved: **education, health, nutrition, housing conditions and early childhood care**. The second phase of the program involved the feasibility study, from which the four priority groups were identified. In July 2020, the European Commission kicked off a third pilot phase that lasted until 2023 and involved the governments of Italy, Croatia, Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Germany and Lithuania in testing intervention systems for combating child poverty and social exclusion as possible models for EU member states, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef).

An inter-ministerial working group was created in Italy. This group, composed of representatives from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, the Department for Family Policies, and experts from the Istituto degli Innocenti and Unicef ECARO, conducted a series of periodic meetings during which the participation criteria for Steering Committee members were defined and the planning and coordination of research, analysis, and documentation activities published in June 2023 was carried out.

At the end of this process, the **National Childhood Guarantee Implementation Plan (NAPGI)** was drafted and given final approval, which will have its dissemination and implementation phase in Italy until 2030.

The main points of the NAPGI are:

- 1) Early childhood education and care, education and school activities, canteens;
- 2) Health and health care;
- 3) Poverty alleviation and right to housing; 4) Governance and system infrastructure.

Two fundamental issues are addressed in the NAPGI: the first concerns **how to combine the universality of the rights of minor subjects with specific action aimed at some of them**; the second relates to how the **reorganization of different systems, starting with the administrative, social, and school health systems, can improve Governance** at all levels and promote intersectionality and interprofessionality.

#### 4. STORIES AND TESTIMONIES: INTERVIEWS WITH PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

By *Giulia Segna*

##### 4.1 Casa Sabotino, stories of welcome and rebirth

###### *Fulvia Vannoli - Coordinator*

“Because what is needed is not enough,” this is the slogan of [Binario 95](#), the Social Shelter Hub for homeless people in **Rome**. It is a project of [Europe Consulting Onlus](#), financed by Roma Capitale in premises granted on loan for free use by Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane. With its day and night center, Help Center social guidance desk, NexTop MSC city social warehouse, HCM (Help Center Mobile) street unit and shelter homes (Casa Sabotino and Casa 95), Binario 95 has been a point of reference for those in poverty, hardship and social marginalization in the city of Rome for more than 20 years. And it is precisely at [Casa Sabotino](#), a facility that welcomes **women, cisgender and transgender people** in conditions of economic hardship or social exclusion, that we meet Fulvia Vannoli, the center's operational coordinator.

In telling us the story of Casa Sabotino, Fulvia reiterates that the project, since its inception, has been oriented towards **beauty**: from its **strategic location** in the center of Rome to the **modern design** of the furnishings, from the choice of **warm colors** to the terrace that is always in bloom and the spaces that are cared for in every detail. “It is important that our guests are the first to believe that **they deserve beauty**, that this is all for them.”

There are currently **16 women** and they represent 12 nationalities. Victims of violence, refugees, addicts to alcohol or drugs, there are many stories that inhabit the residence, all united by the desire to (re)find a normality made of **welcome, respect and dignity**.

“For us, the educator and the host are at the same level but not on equal terms” - continues Fulvia - “so the objective is to do together, co-plan, while looking at the autonomy of the person. The role of the operator is educational, closer to the figure of the parent than of the friend”.

**Pedagogy at the center of the project, respect at the center of the relationship.** And when this fails, you can be expelled from the house. The reasons, she explains, may be a failed or prolonged unjustified return, violent attitudes or repeated aggression.

“Funding is mostly institutional,” Fulvia points out, “particularly from the Municipio Roma I Centro. To these are added occasional contributions from private donors or companies.” This translates into not having tight schedules, so **customized activities**, thought out and organized in detail. For example: training courses on **personal hygiene** or **finance education**; movie workshops; CV preparation and updating; legal and bureaucratic assistance but also **cultural and art experiences**, parties, informal meetings with volunteers. The regulations stipulate that none of the guests can exempt themselves from participating in household chores; after all, somewhat as it happens in all families, it is only fair that everyone should contribute to the smooth running of the home.

In any case, whether it is chores, training or fun, the path inside Casa Sabotino is all about (re)discovery. Of themselves and the world around them.



**Elizabeth's story - Guest** Elizabeth is **31 years old**, she is Roman but has recently spent time away from the city, or rather outside Italy. First in Denmark, hosted by a friend and then in the Netherlands, where she lived the harsh experience of **homelessness**.

She was 18 when her father kicked her out of the house. “I was prepared, he warned me he would do it,” she points out. “When I returned to Italy I asked myself where I could go and the first thing that came to mind was Casa Sabotino. I applied and was accepted.”

Elizabeth has been living in the center for four months, her treatment for **multiple sclerosis** is continuing, as well as her relationship with **depression** and suicidal thoughts is getting better. In recent years they were much more frequent. She doesn't like Rome very much, it's too chaotic. And in general Italy is burdened by the bureaucratic slowness and complexity of the healthcare system. “Lately I have been sensing a repressive climate,” she adds with a hint of bitterness, “of intolerance toward the neighbor who is different. Rights that are being denied or even taken away.”

She is currently unemployed and dedicates most of her time to her great passions: **writing and video games**, without forgetting the activities and chores to do in Casa Sabotino. “It could be useful to improve the guest control system” - she concludes - “because not all of them follow the rules, but my experience in general is positive, I especially appreciate the availability of the operators”.





**Euzelia's story - Guest** A whirlwind of joy and liveliness, this is how Euzelia presents herself. She is Brazilian, 48 years old, and arrived in Italy in 1996.

"I had problems with **alcohol**" - she explains - "and then I was **arrested** for violence against a police officer. When I went out there was Covid, the second lockdown to be precise, and I didn't really know where to go to sleep. I found a group of other transgender women living in a camp in the EUR area of Rome and I joined them." After two years of **living on the streets**, Euzelia met Casa Sabotino, a meeting that gave her a **second chance**.

"Now I have documents and a bank account, finally! **I feel like I'm someone**, I feel recognized as a citizen who has rights. It's such a beautiful feeling that I can't explain verbally" - she adds excitedly - "but it's as if I finally count for something too".

The **joy** can definitely be felt. Her eyes shine and her voice is shrill.

For a few months she has been dating a man with whom she gets on very well, in September she will enroll in school to get the **secondary school diploma** and then look for work in fashion, her great passion. "I don't expect anything, I know that I'm already grown up but now I feel that I can dream, I'm no longer afraid to say who I want to be".

She would love to work as a sales assistant in a clothing store.

The transition began at 14, when she still lived in Brazil, but had no choice. She could only walk away. "Today, however, I feel **I have the freedom to decide for myself**, I know that if I put in the effort I can do what I have always wanted". In the meantime, between the training workshops and the daily chores of the center, she collaborates with a cleaning company to save some money.

"I stopped being afraid" - she concludes smiling - "I feel really good, finally".

#### 4.2 Janek Gorczyca, from Poland to Italy, through the street, prison and a novel



"I was a criminal before, kind of a terrorist," Janek Gorczyca tells us over a cup of ice cream. When he arrived in Italy from Poland in **1992**, the intention was to do things well, but then something went wrong: "I was going to Finland with a friend" - he begins to say "then he received a call from his cousin who lived in Italy and tells him that business was going very well, so we had to go. And so we did. In **Rome** we were hosted by the nuns, we had accommodation and food, then on the street someone stopped me and asked me what job can you do? The **welder**, I tell him, and he replies to go to a place the next day. It was the headquarters of a gas installation company

that was looking for workers. I did the test, I passed and they took me. Immediate work, 60.000 (Italian) lira per month.”

“Then one day - he continues - I met someone who stole cars, he told me that I could make a lot more money with him and I followed him”. **Adrenaline**, sense of **freedom**, good life, **easy money**. “It's stupidity that led me to that clique and then to prison. We stole cars or entered houses: **jewels, paintings and other valuable stuff, but we never touched anyone**” - he specifies proudly - “the time we did the most was 2 million (Italian) lira. In just one night, all that money, can you imagine it?”.

In the Roman prison of Rebibbia he took the blacksmith and carpentry courses, useful skills for finding work when he got out. He still collaborates with private individuals and construction companies.

Years spent on the streets, hosted by friends and colleagues, inside and outside prison, between courts, convictions and suspended sentences. Years in which **he wrote a novel**. *Storia di mia vita* (Sellerio, 2024) is a collection of anecdotes and experiences that his friend Christian Raimo, writer and teacher of History and Philosophy, encouraged him to write down. “We met in '98 - explains Janek - when Christian was still studying and volunteering with Sant'Egidio. He was surprised by my Italian, he listened to my stories with interest, so we exchanged contacts and remained friends.” He will celebrate his upcoming **sixty-second birthday** with him and his family.

**Janek knows every street in Rome. He slept there, worked, drank, fought, and stopped by to visit his friends.** Today he lives in a house shared with other families on the north-eastern outskirts of the city, but he doesn't spend too much time there. He always has errands to run, chores to do and people to help.

His sisters in Poland sometimes tell him to come back but he really doesn't want to leave Italy. “I would die of loneliness! I wouldn't even be able to recognize the Polish mentality anymore. **My life is here, I know everything, I feel good.**”

## 5. AUSTERITY POLICIES AND STIGMATIZATION OF THE POOR: ANALYSIS AND REFLECTIONS

By *Alessandro Scassellati Sforzolini*

### 5.1 The quantitative dimensions of a stagnation that seems irreversible

The annual Istat report on the situation of the country (May 2024) offered a merciless snapshot, although GDP has returned to the levels prior to the global economic crisis of 2008 (but in 2024 it will grow by only 0.7%): **a precarious country, in which poverty has grown to record levels, purchasing power has collapsed, poor work has grown, wages are stagnant, it is plagued by inequalities and is almost punitive for young people who study and/or work** (for which every year over 450 thousand young people between 18 and 24 leave school

prematurely and about 55 thousand leave Italy). To this we can add that public debt is expected to grow over the next two years, up to 140% of GDP, with a deficit that is unlikely to fall below 4%. This, while the new Stability Pact imposes stringent rules for returning within the established parameters: one point of GDP per year for debt, half a point for the deficit, which can drop to 0.25% in the case of seven-year adjustment plans. For Italy, all this will entail a slimming cure estimated between 13 and 25 billion euros per year.

As for the employment rate (number of employed people in the population aged 15 to 64), Istat certified an increase of 2.4% compared to 2019, reaching 61.6%, a value far behind Spain (65.1%), France (68.5%) and Germany (77.1%), almost ten points away from the European average and bringing up the rear of the EU. As for the unemployed, the inactivity rate for those aged 15 to 64 is the highest in the EU (33.4%). As various analysts have been pointing out for years, **in Italy the problem is that few people work, and many have even given up looking for work.**

If between 2013 and 2023 average annual wages increased by 16% in monetary terms, **the purchasing power of gross wages decreased by 4.5%.** Between January 2021 and December 2023 consumer prices increased by 17.3%, and hourly contractual wages by only 4.7%. An abyss, for which work has become even more impoverished because the purchasing power of wages has not been supported by the necessary substantial and timely contractual increases (50% of national employment contracts have expired for at least three years). Since October 2023 wages have increased, but only because inflation has decreased. A trend confirmed in the first quarter of 2024, but still far from a complete recovery of what workers have lost. **Between 2014 and 2023, equivalent household spending, in real terms, decreased by 5.8%,** with peaks of over 8% for families in the lower and lower-middle classes, on whose spending energy and food products have a greater weight. Meanwhile, the propensity to save also decreased to 6.3% last year: people earned less and used up their savings, without however being able to spend as they once did.

**Despite the good performance of the "labor market"** which recorded an increase of 1.8% between 2022 and 2023 in both years, **the number of working poor, those who are in "relative poverty", has increased** at the same time, especially in the "leading" sectors of an economy now based on catering, tourism and poor services. In fact, between 2014 and 2023, the incidence of **absolute poverty among employed people went from 4.9% to 7.6%,** and among workers from 9% to 14.6%. About 5.7 million employees earn on average less than 11 thousand euros gross per year, but the low-paid work bracket is even wider: in fact, over 2 million employees with average salaries of less than 17 thousand euros gross per year must be added. This means that income from **work is no longer able to protect people and their families from serious economic and social hardship.** If we add that in 2023 over half of part-time employees would have liked to work more (they were in an involuntary part-time job, essentially), a phenomenon that affects women more, especially the younger ones, who do not reach 10 thousand euros gross per year, while 34% of employed graduates (about 2 million people) have a lower professional classification than the qualification obtained (they are "over-

educated"). Then there are 3 million fixed-term contracts, people who work for 6-8 months on average per year, a million people who work on call (with an average of 50-60-70 days per year), and a million people who do temporary work, while collaborations, apprentices and **VAT numbers have increased** (often fake, classified as full-time employees without enjoying the "privileges" of regularly employed colleagues).

What emerges is a picture of a country with a development model that cannot keep up with the expectations of its citizens. Involuntary part-time workers, under-framed workers, fixed-term contracts, on-call and temporary work demonstrate that the rhetoric that there are too many people who do not want to work is false. They are the entrepreneurs who do not invest (contributing to keeping labor productivity stagnant), and **they do not invest because domestic demand has been compressed by decades of austerity, precariousness and wage compression**. The description of a country that is going backwards in terms of well-being and where inequalities are increasing after more than 30 years of restrictive and austerity policies that have imposed the most drastic wage compression in OECD countries (for which real wages have remained stable with a symbolic growth of 1% compared to the 32.5% recorded on average in the OECD area, while between 2019 and 2023 they fell by 6.9%; in the first quarter of 2024 alone they increased by 3.4%), with 5 million 752 thousand people who are in "absolute poverty" (9.8% of the Italian population who have very serious economic, social, personal difficulties; 1.3 million are minors), a record since 2014 when they were just over 4 million in this condition. Furthermore, **the share of the population in "relative poverty" is 22.8%** (24.4% in 2022, an improvement resulting from two different pushes: on the one hand the increase in employment, on the other the introduction of the Universal single allowance, which debuted in March 2022, received by 7.8 million people for an average amount of 1,930 euros per year and a total cost of 15.1 billion, which according to the calculations made by Istat alone has reduced the risk of poverty by 1%). The current government would like to review the Universal single allowance, given that the investment for 2024 has not been fully used. In any case, we are talking about an allowance for a child of about 160 euros per month for families. These are never measures adequate to the conditions and real needs of families, but interventions based on the availability of public finances and the choices of the governments in office. Moreover, the poverty data do not yet fully capture the effects of the decision, taken **between May and December 2023, by the Meloni government to restrict access to the "inclusion allowance" for the absolutely poor** (a social benefit of 6,000 to 7,560 euros per year presented as a measure for those "who really need it and not for those who could work and prefer to stay on the sofa") and to the "work and training support" for the poor considered "able to work" (the "employable") introduced by law 85/2023 which replaced the "citizenship income", received by 1.65 million families and costing 7.8 billion. **Hundreds of thousands of families (about half) have been excluded from the new, more stringent, eligibility criteria** (income and asset parameters are no longer enough, you also need to have an elderly person or a minor dependent or have an adult with a disability or social disadvantage in your family unit) and for this reason, next year, the data will certainly be worse, as underlined by a report by the European Commission.



## 5.2 Austerity and stigmatization of the poor

Cynically, the Meloni government has decided to save a few billion euros on poverty, fragility and hardship, **pretending to ignore that in Italy one in ten people lives in conditions of absolute poverty**. Poverty that affects large families the most, working-class families, those in the South, those in rented accommodation, migrants, in line with the heavy inequalities present in the country. You are poor even if you work when the wages and working conditions are inadequate, but the government has vetoed a law that sets the legal minimum wage; you are poorer if you live in rented accommodation, but the government has eliminated the funds for rent and for innocent arrears and does not invest in public housing. **And you are poorer in the South**, but with the differentiated autonomy introduced by law no. 86/2024, inequalities are destined to grow inexorably.

Neoliberalism is associated with austerity-driven public economic policies, with tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations that produce a contraction in public revenues, creating irresistible pressure to cut public spending (a tactic known as “starving the beast,” because it inexorably produces the state’s fiscal crisis). After all, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher argued that government was the problem and markets were the solution. Therefore, the prevailing idea is that, if we want to continue pursuing neoliberal national economic policies based on rigor and austerity, there are not enough resources for everyone and that therefore, in work as in the allocation of social benefits, public housing, access to nursery schools, **"Italians must come first", that is, "our" people, those considered "true" on a racial-ethnic-linguistic level** and from whom it should be possible to demand almost absolute loyalty, excluding those who are not considered "worthy", "integrable" and "assimilable": migrants, the poor, LGBTQIA+, "slackers", "social parasites", Roma, Sinti and Camminanti, social agitators, "anti-patriots", Muslims, Jews, feminists, communists, anarchists, etc. Cruelly pillorying (and even jailing), despising, hating and dehumanizing ethnic minorities, the "smart guys" of welfare, the "slackers", the "slackers", the "anti-patriot ... «couch potatoes», «scroungers», «illegal» immigrants and homeless «vagrants», Southerners have become a form of public satisfaction through which widespread feelings of resentment, anxiety, anguish, fear, anger and disgust are manifested against the weak who are seen only as a burden to the «hardworking» and «law-abiding» citizens of the white middle class.

The Meloni government's **attitude towards the poor and poverty based on a "moral" (or rather moralistic and ideological) judgment** - waging war on the poor, rather than on poverty - is consistent with the results of the bipartisan political-cultural path that has been taken by the governments (both center-right and center-left dominated by technocrats) of Western countries to relaunch capitalism in the last 40 years, with the transition from the Fordist-Keynesian regulatory paradigm (based on the "compromise between capital and labor" of a social democratic nature) to the neoliberal one (based on the centrality of the "animal spirits" of the free market), a transition that has led to the transformation of welfare into workfare, "a conservative social state oriented towards work", as Roberto Ciccarelli defines it («L'odio dei poveri», Ponte alle Grazie, Milano 2023), and which has materialized in an economic program

aimed at reducing taxes, wages, protections, rights, social spending and public services, privatizing businesses, services and public goods, deregulating markets, starting with the financial one and from that of work, creating a deeply unstable system that has given rise to new forms of poverty (the working poor) in Western countries.

Governments initially framed the poor as victims of a **"culture of poverty"** (negatively interpreted in terms of moral, social and economic debauchery) from which they would have to demonstrate that they were capable of escaping or they would be considered responsible for their precarious and morally degraded conditions, and therefore unworthy of state aid. In the wake of media campaigns against "welfare queens" who lived off government assistance and refused to work, the idea gradually gained ground that the poor are undeserving, that they have brought poverty upon themselves, that poverty is somehow self-inflicted, **the fault of the individual** and of the vices that make him/her incapable of being productive, and **not the result of the functioning of capitalist society**, a structural fact and a necessary condition for its development. In this way, a social problem, poverty, and inequalities are transformed into moral crimes whose culprits are the same subjects who suffer the effects of capitalism.

Thus, it was in the second half of the 1990s that the so-called "welfare to work" or "workfare" was introduced, the result of complex technical, legal and administrative work and based on "disciplinary" policies, often punitive and degrading for people in poverty (defined as "active inclusion" and based on "active labor policies": mandatory professional training and job placement programs), instead of aiming for an efficient, well-funded (with contributions taken from wages and company profits) and universalistic welfare state (of "well-being") that guaranteed social rights and also included a universal and unconditional basic income, detached from the production of labor-commodity in order to guarantee everyone the right to exist independently of work.

The poor person must atone for his or her sin, rehabilitate himself or herself, transform himself or herself into a "deserving" person, adapting to the behavioral norms of those who want him or her to be different, who experience him or her as a danger. Workfare embodies a program of authoritarian pedagogy and for this reason the emphasis has been placed on personal responsibility and on the opportunity to find (any) work even in «projects of utility to the community». **«Deserving» is only the person who wants to work, who shows the will to commit to becoming industrious, who lends himself to the conditions of employability.** Or the structural poor, inactive with just motivation (those who are in need «without any fault on their part», victims of circumstances beyond their control), the «good poor» due to age, illness, handicap. The poor considered able to work, who are those who have suffered the sense of loss of a position and social identity from neoliberalism and its crises, are addressed by the power that acts with policies that make them hostages of need and that aim to transform them into «workforce», into «human capital» to be introduced into the multitude of precarious jobs and lives (in the labor market exactly as it is), although the texts of the resolutions of the European Parliament always speak of decent work. From this point of view, workfare does not serve to

eliminate poverty, but to govern the lives of the poor through their forced cooperation, obtained through a regime of blackmail in the forms of bargaining promoted by active labor policies. The idea behind welfare-to-work is to bring new workers into the labor market, so that the market itself can solve the problem of poverty for millions of people and families. An intervention model aimed at saving public financial resources because there is no longer any need for cash assistance, given that people should obtain an income (even if very low) through a job or by becoming entrepreneurs (of themselves), and this would also have made the economy grow, because there are more workers and (micro)businesses. A model in which **work has primacy over citizenship**, is the tool that allows access to well-being, if you refuse it you lose rights. The person who refuses job offers loses the right to benefits, branded as a "slacker", a person who prefers to remain unemployed. A person to be blamed and hated, because he/she lives at the expense of the community.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*By Paola Springhetti*

From the contributions proposed in this publication, a picture emerges in which social protection policies in our country appear increasingly **insufficient**, less and less able to respond to the growing diversification of needs, and in some cases almost **discriminatory**.

At a historical moment characterized, on the one hand, by the constant increase in poverty and vulnerable situations and, on the other, by the overlapping of international crises for which no path to peace is in sight and which create, among other things, price increases, distrust in the future, and migratory flows, Italians are seeking security on all levels. And, indeed, one of the goals of the welfare state should be to provide every citizen with economic security and justice, within the community. But today, as analyses of the disintermediation mechanisms that have been developing since the 1980s show, **the relationship between the state and the community is weakened** in every context of life: from the economic to the political to the cultural to the religious, with even very concrete repercussions in daily life: think of information, schooling, science, health care. **The citizen no longer trusts the journalist, the teacher, the scientist, the doctor - anyone with expertise.** And least of all a state that appears increasingly weak, distant, unnecessarily complicated, far from people's real problems.

We can say that our social protection policies have three problems:

- Normative
- Financial
- Cultural

### 6.1 The Normative Problem

As Luigi Colombini reminds us in his contribution, social protection policies in recent years have had an inconsistent, sometimes contradictory trend, with different measures alternating on the same problem, correcting or contradicting each other. Suffice it to think, in the context of anti-poverty policies, of the various Minimum Inclusion Income, Active Inclusion Support, Inclusion Allowance, Social Card... Assessing the effectiveness of each of these measures is not easy, not least because they often remain active for too short a time and in some cases there is no data to assess their impact: this is the case of the Inclusion Allowance, the “measure of economic support and social and professional inclusion,” with the aim of “encouraging the activation in the world of work of people at risk of social and labor exclusion,” which together with the Inclusion Allowance replaces the Citizenship Income and became operational on September 1, 2023.

Meanwhile, **poverty in Italy steadily increases, as does inequality.** According to preliminary estimates of absolute poverty in 2023, released in July 2024 by Istat, there are more than 5.7 million people in absolute poverty in our country: in practice, one in 10 people. According to INPS's Statistical Observatory on Inclusion Allowance (ADI) and Training and Labor Support



(SFL), in the first six months of 2024, only 698 thousand households saw their applications for ADI accepted, for a total of 1.68 million people involved, while up to June 30, 2024, 96 thousand applications for Training and Labor Support were accepted<sup>5</sup>. Too many people, therefore, were left without support measures, far fewer than those eligible for Citizenship Income (3.6 million in 2022). As for the Universal Single Allowance INPS disbursed 11.5 billion in January-July <sup>6</sup> to 9.9 million minors corresponding to 6.2 million families. These are not just poor families, but households with an ISEE up to 45,574.96 euros. At the same time, we cannot forget that, even in the area of **health**, more and more people are at risk of not being able to demand their rights, due to the creeping but **factual privatization** of the services that the National Health System is supposed to offer, progressively downsized by the austerity policies adopted after the 2008 economic crisis: a relentless karst erosion that has made the Health Service less and less universal, in open contradiction to Article 32 of the Constitution, according to which the Republic “protects health as a fundamental right of the individual and interest of the community, and guarantees free care to the indigent.”

Added to all this is the fact that the Law on **Differentiated Autonomy** (Law No. 86/2024) further calls into question the universality of rights and uniformity of benefits and services. **Citizens are less equal, even according to the territory in which they live.** At the time of writing, the collection of signatures for the repeal referendum is still underway, but however it turns out, the fact alone that such a law was passed without major majority problems is indicative of the direction that is to be given to our welfare.

Again Colombini, in his speech, points out how, alongside the regulatory doggedness toward poverty, which has occurred by “breaking the poor into categories and subcategories” in relation to the “wealth” possessed on the basis of ISEE, in recent years “there has been an equally evident regulatory doggedness toward immigrant people.” Immigrants, in fact, have become the scapegoat for all the country's problems, along with all people in a particularly fragile or marginalized condition. And to this we will return.

## 6.2 The financial problem

“There is no money.” Every year, in September, when we begin to make assumptions and proposals for the Budget, next to the wish list inevitably pops up the call for austerity, the need to balance the books... And indeed, in 2023 our country's deficit stood at 7.4 percent of GDP, placing us first among European countries, while public debt fell to just 137.3 percent from 140.5 percent in 2022, placing us in second place, after Greece.

---

<sup>5</sup> See Remo Siza, Three recent reports on poverty alleviation measures, in Alleanzacontrolapoverità.it, July 22,

<sup>6</sup> , [https://alleanzacontrolapoverita.it/rassegna-stampa/tre-recenti-rapporti-sulle-misure-di-contrasto-delle-poverta/#:](https://alleanzacontrolapoverita.it/rassegna-stampa/tre-recenti-rapporti-sulle-misure-di-contrasto-delle-poverta/#:~:text=contrasto%20delle%20povert%C3%A0,-,22%20Luglio%202024,-%2D%20In%20Rassegna%20Stampa)

<sup>6</sup> Lorenzo Ruffino, Tax evasion in Italy, in five graphs, in Pagellapolitica.it, 11/14/2022, Tax evasion in Italy, in five graphs | Pagella Politica

However, we are also the country where tax and contribution evasion remains at very high levels: in 2019 it reached 4.1 percent of GDP. The tax gap - the indicator that measures the gap between theoretical and actual revenue - again in 2019 reached a value of 99.2 billion euros, of which 86.5 billion euros is missing tax revenue, thus related to the evasion of various taxes and fees, and 12.7 billion euros is missing contribution revenue, mainly related to pension contributions<sup>6</sup>.

Fiscal responsibility is certainly not one of the most widespread values in our country, and a greater commitment to it would not say that it would solve all problems, but it would certainly make a substantial contribution to social justice.

This issue, too, however, is within the policy framework prevailing today, internationally and even more so domestically. A framework drawn, as Alessandro Scassellati Sforzolini points out in his contribution, on the one hand by the conviction of the need to pursue neoliberal economic policies marked by austerity, and on the other by the idea that welfare is too costly, all the more so because it creates “dependency” and helps the spread of the “culture of poverty.” With the consequence that, since **there are not enough resources for everyone, it is necessary to choose not only between social groups** (more to the young or the elderly? More to the poor or to families?...), **but also between Italians and people with migrant backgrounds**. And of course, “Italians first” must come.

The problem of how to finance welfare is one that has pushed for the transformation of welfare into workfare, that is, a set of policies aimed primarily at reintegrating the unemployed and in general people in need back into the labor market, to remove them from “benefit dependency,” making them economically autonomous. Without taking into account the fact that this is often a vague goal, not only because of the fragile conditions of many people in poverty, but because the labor market itself is not welcoming, marked as it is by precariousness, low wages, involuntary part time, and so on. So much so that, according to Istat, the working poor have increased in recent years: in 2023, 7.6 percent of the employed were in poverty, up from 5.3 percent in 2019 and 4.9 percent in 2014.

### 6.3 The cultural problem

Underlying all of this - of policy choices as well as best practices and possible solutions - is a cultural problem.

Vincenzo Maesano, among the good practices, recalls the approval of the Disability Decree, in force as of June 30, 2024, and the innovations it brings: from the definition of disability to the redefinition of disability assessment systems, to the topic of reasonable accommodations and life project. So, what makes this Decree an innovative practice is first of all a cultural fact: **a more inclusive idea of disability**, on which the Decree rests, revitalizing it. Maesano also cites, among the best practices, Legislative Decree No. 29 of March 15, 2024, which reforms policies in favor of the elderly based on certain pivotal principles: “the recognition of the right of the elderly to determine themselves independently, freely, informed and consciously with

respect to decisions concerning their care; the recognition of the right to continuity of life and care at home.” This too is a cultural choice, which then inspires a positive style of intervention in response to a crucial problem in our country: that, precisely, of the elderly.

The problem is that there can be no fair and effective social policies if there is no sympathetic understanding of poverty and fragility. Governments, if they inspire their choices by a culture that blames people in poverty for the fact that they are poor - accusing them more or less explicitly of trying to live on the backs of society, without “giving themselves” to overcome their condition - it is difficult for them to outline social policies that are truly capable of enabling these people to live a life of dignity and to affect the causes of poverty.

Governments' propaganda goes on to reinforce that “culture of waste” - which Zygmunt Bauman had described in his book “Lives of Waste” and which Pope Francis later stigmatized on several occasions - based on consumerism, competitiveness, and individualism, whereby everything that gets in the way of constant economic growth is an obstacle to be removed: “A ghost lurks among the inhabitants of the liquid-modern world and among all their labors and creations: the ghost of redundancy. Liquid modernity is a civilization of excess, redundancy, discard and waste disposal.” Even when the “waste” is human persons<sup>7</sup>.

To facilitate the discard, all needs become problems, all problems become a security issue.

Social representations fed by the media also contribute to this. **Information is traditionally conflictual**, both in the sense that it feeds on conflicts and where there are none it builds them up-as evidenced by the many TV talk shows, where the quarrel is constructed at the table-both in the sense that it feeds the social conflicts present in our society, as in any complex society. And even more so does communication on social networks go in this direction, thanks to the well-known mechanisms that lead to the formation of filter bubbles and the spread of hate speech, uncontrollable in itself and fueled by various parties for the purpose of propaganda and disinformation.

Fired and polemical headlines, the large space given to crime news, and fake news construct narratives about immigrants, Roma or other “sensitive” issues for public opinion, narratives that provide a dramatic representation of reality, whereby the citizen feels perpetually threatened, especially in the area of identity values. Social information and communication thus become a veritable fear factory, with heavy repercussions on public opinion.

This mechanism is particularly evident in the case of migrants, because it is blatant how “despite the weakness of the link between statistical reality and constructed reality, there is in many countries an evident tendency of the media to objectify the equation immigration = crime and to define it as (the) problem by definition. As a result of this displacement process, in which the media assume a role of absolute centrality, the mere presence of migrants ends up becoming

---

<sup>7</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Lives of waste*, Laterza, Bari 2007, p.120

a synonym for malaise and disorder, which not only fuels social alarm, but is often at the origin of real phenomena of moral panic<sup>8</sup>.”

## 6.4 The Third Sector

Therefore, a profound commitment is needed on the cultural level, in order to propose social representations that better reflect reality and enable a different approach to problems, in public opinion even more so. A commitment that concerns everyone: political parties, schools, the Church (which also, with this Pope, already does so) and also or perhaps above all the Third Sector. However, it is itself a victim of these mechanisms at the same time political and media, which hinder its work in no small measure.

The world of information still - almost sixty years after the flood that devastated Florence in 1966 and on the occasion of which this expression was coined - defines volunteers as heroes or “angels of the mud” or the snow or the earthquake or whatever, noticing they are in emergencies: bound as she is to the traditional criteria of newsworthiness and the idea that the news is the man biting the dog, she struggles to see and tell a reality such as that of volunteerism, committed to removing the causes why the dog bites the man and preventing the possibility of the man biting the dog.

In recent years, the lack of affinity between the worlds of the third sector and the world of communication has often resulted in open enmity, which has turned the nonprofit into an “enemy” against which to hurl public opinion (and what some information does not do, social media does): NGOs are “cabs” of the sea; family homes “steal” children from poor families; cooperatives squander public money and do not pay taxes...

And on the other hand, in this, too, the world of communication mirrors that of politics, which has been able to invent “solidarity crimes” to punish those who carry out actions of aid and welcome: and they range from the April 2020 measure by which the Sassuolo City Council established a fine of 56 euros for those who give charity in the streets, to the security decrees sought in 2019 by Salvini to prevent NGOs from saving lives in the Mediterranean. so much so that in 2020 Amnesty published the report “Punishing Compassion: Solidarity on Trial in Fortress Europe,” in which it documented cases of restrictions and criminalization of assistance and solidarity toward people on the move in eight countries-Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom<sup>9</sup>.

But alongside the urgent cultural effort to change narratives, the Third Sector must succeed in solving the problem of relations with Administrations and Public Institutions.

With the 2017 Third Sector Code and subsequent implementing decrees, the sector has received important recognition, but it has also been loaded with bureaucratic constraints and condemned

---

<sup>8</sup> Marco Binotto, Marco Bruno, Valeria Lai, *Drawing Boundaries. Immigration in the Italian media*, Franco Angeli, Rome 2016, 21

<sup>9</sup> AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Punishing compassion, solidarity on trial in fortress Europe*, March 2020, in [www.amnesty.ch/it](http://www.amnesty.ch/it)

to perpetual precariousness due to the system of calls for proposals, while too many local governments still have not seriously entered into the logic of co-programming and co-design, and still “use” the components of the nonprofit world to lower the costs of services, keeping them in a subordinate position.

This gets in the way of a true implementation of horizontal subsidiarity, provided for in our constitution, and of a full collaboration between public, private and private social organizations that, if implemented, would facilitate the construction of a new welfare system.

## 6.5 Proposals

A number of proposals emerge from the contributions collected in this publication that can be worked on. Proposals that increase the effectiveness of social policies, from the perspective dictated by the values set forth in the Italian Constitution and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>1011</sup>.

The **first** is to rediscover a systemic approach to social policies, within which new processes and projects contribute to profound changes in cultural approach, legislative choices and resource flows on the basis of appropriate cultural approach. In other words, there is a need to rebuild a vision of a society that is open, welcoming and supportive, and from within this vision to blossom a unified project and innovative practices that embody it.

The second is to rediscover the role of the state and its function of guidance and coordination, alongside that of the regions, municipalities and territorial ambits. A role cracked by Constitutional Law No. 3/2001, first, and the Law on Differentiated Autonomy now. The role of the state is necessary to ensure equality among citizens. It must also be accompanied by the revitalization of multi-year social planning, with the definition of OELs and their financing.

The **third** is the strengthening of ATSS on the legal level, on the human resources level and on the financial resources level.

The **fourth** concerns the Third Sector, which must be given the concrete possibility to act on a level of real equality with the Public Administration, and in less precarious conditions than the current ones. In this regard, it is worth relaunching the proposal already put forward in Poverty Watch 2022: “the supervening crises that have intervened over the years (immigrations, pandemics, increase in poverty, climate change, energy crisis, wars) must deem necessary the establishment of what can be called a ‘Cabina di regia,’ of which the relevant institutions are part, at the central level, including not only Ministries and Regions, but also ANCI and the Third Sector organized in the network provided for by the Code of the Third Sector. This organization should also be related to the local level, and more properly to the level of the Territorial Social Areas...”

---

<sup>10</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in Official Journal of the European Communities, 18.

<sup>11</sup> . 2000, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_it.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_it.pdf)



The **fifth** relates to financial resources, and in this regard, too, we revive a proposal made in Poverty Watch 2023: “It is deemed necessary to strengthen the ‘fiscal state’ (with its strengths being progressive income tax, and tax fairness) that feeds the welfare state with its own resources, for the carrying out of social policies aimed at guaranteeing the exercise to the person of fundamental rights such as which are articulated in the implementation of specific services and interventions of a universal nature (education, health, welfare, assistance, training, overcoming inequalities, promoting distributive justice).”

CILAP - EAPN Italy - Collegamento Italiano Lotta alla Povertà

Largo Camesena, 16 – 00157 Rome (RM)

Website: [www.cilap.eu](http://www.cilap.eu)

Email: [info@cilap.eu](mailto:info@cilap.eu)

Tel: +39 347 647 5198



Collegamento Italiano Lotta alla Povertà