

(IM)POSSIBLE FUTURE

**National survey on
child poverty and aspirations**



Save the Children
RICERCA

Research coordination: Michela Lonardi

Save the Children research team: Anna Battistin, Research Assistant; Elena Caneva, Policy Coordinator; Antonella Inverno, Head of Research, Analysis and Training; Patrizia Luongo, Data Hub Lead; Christian Morabito, Senior Researcher

Peer researchers' team: Karol Aperi, Wisam Badawi, Alessia Barberio, Mario Burzo, Sebastiano Cosentino, Ludovica D'Agostino, Mary Joy Encarnacion, Matteo Englaro, Patrizia Ippolito, Alessio Maione, Mbaye Mamadou, Alessia Mangiapia, Samadi Alexandra Manikkage Perera, Sofia Mazziotti, Yassa Mikhaeil, Mariam Morra, Alice Silvia Paci, Ferdinando Pacileo, Irena Qorollari, Claudio Rusu, Miriam Salerno, Zion Mathieu Salomon, Marco Sharmoukh, Samwail Sharmoukh, Roxana Ungureanu

With the contribution of:

Gaia Bertarelli, Statistical Expert and Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Stefano Virgilio Cipressi, Expert in participatory video techniques

Research team of the Caritas Italiana Research Office: Federica De Lauso, Sociologist; Walter Nanni, Sociologist; Vera Pellegrino, Researcher; Alberto Fabbiani, Statistician (Con2b) and Sandro Savoldelli, Statistician (SR)

We would like to thank the staff of Save the Children who contributed in various ways to this publication and in particular Melissa Bodo, Diletta Pistono, Damiano Sabuzi and Arianna Saulini

Thanks to the Scientific Committee:

Francesca Bottalico, Councillor for Welfare, Inclusive City and Solidarity, Municipality of Bari

Andrea Brandolini, Deputy Head of Economics and Statistics Department, Bank of Italy

Barbara Collevocchio, Clinical Psychologist

Cristina Freguja, Central Director, Central Directorate for Social Statistics and Welfare, Istat

Mery Pagliarini, President, Get Up APS

Silvia Paruzzolo, Managing Director Evidence for Impact, Save the Children USA

Michele Raitano, Full Professor of Economic Policy, Sapienza University of Rome

Chiara Saraceno, Professor Emerita, University of Turin and Berlin Social Science Center, Honorary fellow, Collegio Carlo Alberto

Giorgio Tamburlini, Paediatrician and President, Centro per la Salute del Bambino

Donatella Turri, Member of the management team, Caritas Italiana

Thanks to:

Tito Boeri, Director Department of Economics, Bocconi University of Milan

Daniele Checchi, Professor of Economics, University of Milan

We would also like to thank:

INVALSI (National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System)

Patrizia Falzetti, Head of Evaluation Research

Lorenzo Maraviglia, Researcher

Istat - National Institute of Statistics

Emanuela Bologna, Valeria De Martino, Francesca Gallo, Sabrina Prati, Miria Savioli, Researchers

Ministry of Justice - Department for Juvenile and Community Justice

Giuseppina Barberis, Pedagogical Work Officer, Office II DGPRAM

Manuela Mariotti, Social Service Officer, Office I DGPRAM

And all the professionals working or collaborating with the Juvenile Justice Services and who contributed to the survey

Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Directorate General for Poverty Alleviation and Social Planning, Division II - Poverty alleviation policies. Implementation of Citizens' income and Citizens' pension. Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE) and subsidised social benefits

University of Padua

Paola Milani, Professor, Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology

For their valuable contribution to the realisation of the quantitative survey, we thank the Cooperative E.D.I. Onlus, Silvana Casertano, former Headmaster, I.C. Giovanni XXIII Aliotta and the participating schools: Liceo classico-linguistico "Francesco Petrarca" (TS), Istituto tecnico commerciale "L. Da Vinci - G.R. Carli" (TS), Liceo scientifico "M. Grigoletti" (PN), Liceo artistico "Einstein" - Vimercate (MB), Liceo "G. Parini" - Seregno (MB), Istituto tecnico "A. Mapelli" - Monza (MB), IT economico e tecnologico "G. Cardano" (MI), IT economico "V. F. Pareto" (MI), IT turistico "A. Mantegna" (BS), Istituto tecnologico "Giacomo Perlasca" - Vobarno (BS), Istituto tecnico "Carlo Beretta" - Gardone Val Trompia (BS), IT "Giovanni Falcone" - Palazzolo sull'Oglio (BS), ITI "G. Omar" (NO), IPSAA "A. Parolini" - Bassano del Grappa (VI), ITI "G. Segato" (BL), Liceo classico "A. Canova" (TV), Liceo scientifico sportivo musicale "Attilio Bertolucci" (PR), ITC Tallini - Filangieri - Formia (LT), Liceo "Marco Tullio Cicerone" - Frascati (RM), Liceo statale "Terenzio Mamiani" (RM), Liceo statale "C. Tacito" (RM), IT "Leon Battista Alberti" (RM), ITCG "Federico Caffè" (RM), Istituto professionale "G. Fascetti" (PI), Liceo scientifico "A. Checchi" - Funecchio (FI), Liceo delle scienze umane e linguistico "G. Mazzini" - Locri (RC), Liceo scientifico "Zaleuco" - Locri (RC), IPSAR "Le streghe" (BN), IPSEOA "Ippolito Cavalcanti" (NA), Liceo statale "Piero Calamandrei" (NA), Liceo statale "Pasquale Villari" (NA), Liceo scientifico - classico "E. Torricelli" - Somma Vesuviana (NA), IPIA "E. Ferrari" - Gragnano (NA), Liceo classico "Duca degli Abruzzi" - Ozieri (SS), Liceo classico "Giorgio Asproni" (NU), Liceo "Fortunato Fedele" - Agina (EN), Istituto Tecnico "Michelangelo Bartolo" - Pachino (SR), Liceo classico "Vittorio Emanuele II" (PA), ITET "E. Fermi" (ME) and the other schools involved.

Thanks also to Cooperativa Sociale Comunità del Giambellino (MI), Hermete cooperativa sociale onlus (VR), Energie Sociali Coop. Sociale Onlus (VR), Equality Cooperativa sociale (PD), Alice cooperativa sociale (PO), Ninfea cooperativa sociale (LT), Villa Angaran San Giuseppe di Bassano del Grappa (VI), Scuola e Lavoro Soc. Consortile (CB), S. Onofrio Cooperativa Sociale Onlus (RM), C.T.G. TURMED (NA), L'Orsa Maggiore Cooperativa Sociale (NA), Associazione I Tetti Colorati (RG), Associazione 21 luglio (RM), Figli in famiglia A.P.S (NA), Associazione Cieli Aperti (PO), UISP Nazionale, Zen insieme (PA), Inventare Insieme (PA), CGD Napoli Chiaiano (NA), Associazione Gianfrancesco Serio (CS), Cooperativa Di Vittorio (PO), UISP Comitato provinciale L'Aquila (AQ), Associazione Civitas Soli (RC), Vides Main (TO), CSI Comitato di Catania (CT), AppStart Cooperativa Sociale Onlus (PZ).

A heartfelt thank you to the volunteers and operators of the Caritas listening centres/services that made the quantitative survey possible in the dioceses of: Acqui Terme, Agrigento, Albano, Ales - Terralba, Alessandria, Alghero - Bosa, Ancona - Osimo, Andria, Aosta, Arezzo, Ascoli Piceno, Assisi - Nocera Umbra - Gualdo Tadino, Avellino, Aversa, Belluno - Feltre, Benevento, Bologna, Cagliari, Caltagirone, Caltanissetta, Carpi, Caserta, Cassano All'Jonio, Catania, Catanzaro - Squillace, Cerreto Sannita - Telesse - Sant'Agata De' Goti, Cesena - Sarsina, Chiavari, Como, Crema, Cuneo, Fabriano - Matelica, Faenza - Modigliana, Fano - Fossombrone - Cagli - Pergola, Fermo, Ferrara - Comacchio, Fiesole, Florence, Foggia - Bovino, Forlì - Bertinoro, Fossano, Frascati, Gaeta, Genova, Grosseto, Gubbio, Iglesias, Imola, La Spezia - Sarzana - Brugnato, Lamezia Terme, Livorno, Lodi, Lucca, Macerata - Tolentino - Recanati - Cingoli - Treia, Massa Carrara, Massa Marittima, Matera - Irsina, Mazara Del Vallo, Melfi - Rapolla - Venosa, Messina - Lipari - Santa Lucia Del Mela, Milan, Modena - Nonantola, Molfetta - Ruvo - Giovinazzo - Terlizzi, Mondovì, Monreale, Montepulciano, Naples, Nocera Inferiore - Sarno, Noto, Novara, Nuoro, Orvieto - Todi, Padua, Palermo, Palestrina, Pavia, Perugia - Città Della Pieve, Pescara - Penne, Pescia, Piacenza - Bobbio, Piazza Armerina, Pinerolo, Pisa, Pistoia, Pitigliano, Pozzuoli, Prato, Ragusa, Ravenna - Cervia, Reggio Emilia - Guastalla, Rimini, Saluzzo, San Benedetto Del Tronto - Ripatransone - Montalto, San Marino - Montefeltro, San Miniato, Sassari, Siena,

Siracusa, Sora - Cassino - Aquino - Pontecorvo, Spoleto - Norcia, Tempio - Ampurias, Teramo - Atri, Terni - Narni - Amelia, Turin, Tortona, Treviso, Trivento, Udine, Urbino - Urbania - Sant'Angelo In Vado, Vercelli, Verona, Vicenza, Vigevano, Viterbo, Volterra.

A sincere thank you to the operators of the diocesan Caritas of Ancona, Caltanissetta, Perugia and Venice, **and to the operators of the diocesan Caritas** Rosa Colantuono, Francesca Fiordalisi, Mariavittoria Frioni, Martina Mazzanti, Monica Mei, Maria Rosaria Ruggeri, Francesca Uleri, **to the Save the Children project operators** Beths Ampuero, Serena Antonelli, Brunella Cozzolino, Angela Dicillo, Genny Mangiameli, Valentina Pedroli, Gina Riccio, **the educators and operators** Edmea Abramo, Tsvetelina Aleksieva, Elena Carrucola, Agnese Gagliano, Michela Manuali, Roberta Moccia, Eugenia Poli **and the teachers** Giovanna Castagnaro, Tiziana Conforti, Carla Facchin, Luisa Fucito, Daniela Melucci, Michela Morando Chiaramello, Venera Scarcella who participated in the focus groups. **Thanks to the partners of Save the Children's Punto Luce and Spazio Mamme** who contributed to the policy reflections.

And finally, thank you to the families and to all the interviewed adolescents for sharing their experiences and views with honesty, courage and determination, in the hope that the results of the research will help make public interventions concerning them more responsive to their needs.



English translation by: Maria Gabriella Garzillo and Anna Battistin, Save the Children Italy. Sincere thanks also to Helen Mirsky who, as a volunteer proofreader, offered her support and conducted a thorough review of the document.

Editorial Project Coordination: Laura Binetti

Editorial and Graphic Design: Odd ep. studio Printing: STR Press

Published by: Save the Children Italy ETS, May 2024 (English version January 2025)

(IM)POSSIBLE FUTURE

National survey on child poverty and aspirations

CONTENTS

Preface	8
Executive summary	11
INTRODUCTION	14
1. CHILD POVERTY AND MEASUREMENTS	15
1.1. Absolute and relative poverty in Italy	15
1.2. The European drive: poverty and social exclusion	18
1.2.1. A view of Italy through the European lens	20
1.3. The impact of poverty on life aspirations and expectations: international measurement	24
1.3.1. How poverty compromises the future of children and teenagers	24
1.3.2. International data	25
2. THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY ON POVERTY AND TEENAGERS' ASPIRATIONS IN ITALY	26
2.1. Research objectives, methodology and research tools	26
2.2. The demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the sample	29
2.3. The results	31
2.3.1. Living without	31
2.3.2. Growing up with scarce educational resources	35
2.3.3. University, work, family: between desires and possibilities	37
2.3.4. Entangled in poverty	40
2.3.5. Interrupted girls	43
2.3.6. Is Italy my home?	44
2.3.7. Wanting to leave	45
2.3.8. School (even beyond school) is still a social ladder	46
2.3.9. The future	51
3. THE VOICES OF TEACHERS AND ADOLESCENTS	55
3.1. Schools facing the challenge of poverty: the teachers' perspective	55
3.1.1. Young people in poverty, between school and work	55
3.1.2. Missing models	58

3.1.3. Good practices to break the link between economic and educational poverty and promote positive aspirations	59
3.2. Poverty in the experiences of boys and girls: peer research	63
3.2.1. Life, training and work projects	63
3.2.2. The role of schools in supporting children's paths	67
3.2.3. The neighbourhood as an obstacle to the pursuit of one's goals and desires	68
3.2.4. Living in a poor family: between awareness of difficulties and optimism for the future	69
3.2.5. What solutions do the teenagers propose	73
4. FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AGED 0-3 IN POVERTY ASSISTED BY CARITAS: SOCIAL PROFILES, DEPRIVATIONS, EXPECTATIONS, DREAMS AND SUPPORT NETWORKS	76
4.1. The quantitative research path	77
4.1.1. Methodological elements	77
4.1.2. The social profile of families with children aged 0-3	79
4.1.3. Hardship and deprivation	83
4.1.4. Access to daycare	87
4.1.5. Support networks	89
4.2. The qualitative research path	94
4.2.1. Families in distress with children aged 0-3: experience, obstacles, hopes	94
4.2.2. Poverty among families with children aged 0-3 as seen by operators	104
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	110
APPENDIX - Adolescents' poverty and aspirations questionnaire	114

Preface

A few months ago, Istat (National Institute of Statistics) released data on child poverty in Italy over the past decade that was particularly alarming. The data revealed that one million three hundred thousand children and adolescents grow up in circumstances that are "inadequate for a dignified life".

In Italy, the younger you are, the poorer you are. The incidence of absolute poverty among minors is more than double that of the over-65s. The majority of affected children are those up to the age of three. This represents a tragic generational injustice.

The numbers are stark. However, they do not tell the whole story. To gain a full understanding of the situation, it is necessary to go beyond the statistics and engage with the individuals and communities directly affected.

This is what we attempted to achieve through extensive and dedicated research involving numerous teams of researchers, a distinguished Scientific Committee, 1,496 boys and girls aged 15-16 representing this age segment of the population, 40 schools, teachers and educators, 31 Third Sector associations, social services and juvenile justice services, and four groups of young people who conducted in-depth peer research in four distinct outlying educational districts. A comprehensive field research programme was conducted, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, with the objective of elucidating the implications of poverty for minors and the potential impact of their experiences on their aspirations.

Aspirations represent a crucial interpretative lens through which to assess the impact of child poverty and its capacity to constrain growth opportunities. For this reason, we inquired not only about the professional careers that the children aspire to pursue, but also about the personal qualities that they aspire to embody. We then assessed their confidence in the feasibility of translating their aspirations into achievable goals, and in bridging the gap between their current circumstances and their future aspirations.

One element that emerges from the research is how mature teenagers are in expressing their judgements. They are acutely aware of the challenges faced by those living in economic hardship, and they condemn the environmental degradation and lack of educational, cultural, and sporting opportunities that afflict many of them. They perceive the economic stress experienced by their parents and attempt to intervene as best they can, even resorting to child labour. The future is viewed with a combination of hope, anxiety, and, in some cases, fear. Along with economic support for families in poverty, there is a call for free psychological support for all adolescents. This demonstrates how the right to psychological well-being has become for the first time a real political demand, thanks to their efforts. Furthermore, they have formed a unified front in stating that the first challenges their generation will have to face in an uncertain future are those posed by the climate crisis, artificial intelligence, and the growing burden of discrimination and violence.

The majority of respondents expressed a desire for a stable and rewarding career that does not compromise their physical or mental health, as well as the opportunity to engage in leisure activities with friends and pursue their personal interests. Having children and being a good parent were also identified as important aspirations (80%).

The picture becomes distorted when we move from aspirations to expectations. This means that when we ask boys and girls what they think they will actually manage to do, we are asking them to assess whether they think their aspirations will be realised or whether they will remain simply dreams. Here the roads diverge, and reading the results of the research becomes painful.

It is distressing to observe that 15 and 16-year-old boys and girls living in severe economic deprivation are already convinced that they will be unable to opt out of this situation. They are resigned to leaving school early to go to work (some of them have already dropped out); those who would like to go to university already know that they will not be able to afford the high costs; they believe that, even when they enter the labour market, they won't earn enough (they are destined to become the new 'working poor', like most of their parents).

It is particularly concerning to discover that girls are the most discouraged. In comparison to their male counterparts of a similar age, they have considerably higher aspirations for further education yet exhibit markedly lower expectations regarding their prospects in the labour market. It is alarming to observe that 46% of 15- to 16-year-old girls believe that they will be unable to secure gainful employment in an environment that is "respectful and free from exploitation". Additionally, nearly 30% of them anticipate that they will not be able to pursue their desired careers when they grow up.

Adults cannot remain indifferent to this gap in expectations about the future affecting adolescents in poverty and girls - regardless of their economic conditions. Adults have the responsibility to rebuild trust, not only in words but in deeds. For example, through a strategic intervention to tackle poverty and a structural strengthening of the scholastic and educational programmes on offer. This would ensure that all young people, starting with the most disadvantaged, have the opportunity to experiment and let their talents flourish. It is necessary to invest in educational guidance, also drawing inspiration from the good practices described in this research by teachers and educators. Last but not least, we must remember that to generate trust it is first necessary to place trust in boys and girls, providing them with spaces where they can be listened to and become protagonists, recognising them as active agents of change.

The research then focuses on parents and their children aged zero to three living in poverty. This is the outcome of the valuable commitment of Caritas Italiana, which contributed to this survey by collecting, through its Research Office and operators in the field, the voices of families addressing their network of territorial services. An extensive survey was conducted involving 1,612 parents in 115 dioceses and included 7 qualitative focus groups with families and operators. Many of the participants are employed in insecure and poorly paid jobs, mothers who are unable to find work after the birth of their child and who experience difficulties in making ends meet. Their bank balance frequently plummets, sometimes because they need to buy medicines for their sick children ("I have three children and when one gets sick, then all of them get sick and we spend a month buying drugs. You tear your hair out, you want to cry as soon as you see that one of them is sick..."). Loneliness, personal renunciations, and the inability to engage in simple activities, such as celebrating a birthday, eating a pizza or ice cream, or purchasing a children's book, are also common. But the strength of spirit and the desire to invest in their children's future are also evident. This is despite the fact that there is much talk of the demographic crisis in Italy, yet little is known about the experiences and the real hardships of those who give birth to a child in conditions of economic precariousness. It is an in-depth study that helps us to understand the strengths of our welfare system and to identify areas for improvement. For example, many stories highlight the value of daycare, the support of a good paediatrician and social services. However, there are also instances where these services are lacking, which should be addressed.

As rich as it is in data and analysis, this report - including all the research material available in the Datahub of Save the Children¹ - does not, of course, claim to give an exhaustive account of the complex phenomenon of child poverty, nor does it claim to draw conclusions. We come out of this research work with more questions than answers, with the awareness that we have to follow multiple research 'tracks' that have been left open to further research, hoping that many others continue this work. We wanted to gather the voices of those who directly experience a condition of deprivation, asking not only for testimonies, but for points of view and proposals on what needs to be done. We believe that it is necessary to give voice, from the depths of their invisibility, to those who experience

¹ See <https://datahub.savethechildren.it/>

this condition and who often, in addition to the burden of economic difficulties, must also face the stigma of poverty, considered as a shame to be hidden, a failure and a personal fault.

In addition to its operational activities, Save the Children has consistently regarded research as an integral component of its mission. Over the years, in Italy, it has fostered a close collaboration with various organisations, research institutes and experts who have provided invaluable assistance in the production of studies and elaborations. This includes the formulation of the initial concept of "educational poverty" a decade ago. The accelerating and intricate transformations in the world of childhood and adolescence make the need for data to support policies increasingly evident. In many cases these are distant from reality, guided by emergency and ideological approaches and lack evaluation tools. To help bridge this serious gap, Save the Children has decided to set up a Research Centre, with the aim of providing useful data and analysis for the design of its programmes and the production of public policies in favour of the rights of children and adolescents. This will only be possible through the establishment of extensive networks, the mobilisation of the scientific community, young researchers and all movements active in the field. We do hope that the dissemination of this report will be the first step towards gathering new energy around this objective, which is as ambitious as it is necessary.

Raffaella Milano
Research and Training Director, Save the Children Italy

Executive summary

In Italy, more than 1.3 million children and adolescents live in absolute poverty², with over one in four children (28.5%) at risk of poverty or social exclusion³. Child poverty has a detrimental impact on all aspects of their growth, including health and education, and not only affects their present but also their future.

In this research, Save the Children has examined the various dimensions of child poverty from the perspective of boys and girls, analysing the impact of this condition on their present experience and future life prospects. The findings indicate the existence of a '(im)possible future', where expectations for the future are strongly influenced by personal, family and contextual circumstances, to the disadvantage of those in unfavourable socio-economic conditions.

In Italy, approximately 108,000 teenagers aged 15-16 (9.4% of the total) live in conditions of severe material deprivation⁴. Furthermore, 17.9% of parents report difficulties in meeting food or clothing expenses or paying bills. Some of these individuals reside in houses that lack heating (7.6%) or have nothing to eat in the fridge (6.4%). Others cannot afford to go out with their friends (15.1%), while others (16.2%) abstain from engaging in sports due to the prohibitive costs. Some do not take holidays for economic reasons (30.8%), and some others cannot afford to purchase new shoes, even though they need them (11.6%).

Material poverty also has an impact on educational opportunities. For instance, 23.9% of the interviewed 15–16-year-olds started the school year without purchasing all the required books and materials because they couldn't afford them. Furthermore, 24% of respondents indicated that their parents encountered financial difficulties in letting them take part to school trips. Additionally, 17.4% of respondents stated that they are not enrolled in language courses due to the high costs. Some respondents (15%) also reported a lack of a quiet space at home for studying. A significant proportion of 15–16-year-olds (37.7%) report that their parents are often or always concerned about the financial pressures they face. 43.7% of teenagers try to help their parents financially by saving (84.2%) and undertaking paid work, even before reaching the legal age set by the law, to cover their own expenses (18.6%) or to contribute to household expenses (12.3%).

In examining aspirations for the future, meaning the desire to be or do something as an adult, almost all of the boys and girls interviewed (more than 90%) – regardless of their socio-economic background – emphasise the importance of having a steady job that allows them to earn sufficient income to meet their own and their family's material needs and that is both rewarding and in line with their passions and interests. Similarly, the desire to have a loving family, a comfortable home and good friends, as well as having children and being a good parent, was also identified as important (79.4%). Conversely, when comparing children below the material deprivation threshold and their peers above it, there were differences in their desire to continue their studies and obtain a university degree (43.4% vs. 60.7%). Finally, more than one in three teenagers (36.7%) aspire to relocate abroad. This figure rises to 58.7% among second-generation migrants and falls to 34.9% among Italians. All this leads to reflections on the potential loss of resources, knowledge and skills in the coming years.

Turning to expectations we can see how poverty affects what teenagers actually think they will be able to do in the future given their starting situation. Only slightly more than half of socio-economically disadvantaged children believe they will be able to achieve their desired goals in life (54.7%) or what they feel best suited to do (59.5%), compared to 75% and 77.8% of those in more favourable socio-economic conditions. Moreover, only 35.9% of young respondents who live in a state of material deprivation say they will go to university – compared to 57.1% of minors in better

² Istat, *Rapporto Annuale, 2024*, <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2024/05/Rapporto-Annuale-in-pillole.pdf>

³ Eurostat, *EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC), 2022*

⁴ As defined for the purposes of this survey; see box 'The deprivation threshold used for the survey' (p. 36).

socio-economic conditions – and 43.6% state that they would like to go to university but are not sure whether they can afford it. With respect to work, the real expectations of the adolescents living in conditions of hardship are considerably gloomier compared to those of their peers living in better conditions: 67.4% of the respondents in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions fear that, even if they were to work in the future, they would not earn enough to support themselves, compared to 25.9% of teenagers with a better socio-economic background.

The data indicate that expectations are for everybody lower than desires, however the discrepancy is particularly pronounced among minors in poverty. For them, the gap between expectations and desires is 56.4 percentage points, compared to 17.7 percentage points for those who start from a better situation. This evidence demonstrates how poverty can lead to feelings of frustration and negatively impact life pathways.

In addition to the effects of poverty on adolescents' expectations, the survey results revealed other factors affecting the future prospects of boys and girls, starting with gender. Girls generally have higher expectations than their male counterparts regarding their studies. However, this picture changes drastically when one compares it with the world of work and the possibility to carry out one's own life plans, where the expectations of girls – regardless of their economic status – are much lower than those of their male peers. The inclusion of additional variables, such as the mother's educational qualification, the availability of learning spaces and tools, and study paths, demonstrates how family and individual educational opportunities and investments act as protective factors with respect to low educational aspirations (and in some cases, expectations).

For over 40% of boys and girls, the awareness of the obstacle ridden route they will have to face in realising their aspirations is accompanied by negative feelings such as anxiety, distrust and fear.

There are additional concerns about the challenges that their generation will have to face, particularly those posed by the climate crisis (43.2%), artificial intelligence (37.1%), discrimination and violence (34.8%). Almost one in three teenagers (32%) report the economic crisis as one of the most important challenges, and 30.9% are concerned about the growth of economic inequalities.

To address the pervasive lack of trust among adolescents in public institutions (59.7% of the sample expressed no confidence), the 15- and 16-year-old boys and girls interviewed affirmed that public institutions, including schools and the government, should provide support to the younger generation in addressing the challenges of inequality and poverty. They identified economic assistance for families as a crucial measure, with half of the minors (50.9%) rating it as the most important.

In addition to the research on adolescents, a quanti-qualitative survey was conducted in collaboration with Caritas Italiana to map the needs, vulnerabilities, sacrifices, and support networks of families with children between the ages of 0 and 3 who are supported by the Caritas network. It is precisely children in this age group that record the highest incidence of absolute poverty (14.7%)⁵.

The purchase of everyday products such as nappies (58.5%), baby clothes (52.3%), baby food such as powdered milk (40.8%), or toys (37.2%) can be challenging. Additionally, 40.3% of respondents report difficulties in affording specialist visits in private paediatric clinics, while 38.3% indicate difficulties in purchasing medicines or medical aids for babies. Furthermore, family budgets are also burdened by the payment of fees for daycare or baby spaces (38.6%) and the payment of babysitting services (32.4%), if relevant. In fact, only one in four children (25.5%) is enrolled in daycare. Those who are not, are often cared for by a jobless or job-seeking mother (69.4%) or are not enrolled specifically due to the fact that the fees are too expensive (27.4%). Consequently, 64.6% of parents, the majority of whom are women, give up educational and work opportunities because they do not know who to entrust their children to. Moreover, almost one in two (47.1%) report a lack of time for themselves or

⁵ Istat, *Le statistiche dell'Istat sulla povertà - Anno 2022, 2023*, <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2023/10/REPORT-POVERTY-2022.pdf>

for their personal leisure activities, while one in three (33.8%, with a higher incidence among Italian women) report a lack of time for their own health and well-being. It is notable that almost one in seven families (15.2%) lack access to a free family paediatrician. This is a reminder of the shortage of paediatricians in our country and the necessity to guarantee registration with the National Health Service to all children, as required by law.

The data presented here highlight the deep-rooted inequalities that exist in Italy and underline the urgency of a wide-ranging intervention aimed at guaranteeing all children and adolescents the right to aspire to freely determine their own future. It is therefore essential that this becomes a priority of the political agenda in Italy, through a long-term strategy that integrates education, health, labour and housing policies, which should be associated with a clear investment of resources in favour of childhood and adolescence.

In this regard, Save the Children advocates for the delineation of a medium-term investment path for children and adolescents - based on an organic reform design to address inequality and child poverty - within the medium-term structural budget plan that is required by the new Stability Pact.

Furthermore, investments for children and adolescents should include the definition of Basic Levels of Services (Italian acronym LEPs) in child and adolescent-related subjects and their adequate financing. This should include, for example, school canteens and full-time education, the provision of textbooks, and the right to university study. To support the aspirations of children and adolescents, we call for the establishment of a National Fund aimed at ensuring an educational grant to be used in cultural, sports, and recreational services. We also recommend an intervention addressing the first years of life, extending to all minors between the ages of 0 and 3 the 50% increase of the Single and Universal Allowance.

The implementation of these proposals, together with a number of other recommendations put forward by networks and organizations advocating for the rights of children, demands a robust political will and a unified commitment from the government, institutions at all levels, the productive sector, and civil society to guarantee tangible opportunities for the creation of a more prosperous future for all children and adolescents in our country.

INTRODUCTION

According to preliminary estimates by Istat, the incidence of absolute poverty among minors in Italy is registered at 14% in 2023. This is the highest value observed in the historical series since 2014, affecting 1.3 million minors⁶. Moreover, although the proportion of families at risk of poverty or social exclusion with at least one minor child has fallen slightly compared to the previous year, it remains high at 25.5%⁷.

Minors born and raised in poverty face a difficult life. The lack of economic resources has a negative impact on all aspects of growth, including health and education. It can lead to impaired cognitive development, affects psychological well-being and social relationships, and limits the potential for investment in skills and knowledge that are essential for future success.

Poverty not only impacts on the current experiences of children and teenagers, but also has long-term consequences for their aspirations and life expectations. The “capacity to aspire” is not equally distributed, as it is linked to available resources and socio-economic and cultural background. As a result, those living in conditions of deprivation develop a diminished capacity to aspire to a different future and are left to define their expectations in a context of uncertainty and insecurity.

Poverty surveys typically focus on household income and consumption, without considering the distribution of these resources among household members or the specificities of child deprivation. Although it is true that in recent years the issue of child poverty has received more attention, there are still no tools for measuring child poverty that take into consideration both material and social/emotional aspects, together with the subjective perceptions of poverty and the territorial characteristics of the communities in which children grow up⁸.

With this survey, Save the Children intends to contribute to investigating the issue of child poverty. In doing so, the survey considers the minors' point of view and their direct life experience, and analyses how and to what extent the condition of poverty can influence not only the present, but also aspirations and expectations for the future.

The first chapter presents the definitions and measures of child poverty currently used, focusing on national and regional data and comparisons at the European level. The second chapter presents the results of the quantitative research carried out among 15- and 16-year-old young people. It looks at multidimensional deprivation, aspirations and expectations. The next chapter presents the teachers' perspective and reports on the life experiences of boys and girls, collected through peer research fieldwork. The fourth chapter, resulting from a collaboration between Caritas Italiana and Save the Children, focuses on a crucial period of development: early childhood. To this end, an analysis of the living conditions of families with children aged 0-3 who use Caritas services in Italy was carried out. This analysis examined the impact of poverty on children's growth and development. At the end of the research, there is a collection of recommendations for institutions to implement effective policies and programmes aimed at helping children and adolescents to emerge from deprivation and promote positive aspirations for their future.

⁶ Istat, *Resta stabile la povertà assoluta, la spesa media cresce ma meno dell'inflazione*, 25 marzo 2024, https://www.istat.it/it/files//2024/03/STAT_TODAY_POVERTA-ASSOLUTA_2023_25.03.24.pdf. Although the measurement of child poverty in Italy started in 2005, the comparison with the historical series is only possible from 2014.

⁷ Istat, *Condizioni di vita e reddito delle famiglie | Anno 2023*, 7 maggio 2024, <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/296819>

⁸ In this direction, a major step forward could come from the definition of the educational poverty index by Istat, which for this purpose has set up an inter-institutional scientific commission on educational poverty, whose work is currently underway.

1. CHILD POVERTY AND MEASUREMENTS

1.1. Absolute and relative poverty in Italy

To date, there is no specific measurement tool of child poverty in Italy. The deprivation of children and adolescents can be derived by disaggregating the absolute and relative poverty indicators of the general population by age group. The incidence of poverty among minors is thus measured by looking at the income of the households to which they belong, assuming that all individuals in a household considered poor are equally poor⁹.

Measuring poverty in Italy

In Italy, Istat measures poverty in both absolute and relative terms.

The incidence of absolute poverty is measured by calculating the number of people, relative to the total population, whose expenditure at household level is below an "absolute threshold" defined by the monetary value of a basket of goods and services considered essential for each household to avoid serious forms of social exclusion in its context. The basket includes elements related to adequate food, a house with sufficient space for the size of the household, equipped with essential services, accessories and durable goods, and adequately heated. It also includes needs related to clothing, communication, information, mobility in the area, education and maintaining a good state of health. The value of the basket naturally evolves over time, taking into account, for example, fluctuations in the prices of goods and services, but also changes in the types of goods and services considered essential.

Relatively poor households are those with a consumption expenditure at or below a conventional relative poverty threshold (poverty line). For households of different sizes, the value of the line is obtained by applying an appropriate equivalence scale that considers the economies of scale that are relevant as the number of members increases (e.g. the poverty line for a family of four is 1.63 times that for a family of two). Relative poverty defined in this way is therefore also seen as a measurement tool for inequalities¹⁰.

Based on the latest available comprehensive statistics in 2022, 22.2% of minors lived in relative poverty and 13.4% in absolute poverty¹¹. According to preliminary estimates by Istat, the figure is expected to increase in 2023¹².

The territorial distribution of minors living in absolute poverty in Italy shows significant differences between the northern, central and southern macro-areas. The latter has a higher incidence of the phenomenon, at 15.9%, compared with 12.3% in the North and 11.5% in the Centre (Fig. 1)¹³.

⁹ Brandolini A., *Il dibattito sulla povertà in Italia, tra statistica e politica*, in *Questioni di Economia e Finanza, Banca d'Italia*, 2021

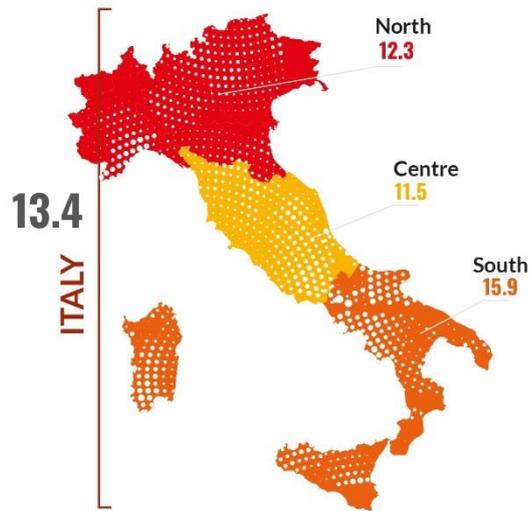
¹⁰ Istat, *Le statistiche dell'Istat sulla povertà - Anno 2022, 2023*, <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/289724>

¹¹ See Istat data for 2022, https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1,HOU,1.0/HOU_POVER/DCCV_POVERTA/IT1,34_727_DF_DCCV_POVERTA_9,1.0

¹² Istat, *Resta stabile la povertà assoluta, la spesa media cresce ma meno dell'inflazione*, 25 marzo 2024, 2024, https://www.istat.it/it/files/2024/03/STAT_TODAY_POVERTA-ASSOLUTA_2023_25.03.24.pdf

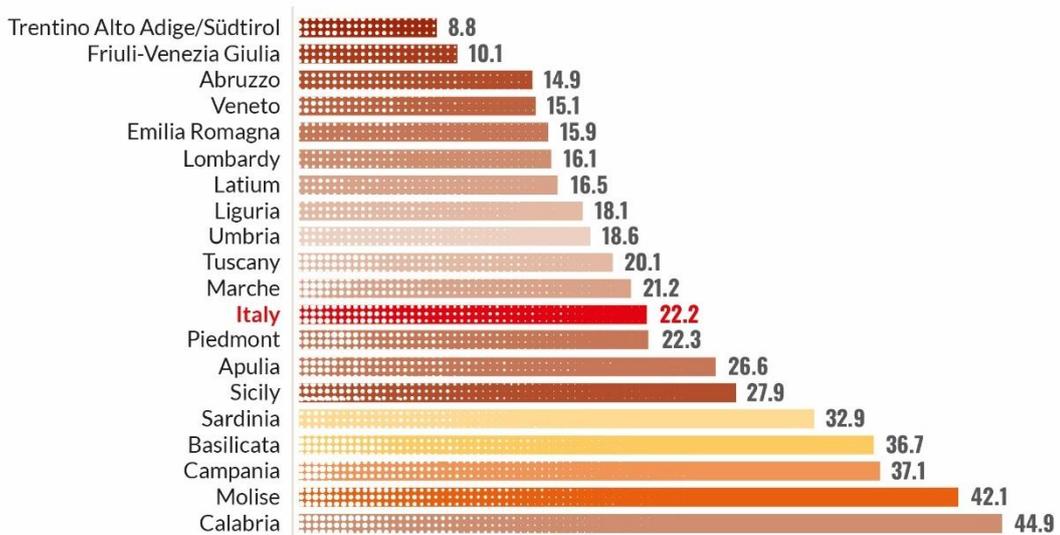
¹³ Istat, *Le statistiche dell'Istat sulla povertà - Anno 2022, 2023*, <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/289724>

Fig. 1
Minors in absolute poverty by macro-areas (%)
Source: Istat data (2022)



Data on relative poverty also show significant differences between Italian regions (Fig. 2). While regions such as Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia have percentages of minors living in relative poverty equal to or below 10% (8.8% and 10.1% respectively), in other regions, particularly in the South and the Islands, the incidence of poverty is particularly high, in some cases exceeding 30% and even 40%. This is the case in Sardinia (32.9%), Basilicata (36.7%), Campania (37.1%), Molise (42.1%) and Calabria (44.9%), where almost one child in two lives in relative poverty¹⁴.

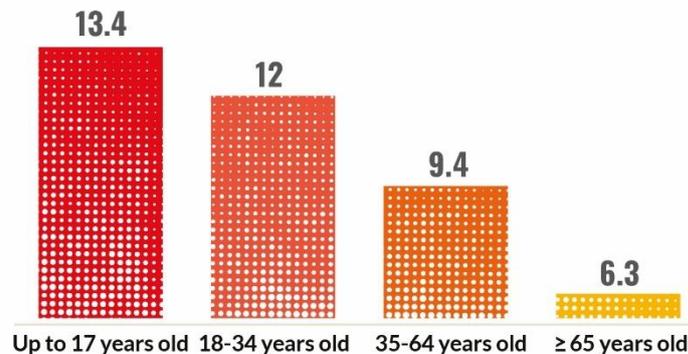
Fig. 2
Children in relative poverty by region (%)
Source: Istat elaboration for Save the Children (2022)



¹⁴ Processing of relative poverty data (2022) by Istat for Save the Children.

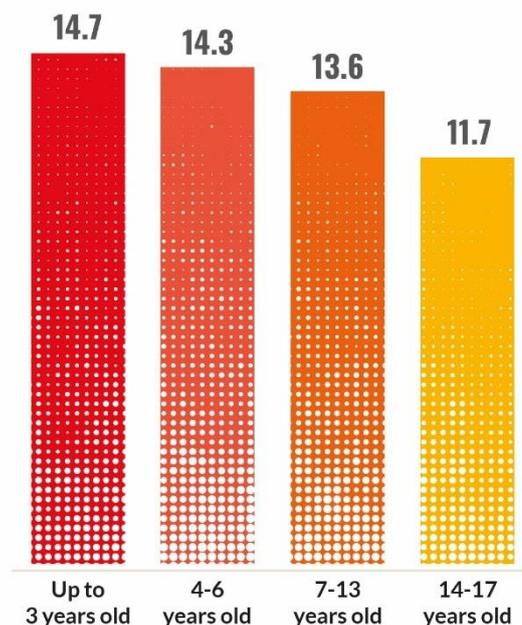
In a generational comparison, it is even more worrying that the incidence of poverty is higher among minors than among adults. Data on absolute poverty disaggregated by age groups show that the incidence of deprivation among minors up to 17 years of age is 13.4%, while it drops to 12% among young adults between 18 and 34 years of age. Poverty rates are even lower for people aged 35-64 and those aged 65 and over, at 9.4% and 6.3% respectively (Fig. 3)¹⁵.

Fig. 3
People in absolute poverty in Italy, by age group (%)
 Source: Istat Data (2022)



A closer look at the data shows that within the demographic groups there are differences in the experience of poverty. The statistics provided by Istat show that within the under-17 age group, the youngest children, up to the age of 3, are the most affected (14.7%). This percentage decreases slightly as the age increases¹⁶ (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4
Children in absolute poverty in Italy, by age group (0-17 years) (%)
 Source: Istat Data (2022)



¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

1.2. The European drive: poverty and social exclusion

It is only since the 2000s that the concept of poverty and statistical tools, which initially focused only on the income component, have been integrated by the non-monetary dimensions associated with the condition of social exclusion. The debate that started in the 1990s at the level of the European Union, which led to the development and subsequent adoption of the current European indicators on the risk of poverty or social exclusion, has certainly contributed to this.

At the European level, a common definition of poverty was first agreed upon in 1975, referring to the state in which a person's income and resources are inadequate to ensure that he or she has a standard of living that is considered acceptable by the society in which he or she lives¹⁷. Subsequently, in the 1990s, the then European Economic Community launched a series of reflections on how to develop comparable statistics between Member States that would include a measure of poverty and social exclusion¹⁸.

In 2001, the European Council in Laeken (Belgium) officially defined European statistical indicators to assess the incidence of poverty in the Member States, recognising the multidimensional nature of deprivation¹⁹, which is not only linked to a lack of income but also to social exclusion, by considering parameters such as unemployment, poor housing and health conditions and lack of educational, cultural and recreational opportunities. In this context, in 2004 Eurostat launched the European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), the survey that still to this day measures the incidence of the risk of poverty or social exclusion in a harmonised way at European level²⁰.

The EU-SILC survey is used as a base to calculate the AROPE (At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion) indicator²¹, which measures the number of people - and thus the percentage of the total population - who are considered to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion or severely deprived of resources and basic necessities, or living in family units with very low work intensity, for example where family members have occasional and/or short-term jobs. The AROPE indicator thus captures the multidimensional nature of poverty, considering not only the income dimension but also education, employment, health, housing, food deprivation, etc.

Europe's strategy to tackle child poverty

In 2010, with the adoption of the European 2020 Strategy by the European Commission²², the reduction of poverty, as measured by the AROPE indicator, was recognised as one of the main objectives of the European Union. The subsequent European Agenda 2030 for Growth, Prosperity, Sustainability, Equality and Democracy maintained this objective and introduced a specific target to reduce the number of minors at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 5 million by 2030²³.

¹⁷ Brandolini A., *Il dibattito sulla povertà in Italia, tra statistica e politica*, in *Questioni di Economia e Finanza*, Banca d'Italia, 2021; European Parliament, *Poverty in the European Union. The crisis and its aftermath*, 2016

¹⁸ Brandolini A., *Il dibattito sulla povertà in Italia, tra statistica e politica*, in *Questioni di Economia e Finanza*, Banca d'Italia, 2021; Guio A.C., Gordon, D., Marlier E., Najera H., Pomati, M., *Towards an EU measure of child deprivation*, in *Child Ind Res*, 11, 835-860, 2018

¹⁹ Atkinson T., Cantillon B., Marlier E., Nolan B., *Social Indicators: The EU and Social Inclusion*, 2002

²⁰ European Commission, *Joint report by the Commission and the Council on social inclusion*, 2004

²¹ Eurostat, *At risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)*, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_\(AROPE\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_(AROPE))

²² European Commission, *Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, 2010, <https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLETE%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

²³ European Commission, *Commission welcomes Member States' targets for a more social Europe by 2030*, 16/06/2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_3782

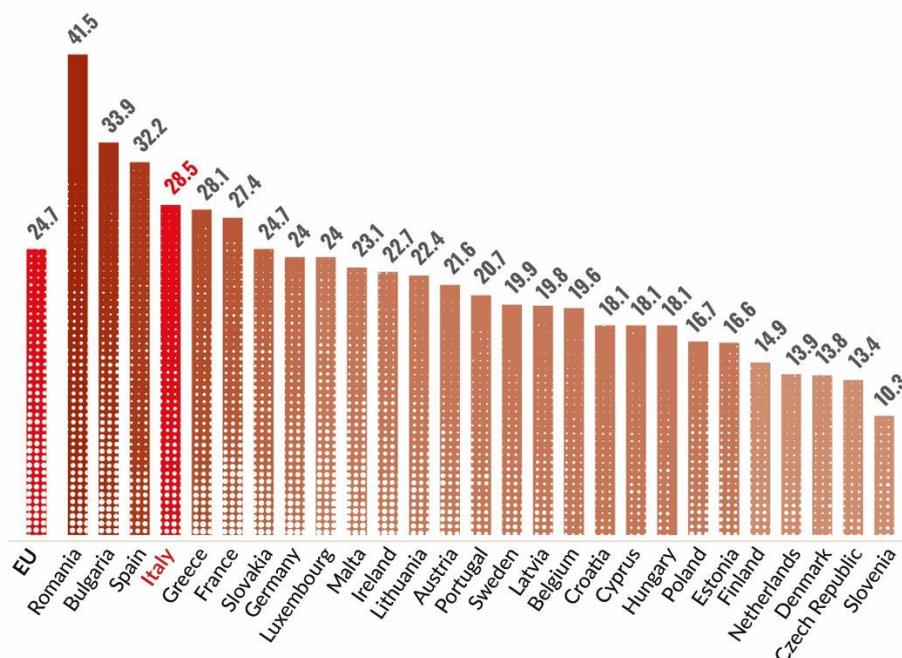
In 2021, the European Commission launched the EU Strategy 2021-2024 on the Rights of the Child, renewing its commitment to enforce the rights of minors and to fight poverty, social exclusion, discrimination and all forms of intimidation, and placing children and adolescents at the centre of EU policymaking.

In the same year, the European Union adopted the Child Guarantee, which aims to prevent and combat social exclusion by ensuring that minors in socio-economically disadvantaged situations have access to a range of basic services²⁴. The Child Guarantee requires EU Member States to develop national plans to ensure that all children and adolescents are guaranteed access to a range of basic services. Young people, regardless of their parents' economic situation, must have access to the resources they need to develop and realise their full potential. This includes ensuring quality education from early childhood, health care, nutrition and adequate housing conditions.

According to the latest EU-SILC survey, in the European Union around 20 million minors under 18 are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, almost one in four (24.7%)²⁵ (Fig. 5).

Italy stands out as one of the countries with the highest percentage (28.5%, equivalent to 2 million 660 thousand minors, of whom 435,000 are in severe material and social deprivation), exceeded only by Spain (32.2%), Bulgaria (33.9%) and Romania (41.5%). On the other hand, there are countries where the percentage of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion is much lower, e.g. Finland (14.9%), the Netherlands (13.9%), Denmark (13.8%), the Czech Republic (13.4%) and Slovenia (10.3%)²⁶.

Fig. 5
Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU (%)
Source: EUROSTAT EU-SILC data (2022)



²⁴ European Commission, European Child Guarantee, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en#:~:text=The%20objective%20of%20the%20European,healthy%20meal%20each%20school%20day>

²⁵ Eurostat, EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC), 2022.

²⁶ Ibid.

From an intergenerational perspective, Italy emerges as one of the countries where the difference in the incidence of the risk of poverty or social exclusion between children under 18 and adults is among the highest: almost 5 percentage points (pp) to the disadvantage of the former, surpassed by Slovakia (10.1 pp), Romania (8.8 pp), France (8.1 pp), Spain (7.5 pp), Luxembourg (5.7 pp) and Austria (5 pp) (Tab. 1)²⁷.

Table 1
Difference in the percentage of individuals at risk of poverty or social exclusion, between under and over 18 in the EU (pp)
 Source: EUROSTAT EU-SILC data (2022)

	<18	>=18	Difference
EU	24.7	20.9	3.8
Slovakia	24.7	14.6	10.1
Romania	41.5	32.7	8.8
France	27.4	19.3	8.1
Spain	32.2	24.7	7.5
Luxembourg	24	18.3	5.7
Austria	21.6	16.6	5
Italy	28.5	23.6	4.9
Germany	24	20.2	3.8
Malta	23.1	19.4	3.7
Ireland	22.7	20	2.7
Bulgaria	33.9	31.8	2.1
Greece	28.1	26	2.1
Czech Republic	13.4	11.4	2
Cyprus	18.1	16.3	1.8
Sweden	19.9	18.2	1.7
Belgium	19.6	18.5	1.1
Poland	16.7	15.8	0.9
Portugal	20.7	20	0.7
Hungary	18.1	18.4	-0.3
Finland	14.9	16.6	-1.7
Croatia	18.1	20.3	-2.2
Lithuania	22.4	25.1	-2.7
Netherlands	13.9	17.1	-3.2
Slovenia	10.3	14	-3.7
Denmark	13.8	17.9	-4.1
Latvia	19.8	27.5	-7.7
Estonia	16.6	27.3	-10.7

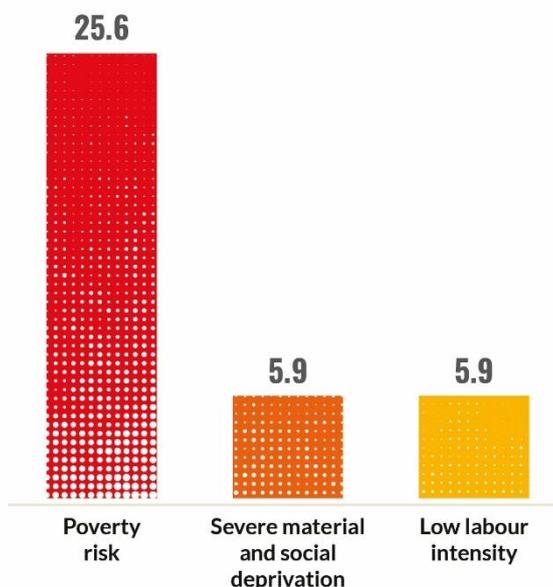
1.2.1. A view of Italy through the European lens

Again, using the European AROPE indicator, Istat has calculated for Italy the rate of minors under 16 at risk of poverty (25.6%), the rate of minors living in families with low labour intensity (5.9%) and, finally, the rate of minors experiencing severe material and social deprivation (5.9%) (Fig. 6)²⁸.

²⁷ Processing of EUROSTAT EU-SILC data (2022) by Save the Children

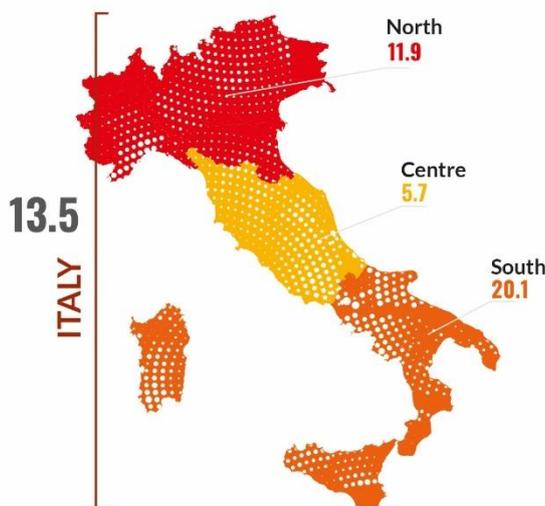
²⁸ Istat, Le condizioni di vita dei minori - Anno 2022, 6 Dicembre 2023, https://www.istat.it/it/files/2023/12/Deprivazione_minori_6_12.pdf

Fig.6
Children under 16 at risk of poverty or social exclusion (sub-indicators) (%)
Source: Istat data (2022)



If we look at the data on the specific material and social deprivation of minors (an indicator drawn up by Istat at national level)²⁹, we see that 13.5% of minors aged 16 and under are in this situation, with considerable geographical differences. While the North of Italy is close to the national average (11.9%), the percentage drops significantly in the Centre (5.7%) and rises to 20.1% in the South (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7
Children under 16 in material and social deprivation, by geographical area (%)
Source: Istat data (2021)

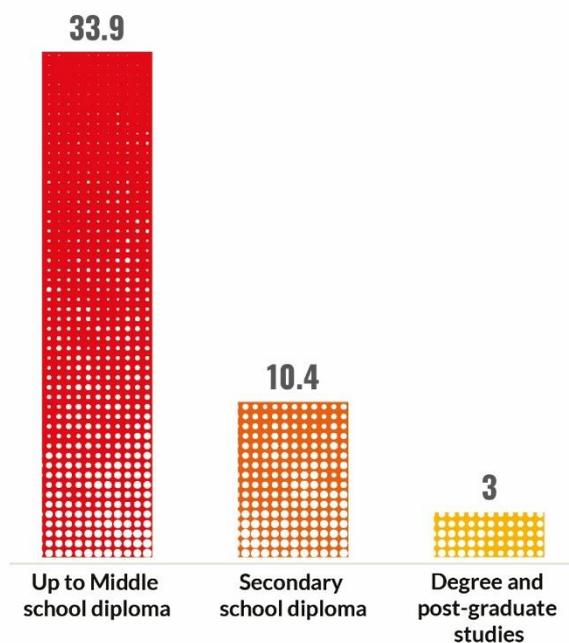


Material and social deprivation disproportionately affects minors aged 16 and under living in single-parent families (16.9%, compared with 12.3% of minors living with both parents). Similarly, the incidence of deprivation is much higher if the parents have only obtained up to a middle school

²⁹ Ibid.

diploma (33.9%), while it falls dramatically if the parents have completed tertiary education i.e. degree and post-graduate studies (3%) (Figure 8).

Fig. 8
Children under 16 in material and social deprivation, by level of parental education (%)
 Source: Istat data (2021)



Italy's ability to reduce the risk of poverty or social exclusion for the under-18s through social transfers is lower compared to other European countries (a difference of 10.5 pp compared to an EU average of 13.9 pp), as shown in the table below³⁰. It is interesting to note that the level of poverty before social transfers in Italy (35.9%) is very close to that of Austria (36%), Germany (35.3%) and Lithuania (35.2%), and relatively lower than that of Ireland (37.7%), Luxembourg (37.7%) and France (38.2%); however, in these countries social transfers are much more effective in reducing poverty, impacting around 15-22 percentage points, compared to the 10 percentage points of Italy (Tab. 2).

To deal with this situation, income support instruments for economically disadvantaged households have been introduced in Italy over time, such as the Support for Active Inclusion (SIA), replaced by the Inclusion Income (REI), the Citizens' Income (RDC) and, from 2024, the Inclusion Allowance (ADI). For the purposes of access to these instruments, poverty is defined as "the state of the family unit whose economic situation does not allow it to have the set of goods and services necessary to lead a decent life"³¹ and is measured by the Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE), which calculates the household's income, housing conditions and assets³².

While these transfers provide crucial support to families, in the past they have not proven sufficient: many poor families have been excluded from the pool of beneficiaries and the level of support,

³⁰ The effectiveness of policies can be observed through the difference in percentage terms between the poverty or social exclusion rate of minors before and after social transfers. Social transfers are defined as: pensions, unemployment benefits, family contributions, sickness and disability benefits, education contributions, housing contributions, social assistance and other benefits. See Eurostat, *Social transfers, 2022*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Social_transfers

³¹ Legislative Decree No 147 of 15 September 2017 'Provisions for the introduction of a national measure to tackle poverty' (own translation)

³² See Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, *Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE)*, <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/strumenti-e-servizi/isee/pages/default>

despite small supplements for families with minor children, has remained in many cases insufficient to ensure a way out of poverty³³.

The effectiveness of the Inclusion Allowance instrument, with its new criteria for access and the calculation of the amount of the transfer, has yet to be measured in practice. The simulations developed until now, however, do not depict it as the right instrument to reduce child poverty³⁴.

Table 2
Poverty risk reduction for under-18s in the EU due to social transfers (pp)
 Source: EUROSTAT EU-SILC data (2022)

	Poverty risk before social transfers	Poverty risk after social transfers	Difference
EU	33.2	19.3	-13.9
Ireland	37.7	15.1	-22.6
Germany	35.3	14.8	-20.5
Finland	28.6	9.5	-19.1
Lithuania	35.2	17.8	-17.4
Austria	36	19.2	-16.8
France	38.2	21.7	-16.5
Belgium	30	14.1	-15.9
Poland	29.9	14.3	-15.6
Luxembourg	37.7	22.5	-15.2
Sweden	32.1	17.2	-14.9
Denmark	23.6	10.1	-13.5
Estonia	27.1	13.6	-13.5
Latvia	29	16.2	-12.8
Hungary	22.3	10.1	-12.2
Bulgaria	37.4	25.9	-11.5
Czech Republic	22.7	11.8	-10.9
Slovakia	32.9	22.1	-10.8
Slovenia	19.9	9.3	-10.6
Italy	35.9	25.4	-10.5
Cyprus	24.8	14.9	-9.9
Romania	35.9	27	-8.9
Malta	27.1	19.3	-7.8
Spain	35.4	27.8	-7.6
Greece	29.8	22.4	-7.4
Croatia	23.1	16	-7.1
Netherlands	19.8	12.7	-7.1
Portugal	25.4	18.5	-6.9

³³ Saraceno C., Benassi D., Morlicchio E., *Poverty in Italy. Features and Drivers in a European Perspective*, 2020

³⁴ On this topic, see European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document. Country analysis on social convergence in line with the features of the Social Convergence Framework (SCF), 6 May 2024 in which it is reported: 'On average, however, without accounting for potential behavioural effects of the reform, such as increased incentives to work, the Assegno di Inclusionone is expected to induce higher incidence of absolute and child poverty (by 0.8 pps and 0.5 pps respectively) relative to the previous scheme.'; Aprea M., Gallo G., Raitano M., *Verso l'assegno di inclusionone: un passo indietro di 5 anni*, in Menabò n.193/2023, <https://eticaeconomia.it/verso-lassegno-di-inclusionone-un-passo-indietro-di-5-anni/>; Baldini M., Gallo G. e Gatta A., *Se non basta lavorare per uscire dalla povertà*, in *Eco*, n. 1/2024

1.3. The impact of poverty on life aspirations and expectations: international measurement

1.3.1. How poverty compromises the future of children and teenagers

As noted above, child poverty affects all dimensions of growth, undermining not only the present but also the future of children and adolescents.

Material poverty is one of the determinants of what Save the Children, with the contribution of a Scientific Committee³⁵, defined ten years ago as 'educational poverty', that is, "the deprivation of children and adolescents of the opportunity to learn, experience, develop and freely express their abilities, talents and aspirations"³⁶. Delays in learning begin in the early years of life for those children who live in socio-economically disadvantaged families and do not have access to early childhood education services³⁷. In addition, children and young people living in families with very limited financial resources score lower on skills surveys and are more likely to drop out of school early³⁸.

Minors living in poverty frequently live in overcrowded houses that are unsuitable for studying and are forced to forgo playing sports and attending recreational, artistic and cultural activities. On top of this, there is the additional difficulty of paying for school materials such as books or IT tools for learning at home³⁹, which further exacerbates the risk of digital educational poverty.

Educational poverty is also strongly conditioned by the lack of opportunities - both educational and extracurricular - in the area where the child lives. Where child poverty is most acute, and families face the greatest economic difficulties, schools and educational services are also 'poorer', lacking daycare facilities, full-time education, canteens and sports halls. The scarce educational offer does not, therefore, reduce the impact of the socio-economic inequalities of the families but, on the contrary, exacerbates them⁴⁰.

Studies show how poverty threatens to undermine the current development prospects and future opportunities of children and adolescents, creating a sense of insecurity and instability and negatively affecting their aspirations and expectations in key areas such as education and work⁴¹. Children growing up in poverty may develop limited prospects and a narrow perception of their opportunities. This is a condition that contributes to perpetuating and reinforcing intergenerational social and economic inequalities⁴².

The "capacity to aspire"⁴³ is therefore not equally distributed and is linked to available resources and socio-economic and cultural starting lines⁴⁴. Poverty, inequality and social injustice limit the possibility of expressing and nurturing aspirations and taking action to realise them: for children and

³⁵ The Scientific Committee members were: Daniela Del Boca, Maurizio Ferrera, Marco Rossi-Doria, Maria Emma Santos and Chiara Saraceno.

³⁶ Save the Children, *La lampada di Aladino*, 2014 (own translation)

³⁷ Save the Children, *Il Miglior Inizio*, 2019

³⁸ Save the Children, *Povert  educativa: necessario un cambio di passo nelle politiche di contrasto*, 2022

³⁹ Save the Children, *Riscriviamo il futuro*, 2021

⁴⁰ Save the Children, *Alla ricerca del tempo perduto*, 2022

⁴¹ Gardiner D. and Goedhuys M., *Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work. A Review of the Literature and Evidence*, ILO, 2020

⁴² Cassio L.G., Blasko Z. and Szczepanikova A., *Poverty and mindsets. How poverty and exclusion over generations affect aspirations, hopes and decisions and how to address it*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, doi:10.2760/472292

⁴³ Appadurai A., *The capacity to aspire culture and the terms of recognition*, 2004

⁴⁴ Dalton P., Ghosal S. and Mani A., *Poverty and aspirations failure*, in *The Economic Journal*, 2016

adolescents, this translates into an inability to imagine a future other than the one closely linked to their starting conditions.

1.3.2. International data

A number of international organisations have addressed the issue in recent years, in particular trying to propose operational definitions of aspirations, potentially measurable, and their interconnections to poverty. The most relevant example of this has been made by the European Commission. In its report 'Poverty and mindsets. How poverty and exclusion over generations affect aspirations, hope and decisions and how to address it'⁴⁵, it proposes an 'operational' definition of aspirational poverty, focusing on factors that influence the prospects of European citizens, with a particular focus on the aspirations and expectations of minors. In particular, aspirations are closely linked to the capacity of minors and their families to imagine and pursue a better future.

This ability can be hampered by external factors, first of all material poverty, which reduces the ability of families to invest in their children's education and formative path (e.g. to purchase the necessary books and teaching materials). This negatively affects the educational performance and cognitive abilities of minors, undermining their motivation and limiting their aspirations. Social discrimination represents a further, compounding obstacle. Exposure of minors to negative stereotypes based on their economic and social status can affect their self-esteem and emotional well-being, contributing to create an unfavourable environment for their development and again limiting their aspirations.

In the same report, another particularly important aspect concerns the relationship between poverty, stress and aspirations. Specifically, the condition of poverty and social exclusion has a negative impact on the quality of life of those exposed to it. The constant worry of not having enough money often leads to a state of 'toxic stress', a state of chronic and prolonged tension and exhaustion. When parents suffer from this condition, there are clear repercussions also on their children, who 'breathe' the same tensions. This has detrimental effects on their cognitive, emotional and social growth and fuels insecurity, lack of motivation and a pessimistic view of the future, thus affecting their ability to aspire.

In other studies⁴⁶, the analysis of boys' and girls' expectations and aspirations has focused mainly on professional career prospects, without considering other dimensions of life, such as family and social relationships, personal well-being and community involvement and volunteering. In the present research we have chosen to look at the issue of expectations and aspirations in a broader sense, not only in relation to employment, but to quality of life as a whole.

⁴⁵ Cassio L.G., Blasko Z. and Szczepanikova A., *Poverty and mindsets. How poverty and exclusion over generations affect aspirations, hope and decisions and how to address it*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, doi:10.2760/472292

⁴⁶ See, for example, the OECD PISA surveys and Gardiner D. and Goedhuys M., *Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work. A Review of the Literature and Evidence*, ILO, 2020

2. THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY ON POVERTY AND TEENAGERS' ASPIRATIONS IN ITALY

2.1. Research objectives, methodology and research tools

With this research, Save the Children aimed to analyse the different dimensions of child poverty from the point of view of boys and girls directly experiencing it, and to examine the impact of this condition on their present experiences and future prospects.

For the purposes of the research, and following the definition of Gardiner and Goedhuys⁴⁷, we call "aspirations" the result of one's preferences, what one wishes to be or do in the future, the goals one aims to achieve, whether in the field of education, work, relationships or other. "Expectations", on the other hand, mean what one believes one can achieve given the starting circumstances on a personal, family and contextual level⁴⁸.

Both aspirations and expectations are influenced by external factors: the ability to aspire is determined by the stimuli one receives while growing up, which affect one's ability to think big, imagining a more or less ambitious future.

Expectations are, at the same time, the product of a realistic reading of the future possibilities available, given the opportunities offered by the context and structural factors such as one's family and socio-economic starting point. Expectations are thus the product of one's own experience, the declination of aspirations in lived reality, the most realistic and concrete version of future prospects.

This research focuses on adolescents in the 15-16 age group, investigating how material poverty - specific to the family and local context - can negatively affect their prospects.

Adolescence is a period of transition to adulthood characterised by profound physical, emotional and cognitive changes⁴⁹. It is a period of growing up in which aspirations are developed and fulfilled, playing a fundamental role in defining adolescents' identities and outlining their future goals⁵⁰. It is during these years that aspirations influence decision-making processes, such as the choice of educational and professional pathways and life in general⁵¹.

Through analysis and data collection, the research therefore aims to contribute to the identification of effective policies and intervention tools to tackle child poverty and reduce inequalities and the negative impact of poverty on the aspirations of children and adolescents. It is essential to implement

⁴⁷ "When what a person aspires to for the future is aligned with what they believe can be achieved, given their circumstances and through their own effort (Dalton, Ghosal and Mani, 2016; Bandura, 1993), then aspirations become analogous to expectations and successful outcomes more likely. Therefore, whereas aspirations afford a dimension for preferences, expectations are the product of experiential perceptions, such that they become more context specific." Gardiner D. and Goedhuys M., *Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work. A Review of the Literature and Evidence*, ILO, 2020

⁴⁸ In the literature, the concepts of aspiration and expectation take on different definitions. See *ibid*.

⁴⁹ Piaget J., *The psychology of intelligence*, 1972

⁵⁰ Cassio L.G., Blasko Z. and Szczepanikova A., *Poverty and mindsets. How poverty and exclusion over generations affect aspirations, hopes and decisions and how to address it*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, doi:10.2760/472292

⁵¹ Gardiner D. and Goedhuys M., *Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work. A Review of the Literature and Evidence*, ILO, 2020

policies and programmes that help minors to broaden their horizons of aspiration and to visualise possible ways of achieving their goals.

The methodological approach of the survey combines quantitative and qualitative instruments. A quantitative survey was carried out on a representative sample of minors aged 15 and 16 living in Italy enrolled in the second and third year of secondary school.

The quantitative survey also included a convenience sample of early school leavers. The administration of questionnaires, which took place between February and April 2024 in person, resulted in the completion of 1,496 valid questionnaires by boys and girls of the target group: 1,346 distributed in 40 schools and 150 intercepted in 31 Third Sector organisations, social services and juvenile justice services.

Methodological note

Edited by Gaia Bertarelli, Statistical Expert and Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

The investigated population consisted of all minors in the 15-16 age group living in Italy, enrolled or not in schools. To obtain nationally representative results, two samples were drawn using different methodologies according to the characteristics of the population. We used a probabilistic sampling for those enrolled in schools (both private or public) and a convenience sampling for the out-of-school population. The two samples were subsequently merged, with each 15-16 teenager in the out-of-school sample being weighted according to the size of the out-of-school population of 15-16 teenagers in Italy, as estimated by INVALSI (the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System) for Save the Children. According to these estimates, it can be inferred that in 2022, approximately 7% (95% confidence interval: 6.3% to 7.5%) of boys and girls aged 15 to 16 years who reside in Italy were out of school. The estimates suggest that, in January 2022, 79,300 young people were out of school (95% CI: 71,900–86,600)⁵². The margin of error for the overall sample is $\pm 5\%$ at a 95% confidence level.

Probabilistic sample for the school population

The population of interest is defined as all 15- and 16-year-olds enrolled in a public or private high school. For the 2021/2022 school year, this equates to 1,001,640 students⁵³.

The sampling procedure used for the survey was designed to obtain a nationally representative sample of the population of interest, with a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$ and a confidence level of 95%. It is a two-stage procedure, stratified at stage one.

The primary sampling units are high schools stratified by geographical macro-area (North, Centre, South and Islands). The extraction was done by simple random sampling without replacement within each stratum. The sample size between the strata is proportional to the number of 15- and 16-year-old students enrolled in the schools belonging to the macro-area. Therefore, the sample is representative per macro-area: 41.6% of 15- and 16-year-old students are enrolled in high schools in the northern regions, 22.5% in the central regions, and 35.9% in the southern regions

⁵² This figure is the result of an estimate produced by INVALSI and made public in congressional form as the data of interest is not recorded in administrative sources and there is therefore no official list of school dropouts, unlike data for the enrolled population.

⁵³ Re-elaboration of Ministry of Education and Merit datasets, available on the Single Portal of School data, School section and Students section, available at: <https://dati.istruzione.it/opendata/opendata/catalogo/elements1/?area=Studenti> (download September 2023)

and islands⁵⁴. The total sample size of the schools was set at 40, in accordance with economic and logistical considerations.

The final sampling units (second stage) are the 15- and 16-year-old students enrolled in the second and third year of sampled secondary schools, extracted from each school by simple random sampling without replacement. In each school, a total of 30 students were selected, with each of the students aged 15 or 16 and enrolled in second or third year of sampled secondary school having the same probability of being drawn in the sample. The final sample, therefore, consisted of n=1200 students.

Given an oversampling of students in schools (n=1346), the weight of each student in the sample was adjusted when carrying out the analyses to maintain the correct territorial proportion of students in the three macro-areas.

Convenience sample for the out-of-school population

As there is neither an official sampling list nor a list of locations and centres where the population of 15- and 16-year-olds out of school can be reached, a convenience sample⁵⁵, not representative of the three macro-areas, was used to draw the sample, setting a sample size of about 150 children. The sample size was defined in relation to the sample collected for the school population and to guarantee variability of the results. To reach these boys and girls, 8 social cooperatives, 5 associations, 11 Punto Luce and 7 juvenile justice services were involved. The different types of services were selected to ensure the heterogeneity of the non-probabilistic sample collected.

A structured questionnaire was employed as the tool for the quantitative survey with the objective of gathering comprehensive information on the multifaceted context of deprivation experienced by adolescents and identifying the dimensions and factors that influence their aspirations and expectations for the future. This questionnaire was designed to provide a detailed picture of the phenomenon and identify potential areas for intervention to address child poverty and support young people's aspirations.

The questions were inspired, in part, by other surveys and adapted to this survey in order to collect the views of adolescents⁵⁶. The questionnaire was validated through consultations involving both the Scientific Committee and a group of adolescents of the same age group as the research target, who participate in the Save the Children programmes.

The questionnaire comprises several sections and contains a series of questions designed to investigate various aspects of poverty and the aspirations and expectations of young people: demographic information, socio-economic and cultural condition of the family, the minor's upbringing context, educational background, material deprivation, quality of living space, perceived poverty and socio-emotional well-being, future aspirations and expectations, the challenges of the current generation, and finally, proposals addressed to the institutions⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which subjects are selected for their comfortable accessibility and proximity to the researcher. The result is a normally biased sample, but the idea is that a good assortment of units and numerosity results in a representative sample. For this reason, it was decided in the survey to oversample this group of youngsters and then adjust their weights based on the distribution in the population.*

⁵⁶ *See appendix.*

⁵⁷ *See appendix.*

2.2. The demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the sample

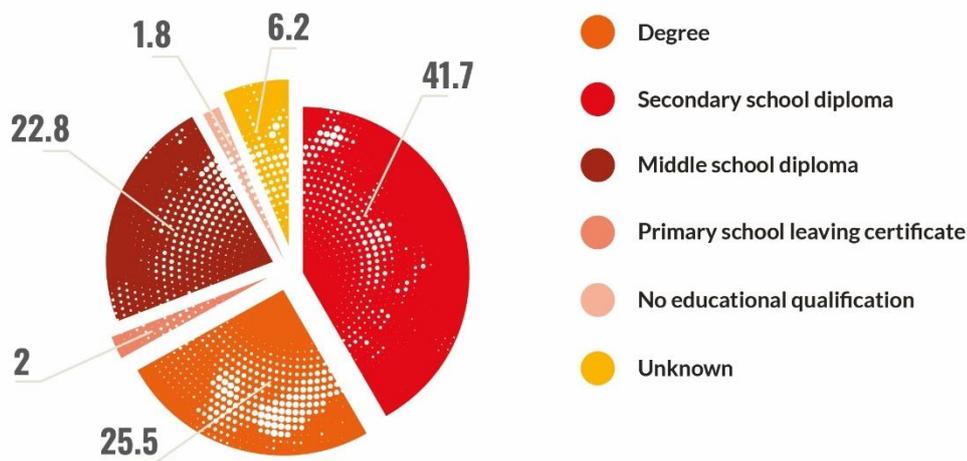
39.7% of the boys and girls interviewed reside in the North, 20% in the Central Italian regions and 40.3% in the South and Islands.

50.2% of the sample defined themselves as 'female', 48.4% as 'male'; 0.8% preferred not to define their gender and 0.6% answered that they did not know.

13.2% of the respondents have parents born abroad. Of these, first generation migrants - also born abroad - are 8.3%, while those born in Italy to foreign parents are 4.9%⁵⁸.

While analysing the family background, the answers provided by the respondents show that 3.8% of the mothers and fathers of the adolescents who took part in the survey have no educational qualification or have only a primary school leaving certificate. 22.8% of the mothers and 30.6% of the fathers have a middle school diploma. 41.7% of the mothers have a secondary education diploma and 25.5% have a university degree, while for fathers the percentages are 39.8% and 17.3% respectively (Fig. 9 and 10)⁵⁹.

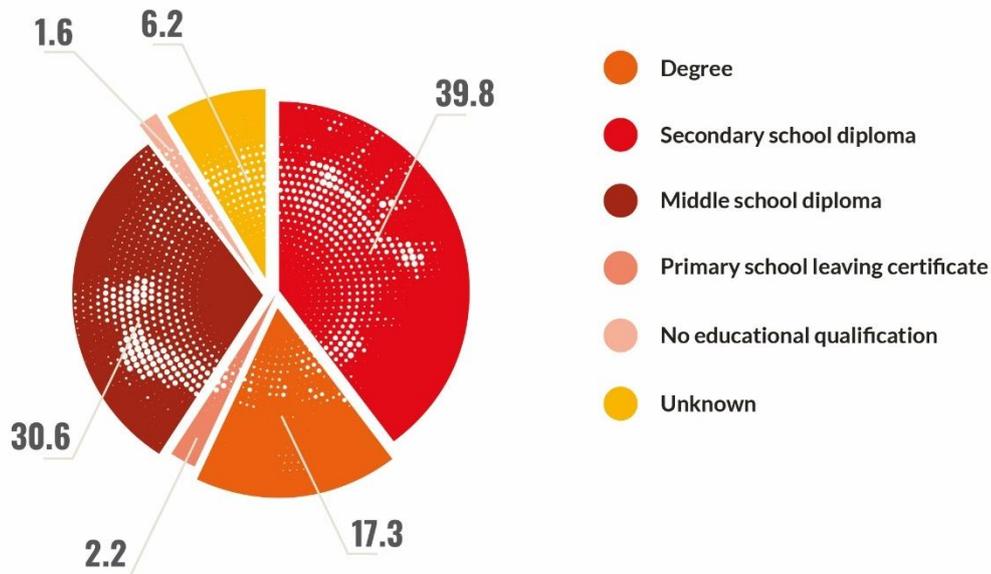
Fig. 9
Highest educational qualification held by mother (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



⁵⁸ The high number of first-generation migrant minors present, i.e. born abroad to parents also born abroad, is due to an over-representation in the 'convenience' sample outside the school. This over-representation does not influence the results of the analysis conducted on the relationship between this variable and aspirations or expectations.

⁵⁹ In this report, nursery refers to day care for children 0-3 years old and kindergarten is a pre-primary education service for children aged 3-6; when they turn 6, children start attending primary school for 5 years, followed by middle school (3 years) and high school/secondary school (3-5 years). Once obtained a secondary education diploma, girls and boys can decide to study at university or at a Higher Technical Institute.

Fig. 10
Highest educational qualification held by father (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)



Although mothers have the highest qualifications, the data on parental employment offers a divergent picture, reflecting the gender disparities in employment that are still strongly rooted in Italy⁶⁰. According to the interviewed 15-16-year-olds, only 38.5% of mothers are in full-time occupation, compared to 74.4% of fathers. Part-time work, on the other hand, remains a female prerogative (27.5% vs. 11.4%), as does housework: 22.8% of mothers take care of the house compared to 0.5% of fathers (Tab. 3).

Table 3
Parental employment (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)

	Mother	Father
Works full-time	38.5	74.4
Works part-time	27.5	11.4
Only works occasionally	4.5	1.5
Unemployed	2.5	2.6
Retired	0.4	2.1
Takes care of the house	22.8	0.5
Unknown	1.6	3
Other	2.2	4.4

Most of the children interviewed live with both parents (78%), while 22% live in families with only one parent or another responsible adult. Of these, 58.2% live with their mother, 9.7% with their father, 25.5% alternate between the mother and the father, 2.6% with their grandparents, 1.6% live with other relatives and 2.4% in foster homes or with other responsible adults. 26.7% live in families of more than 4 persons.

⁶⁰ Save the Children, *Le equilibriste. La maternità in Italia*, 2024

One in five (19.9%) lives in a large city (with more than 250,000 inhabitants), while the majority (66.8%) live in a medium-sized city (between 5,000 and 250,000 inhabitants) and 13.3% in a small town (with less than 5,000 inhabitants).

Finally, with regard to the educational and training pathway, it should be noted that in the construction of the sample, 15- and 16-year-olds who were not in school were also intercepted to guarantee a greater representativeness of the reference population. This resulted in 7.8% of the adolescents in the sample being identified as not enrolled at school. Among this group, 42.4% indicate that they do not attend training courses, are not employed, and are not seeking a job.

2.3. The results

2.3.1. Living without

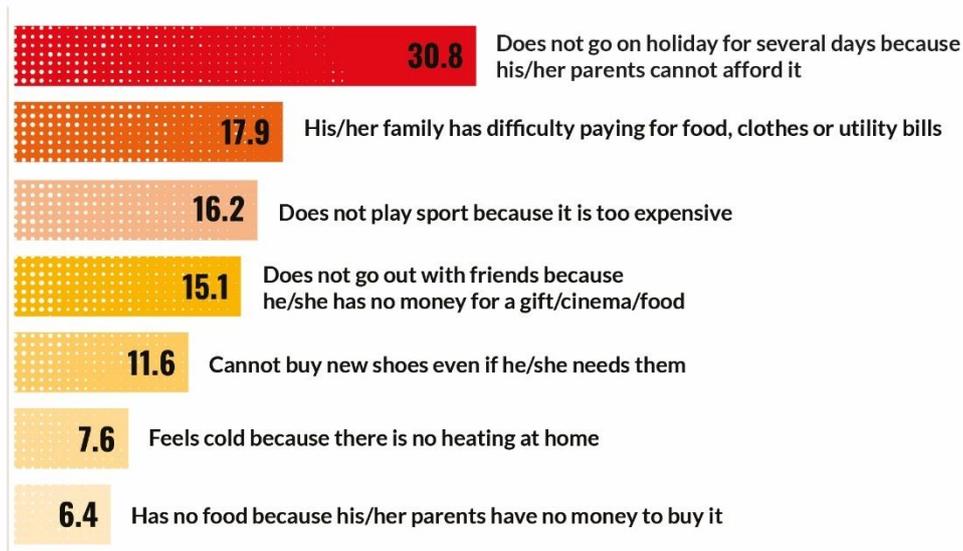
The interviewed adolescents who live in situations of poverty are acutely aware of the difficulties their families face. They give voice to the range and depth of the sacrifices encountered as they grow up.

Analysing the indicators of deprivation⁶¹, almost one in three (30.8%) says that their parents have financial problems that prevent them from taking the family on holiday for multiple days. 17.9% of respondents (equivalent to over 205,000 individuals in the age group) indicated that their parents have difficulty in meeting the cost of food and clothing or paying the bills. 16.2% of respondents reported that they are unable to engage in sporting activities due to economic constraints. Additionally, 15.1% of minors report that they are unable to go on social outings due to a lack of money to purchase gifts for friends, food or cinema tickets. Similarly, 11.6% of minors indicate that they are unable to purchase new shoes, despite needing them (approximately 133,000 15-16-year-olds). Furthermore, 7.6% of the respondents – approximately 87,000 adolescents – indicate they live in a home where they feel cold because there is no heating. This figure is indicative of the more complex phenomenon of energy poverty⁶². 6.4% of the respondents, corresponding to 73,000 boys and girls, have experienced coming home and feeling hungry but finding nothing in the fridge because the family doesn't have enough money to buy groceries (Fig.11).

⁶¹ The question had four possible answers based on the degree of agreement with the statement proposal (completely agree - agree - slightly agree - completely disagree). For the analysis, the answers were recoded into two categories: agree = "completely agree - agree" and disagree = "slightly agree - completely disagree"

⁶² See Save the Children and OIPE, *Freddo: 950mila minorenni in condizione di povertà energetica*, 10/02/2023

Fig. 11
Children aged 15-16 in material deprivation, by deprivation item (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)

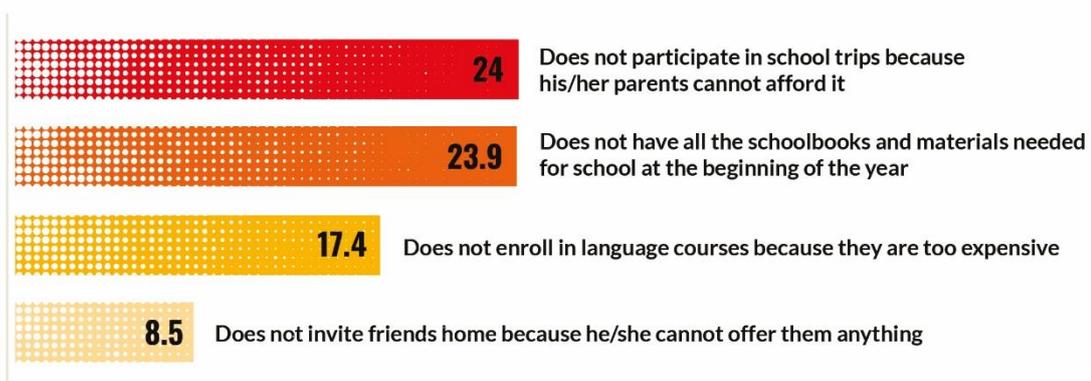


The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

Looking at other indicators⁶³, the survey reveals that the state of economic deprivation also has an impact on other aspects of adolescents' lives. For instance, only 23.9% of minors reported having already purchased all the necessary books or materials at the beginning of the school year. Furthermore, nearly one-quarter (24%) of the surveyed minors reported that their parents find their participation in school trips financially challenging (Fig. 12).

Deprivation, defined as the lack of access to resources that could enhance learning or leisure, is also reflected in the responses of 15-16-year-olds regarding their ability to attend extracurricular activities. For instance, 17.4% of respondents indicated that they do not enrol in language courses due to the prohibitive cost, while 8.5% stated that they occasionally cannot invite their friends home because they have nothing to offer them (Fig. 12).

Fig.12
Children aged 15-16, by other deprivation items (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

⁶³ These indicators were not included in those useful for defining the material deprivation threshold.

Measures to support education and recreational activities in Europe

The costs of educational materials, books, school uniforms, participation in educational activities such as field trips and school trips, and attendance at sports, music or recreational leisure courses place a significant burden on the incomes of families living in poverty. This has the effect of limiting or depriving many children and adolescents of educational and growth opportunities.

To support these costs and ensure equal opportunities and rights, many European countries provide specific support, often in the form of financial subsidies or services accessible free of charge or at reduced costs⁶⁴.

For instance, in Austria, the universal allowance is complemented by a grant paid at the beginning of the school year for every minor aged between 6 and 15. This grant is aimed at supporting education-related expenses such as textbooks, school supplies, uniforms, school transport, and so forth. A similar approach is observed in Belgium, where families with low incomes receive a school bonus, paid annually up to the age of 24 and contingent upon the minor's enrolment and attendance at school. Similarly, in France, to assist with the expenses associated with the start of the school year, families with minors between the ages of 6 and 18 receive an allowance in August, proportional to their income and increasing as the minor's age increases.

In Germany, families in established poverty and already beneficiaris of *Kinderzuschlag* (a monthly supplementary allowance to the universal allowance) are entitled to apply for support for school or out-of-school expenses via an online procedure or at local offices dedicated to families and young people. Such expenses may include multi-day school trips, school supplies, canteens, study support and cultural, musical and sports activities.

Also of interest is the case of Denmark, which in 2022 introduced a leisure allowance for minors up to the age of 18. The sum is paid monthly or quarterly, depending on the number and age of the children. Parents or legal guardians must prove that the support was spent on recreational activities, such as covering fees for sports clubs, music lessons, cultural activities, summer camps, training courses and more. In Finland, on the other hand, resources are allocated to municipalities to expand the range of free services and leisure activities for children.

In the United Kingdom, the Welsh government offers financial assistance to minors up to the age of 11 who attend school and come from low-income families. This assistance consists in a subsidy for essential school expenses, such as the purchase of school uniforms, sports kits and equipment for activities outside school. Additionally, a subsidy is provided on a weekly basis (Education Maintenance Allowance) for post-secondary education students from low-income families.

In Italy, the state support to low-income families for expenses related to the education and leisure of children and teenagers is limited to tax deductions for expenses related to sports and education. At the regional or local level, specific measures are in place to support the education and welfare of minors. These include school vouchers, which can be used to pay the fees for

⁶⁴ The information gathered here, updated to March 2024, is not intended to be exhaustive of the measures to support education taken in the different countries under consideration. For more in-depth information and updates see the ministerial websites of the individual countries and the information shared by EU agencies.

enrolment and attendance at private schools or to purchase textbooks, materials, didactic and technological equipment, and other supplementary activities provided for in the educational offer plans or the cost of transport. In some regions, financial support is also provided for sports or educational purposes, sometimes linked to family income support measures.

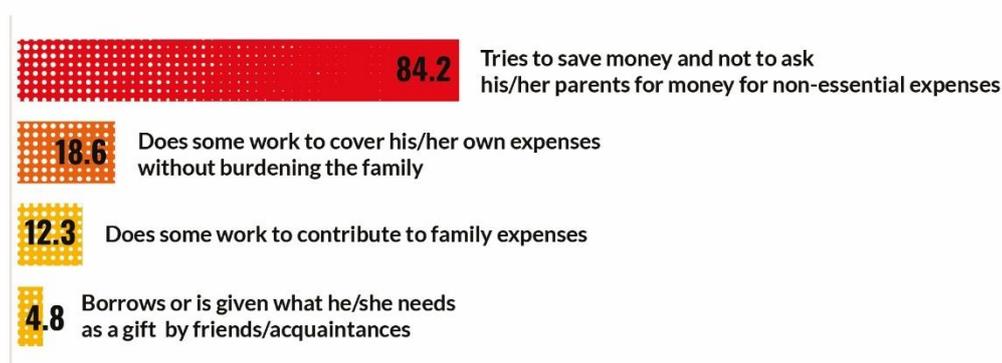
Poverty not only has an impact on school and education, but can also negatively affect social relationships, leading to marginalisation and exclusion. As many as 7.1% of 15- and 16-year-old adolescents state that one or more of their friends were excluded from the group because they could not afford the same opportunities and expenses as others.

The boys and girls interviewed do not hide the fact that economic difficulties are also a cause of distress within the family. A high percentage of the adolescents (37.7%) say that their parents are often or always worried about the many expenses they need to face. One in ten (9%) says that their parents often or always ask relatives or friends for help or borrow money to be able to cover necessary family expenses (e.g. bills, groceries, etc.). It is therefore a high number of adolescents - larger than those who recognise themselves in the specific deprivations indicated in the questionnaire - who report the economic condition as a family concern that pervades their daily lives.

Faced with this condition, almost one minor in two (43.7%) says that they help their parents with their expenses. Among these, 84.2% do so by trying to save money and not asking for money for non-essential expenses. A significant number - considering the age group - state that they do some work to cover their own expenses without burdening the family (18.6%) or to contribute to family expenses (12.3%)⁶⁵. 4.8% of respondents borrow or receive what they need from friends and acquaintances⁶⁶ (Fig. 13).

It is also notable that one in four 15-16-year-olds (25.5%) claims to know at least one teenager who has dropped out of school in order to work and help the family financially.

Fig. 13
Children aged 15-16 who help their parents with expenses, by mode of support (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)



Multiple-choice question.

⁶⁵ These data seem to confirm the findings of Save the Children's research 'Non è un gioco. Indagine sul lavoro minorile in Italia' (2023) according to which 20% of minors aged 14-15 have carried out an activity attributable to child labour.

⁶⁶ Multiple-choice question.

The deprivation threshold used for the survey

The European Union employs a special sub-indicator of the European indicator AROPE (At risk of poverty or social exclusion) to measure the severe material and social deprivation of minors. The indicator of material and social deprivation includes individuals under the age of 18 who experience at least 7 of the 13 deprivations outlined below: inability to pay rent, utility bills and other household expenses; inability to keep the house adequately heated; inability to cover unexpected expenses; inability to eat meat, fish or a protein equivalent every other day; inability to take a one-week-long holiday away from home; not having a car; impossibility to replace worn-out furniture; unavailability of an Internet connection; impossibility to purchase new clothes to replace worn-out ones; not having at least two pairs of shoes; not having the possibility to spend small amounts each week; the impossibility to engage in recreational activities; the impossibility to socialise with friends or family for a drink or meal at least once a month. In calculating deprivation for children and adolescents, items more evidently related to adult life are given less statistical weight⁶⁷.

This same principle was applied to our investigation, resulting in the identification of a material deprivation threshold, calculated by determining the number of minors experiencing a condition of deprivation in at least 4 of 7 selected items. These items are those used by the European Union to calculate the 'severe material deprivation' sub-indicator of the European AROPE indicator and most closely reflect the condition of deprivation of minors. In particular, the following criteria were considered: the inability to take the family on holiday for several days due to economic constraints; the inability to purchase food, clothing, or pay bills due to economic difficulties; the inability to purchase new shoes even when necessary; the inability to go out with friends due to a lack of money for a gift, entertainment, or food; the inability to engage in sports; and the presence of an empty fridge due to the lack of funds for groceries or a cold house due to a lack of funds for heating. The threshold was used to analyse differences in minors' aspirations and expectations according to their material deprivation status.

In light of the responses provided by the respondents, it was possible to estimate the percentage of adolescents living in conditions of severe material deprivation, as defined for the purposes of this survey⁶⁸. Those who met at least four of the seven indicators listed as proxies for material deprivation were considered in conditions of severe material deprivation. Approximately one in ten (9.4%) adolescents between the ages of 15 and 16 is in a state of severe material deprivation, equating to approximately 108,000 adolescents in this age group.

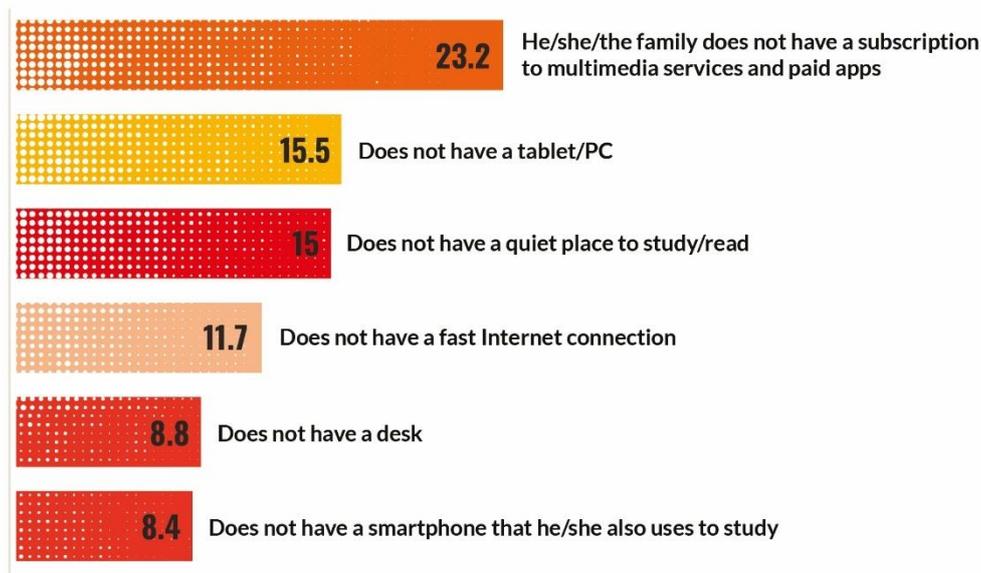
2.3.2. Growing up with scarce educational resources

Fifteen per cent of the minor respondents say they have no quiet place at home to study or read, 8.8% say they do not have a desk and 8.4% a smartphone they can use to study. Furthermore, 15.5% of 15–16-year-olds do not have a tablet/PC and 11.7% do not have a fast Internet connection. Finally, almost one minor in four (23.2%) says that their family does not have subscriptions to multimedia services and paid apps (Fig. 14).

⁶⁷ European Commission, *The new EU indicator of material and social deprivation, Technical note. Annex 1 SPC/ISG/2017/5/4*, 2017 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=818&langId=en&id=82>

⁶⁸ See box 'The deprivation threshold used for the survey'.

Fig. 14
Children aged 15-16 with no space or means of education at home (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)



The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

Almost two in five adolescents live in homes with a severe shortage of books: 18.8% of adolescents - almost 216,000 boys and girls - say they have a maximum of 10 books (excluding schoolbooks) at home, 20% between 11 and 25. 27.1% live in homes with between 26 and 100 books. Only 17.6% have between 101 and 200 books and 16.3% say they have more than 200 books at home.

The survey also sought to investigate the quality of the physical spaces where boys and girls spend their time. Elements such as access to social and cultural spaces and public transport, as well as the cleanliness of the neighbourhood, local economic opportunities and perceived safety, are not secondary aspects of the education process. These factors enable adolescents to expand their horizons and develop their full potential.

With clear voices, adolescents denounce the lack of spaces for socialisation, aggregation and cultural enjoyment, as well as situations of degradation. The absence of green areas (24.2% of cases) or their lack of maintenance (49.4%) were identified as significant issues. 36.6% of respondents indicated that they feel unsafe when walking alone in their neighbourhood, and three out of four (70.5%) of the respondents reported that the streets and pavements were not clean. A lack of suitable locations for sports activities (as stated by the 26.3% of 15-16-year-olds) and free or low-cost gathering spaces for music-making or community initiatives (43.3%) were also denounced, as well as the lack of easily accessible libraries (33.2%) and cinemas (42%).

Finally, 34.4% of respondents indicated that local shops are closing down due to the economic crisis, and over two-thirds (65.2%) expressed the belief that there are no job opportunities in their local area.

Almost a third of the adolescents surveyed (30.2%) stated that it is difficult to travel by public transport to other municipalities or areas of the city (Fig. 15).

Fig.15
Children aged 15-16 who report living in places where (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)



The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

2.3.3. University, work, family: between desires and possibilities

The survey aimed to explore, at a crucial age for the development of life choices, the aspirations and expectations of adolescents aged 15-16, regardless of socio-economic, demographic and/or other contextual variables⁶⁹.

When asked about their aspirations for their future, i.e. what they would like to do/be when they grow up, almost all 15-16-year-olds attribute primary importance to having a steady job (94.2%), one that allows them to earn enough to be able to provide for their own and their family's material needs (91.5%) and that is gratifying and in line with their tastes and interests (91.2%). 87.7% would like to work in a job that allows them to have free time and spend quality time with their family and friends. Significantly, 84.1% say they aspire to have a job that does not put their physical or mental health at risk.

Equally important is the desire of the young respondents to have in the future a family where people love, talk to and understand each other (93.1%), to have a comfortable home (93%) and, again, good friends and the opportunity to spend time with them (90.4%). A significant percentage (79.4%) say they aspire to have children and be good parents.

⁶⁹ The questions on aspirations were graded from 1 to 5 according to the assigned degree of importance (1 = less important, 5 = more important). For the purposes of the analysis, the equivalent of answers 4 and 5 is considered particularly important, while slightly/not at all important is the equivalent of answers 1 e 2. In contrast, the questions on expectations included four possible answers according to the degree of agreement with the proposed statement (completely agree - agree - slightly agree - completely disagree). For the analysis, the answers were recoded into two categories: agree = "completely agree - agree" and disagree = "slightly agree - completely disagree".

Looking instead at tertiary education, the percentage of those who would like to attend university and obtain a degree stands at 59%⁷⁰.

Finally, almost one in three teenagers (31.2%) would like in the future to leave the place where they live and move to another municipality/city in Italy. 36.7% would like to move abroad (Fig. 16).

As it can be seen from the percentages, these aspirations for the future are fairly uniform and shared by a large proportion of boys and girls in the age group. The picture becomes more articulated when moving from the level of aspirations to that of expectations, i.e. adolescents are no longer asked what they want for their future, but what goals they are likely to achieve given the context.

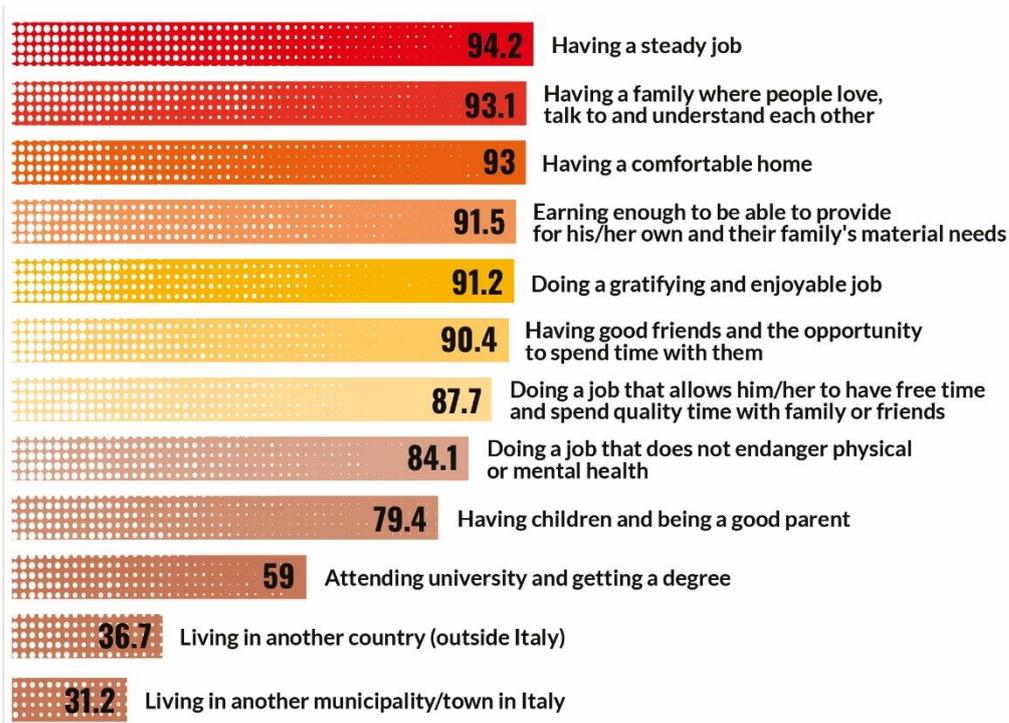
A very high percentage of teenagers face the future with the conviction that they will be able to do a job they like and financially support themselves and their family (81.8%), do what they desire (73%), what they feel best suited to do (76.1%) regardless of the limitations of the context. At the same time, however, this data reveals that at least one in four adolescents (at least 275,000 boys and girls in the age group) is already resigned to setting aside his/her aspirations and is convinced that he or she will not be able to fulfil his/her desires (27%) or use his or her talents or abilities (23.9%) (Fig. 17).

Slightly more than half of the boys and girls surveyed (55.1%) think they will definitely go to university (a figure in line with aspirations in this field), while 13.7% state that they would like to go to university but are not sure they can afford it (Fig. 17).

On the other hand, many young people seem to envisage a rapid entry into the world of work. In fact, almost half of the respondents (48.8%) state that they will follow vocational courses to get started in the job market while 10.7% think they will not finish school and go straight to work (Fig. 17).

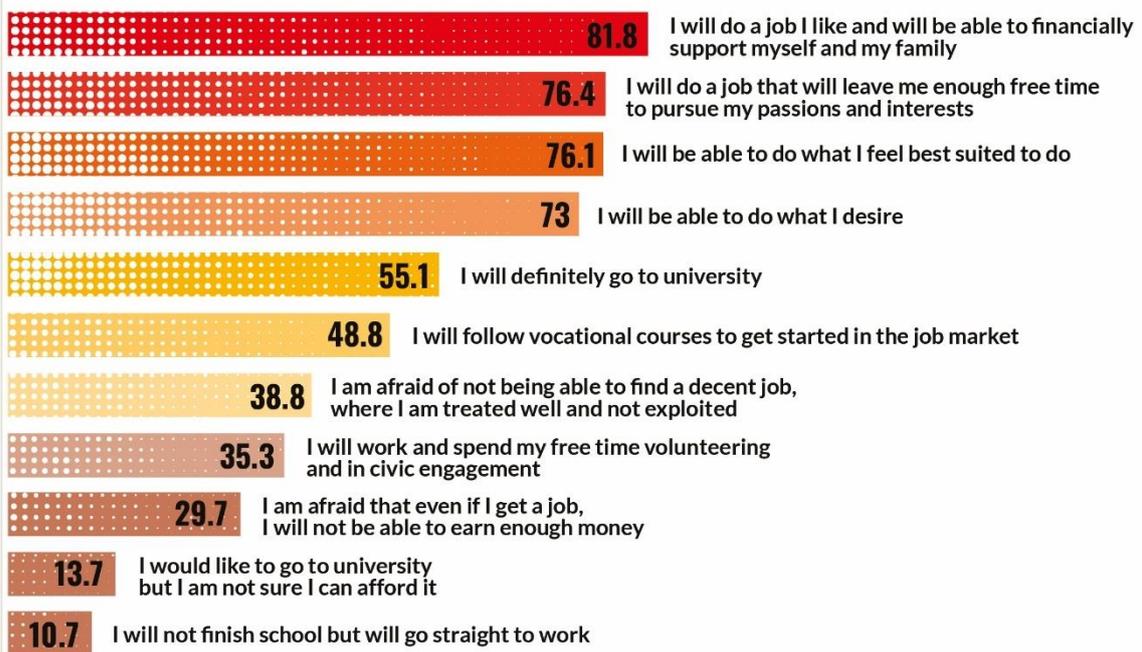
⁷⁰ According to data from AlmaDiploma, one year after attaining a school diploma, 69.4% of school leavers in 2021 continued their education and are enrolled in a degree course (50.1% devote their time exclusively to university studies, 19.3% have chosen to combine study and work). For more details see AlmaDiploma, XVII Indagine Esiti a distanza dei Diplomati – A uno e tre anni dal diploma, 2023, https://www.almadiploma.it/info/pdf/scuole/occupazione2022/Rapporto_ESITI_2023.pdf.

Fig.16
The aspirations of children aged 15-16 (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



Ratings 4 and 5 (=more important) are considered.

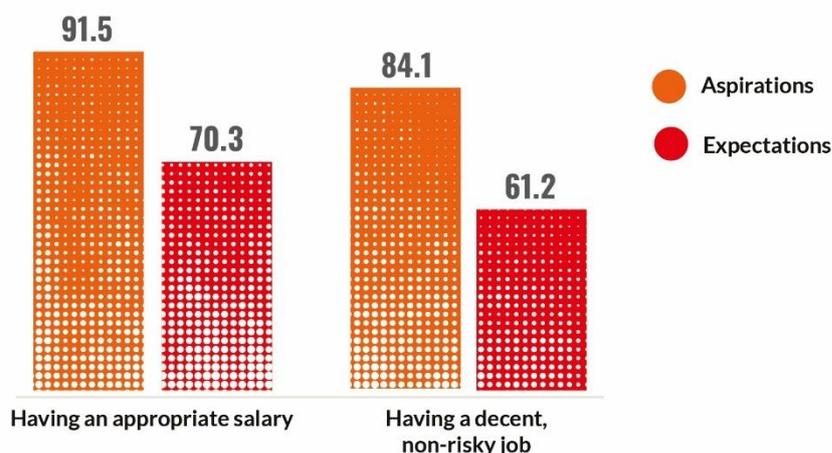
Fig. 17
The expectations of children aged 15-16 for the future (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

Looking at the world of work, adolescents' expectations highlight an awareness of risks and difficulties. When it comes to adequate wages and decent, non-risky job for themselves, while almost all of the boys and girls think that these aspects are important in their future lives (95.1% and 84.1% respectively), only 70.3% state - among their expectations - that they will be able to earn enough by working (while 29.7% fear that they will not make it) and only 61.2% are convinced that they will find a decent job, where they are treated well and not exploited (with almost 40% fearing that they will not) (Fig. 18).

Fig. 18
Work aspirations and expectations of children aged 15-16 (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)



For the expectations the answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered; for the aspirations ratings 4 and 5 (=more important) are considered.

However, only a very small part (5.3%) thinks that their economic condition will be worse than that of their parents. For 23.9%, however, it will be the same and for 38.1% it will be better⁷¹.

Finally, one respondent in three (35.3%) says that, as an adult, it will be important to spend his or her free time volunteering and in civic engagement, in addition to working.

2.3.4. Entangled in poverty

The survey conducted with 15–16-year-old adolescents identified which factors significantly affect, positively or negatively, their future prospects and ability to develop aspirations and expectations⁷².

⁷¹ The remaining 32.7% do not ask himself/herself this question.

⁷² To understand the relationship between aspirations, expectations and 'structural' factors, a series of multivariate regression analyses were conducted on some specific questions/answers with reference to expectations and aspirations. In some cases, the answers were recoded to make them continuous (on a scale of 1 to 4, from 'completely disagree' to 'strongly agree'). Some variables relating to 'structural' factors were also recoded to make them binary. For example, the parents' educational qualifications are considered low in the case of 'no qualification', 'primary school leaving certificate' or 'middle school leaving certificate' and medium-high in the case of 'secondary school diploma' or 'university degree'. With regard to severe material deprivation, deprivation of spaces, tools and materials useful for learning at home, and deprivation in the areas where the minor resides, continuous variables were created that account for the number of deprivation items present. The higher the number of items, more severe the deprivation. Differences were reported for each structural factor variable and only for those found to be statistically significantly associated with the dependent variable (aspirations, expectations), with a p-value of less than 0.05.

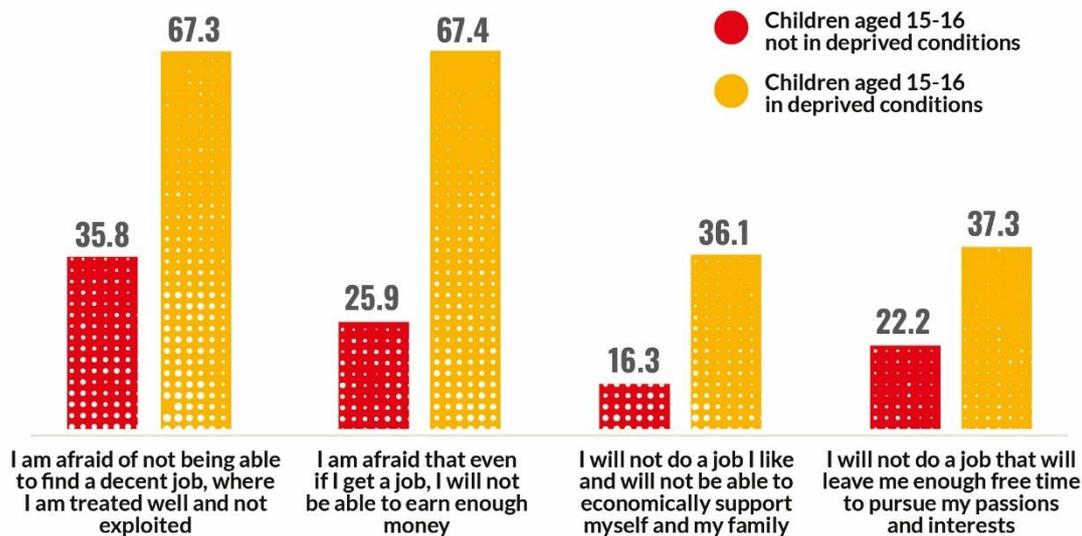
According to the data from the survey, as mentioned above, almost one in ten (9.4%) 15- and 16-year-old minors is in a state of severe material deprivation, lacking at least 4 out of 7 basic necessities or activities essential for one's educational, social and psychophysical well-being and development⁷³.

Minors in this condition appear to have substantially fewer prospects for their future than their peers in a better socio-economic situation. Starting with expectations for school: more than one in four adolescents in a condition of material deprivation (28.1%) states that they will not finish school and will go straight to work, compared to 8.9% of their non-deprived peers (Fig. 20).

Exploring the work-related aspirations of young people, although most minors - including those living in conditions of material deprivation - regard having a steady job as particularly important for their future (94.2%), as well as having a job that allows them to earn a fair income and meet their expenses (91.5%)⁷⁴, real expectations about work are considerably darker among adolescents living in conditions of deprivation than among their peers.

67.4% of adolescents in material deprivation fear that, even if they work, they will not have enough economic resources, compared to 25.9% of their peers in better socio-economic conditions. Similar differences are found in relation to the fear of not being able to find a decent job, and thus being exploited (67.3% vs. 35.8%); not having a job that they enjoy and that allows them to support themselves and their family (36.1% vs. 16.3%), and not having enough free time to pursue their passions and interests (37.3% vs. 22.2%) (Fig.19).

Fig. 19
Work expectations of children aged 15-16, by deprivation status (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)



The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

Concerning the possibility of earning the right salary and getting enough money through work, it is interesting to note that in the transition from aspirations to expectations, which are more concrete and achievable, the jump is much higher for minors in poverty: for them it stands at 56.4 pp (from 89% to 32.6%), compared to the 17.7 pp lost by minors in favourable socio-economic conditions

⁷³ See. para. 2.3.1.

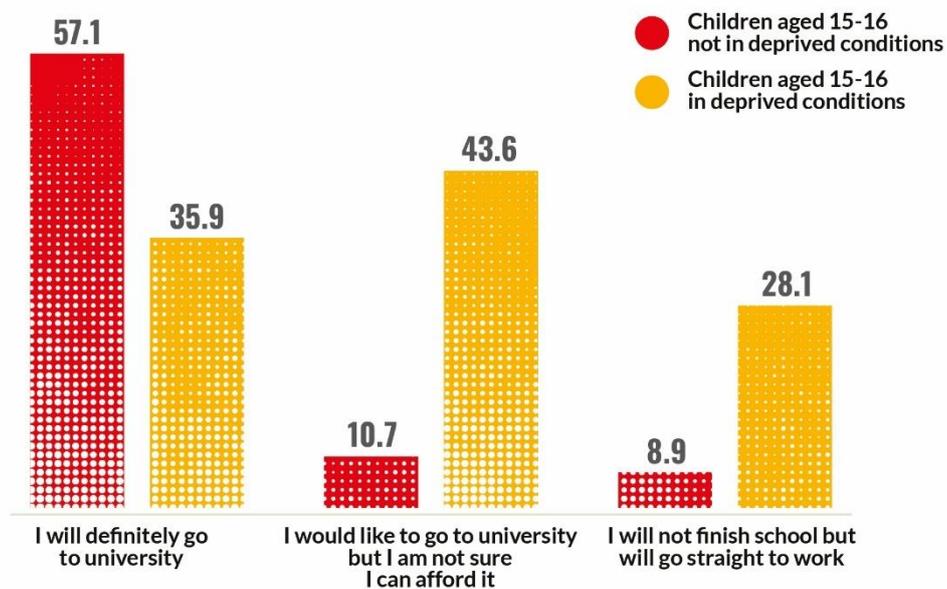
⁷⁴ See. para. 2.3.3.

(from 91.8% to 74.1%), a symptom of how poverty can generate frustration and negatively affect future prospects.

On the other hand, when analysing the aspirations and expectations in relation to continuing their studies and attending university, 43.4% of the young respondents in a situation of material deprivation have this desire (compared with 60.7% of the non-deprived), but only 35.9% think they will go to university, compared with 57.1% of the minors in better socio-economic conditions (Fig. 20). Again, the gap between aspirations and expectations is greater among minors in deprived conditions (7.5 pp) than among their peers in better socio-economic conditions (3.6 pp).

As is to be expected, it also emerges that 43.6% of adolescents in material deprivation would like to go to university but are not sure they can afford it. The percentage drops to 10.7% for those not in deprivation (Fig. 20).

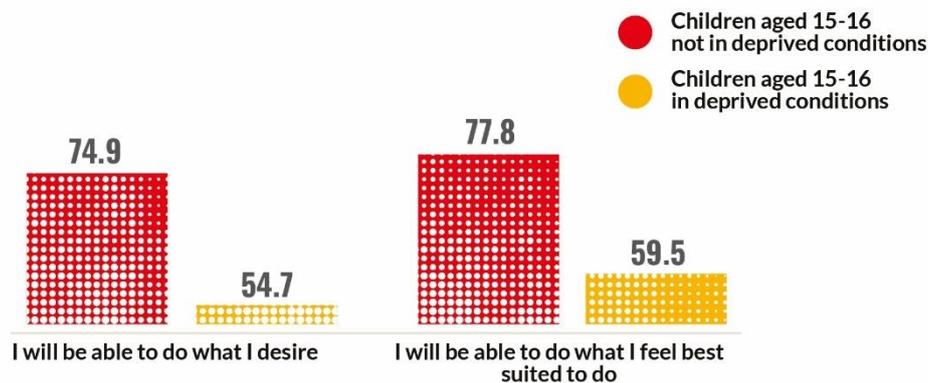
Fig. 20
Educational expectations of children aged 15-16, by deprivation status (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

Even more significant is the figure relating to the relationship between material deprivation and the expectations of self-fulfilment by doing what one desires or feels best suited to do. While almost 75% of minors in favourable socio-economic conditions state that they will be able to do and achieve what they desire in life, the percentage drops by more than 20 percentage points for minors in socio-economic disadvantage (54.7%). Similarly, 59.5% of the those in the latter group are convinced that in the future they will not be able to do what they feel best suited to do, while the percentage of those who believe that they will be able to achieve self-fulfilment according to their inclinations and talents is much higher among the non-disadvantaged youngsters (77.8%) (Fig. 21).

Fig. 21
Life expectations of children aged 15-16, by deprivation status (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)



The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

In addition to the effects of poverty on teenagers' aspirations and expectations, the survey results revealed other factors affecting their future prospects.

2.3.5. Interrupted girls

Analysing expectations from a gender perspective⁷⁵, girls are much more likely to believe that they will complete their studies compared to boys: only 6% are convinced that they will not finish school but will go straight to work compared to 15.7% of boys (Fig.22).

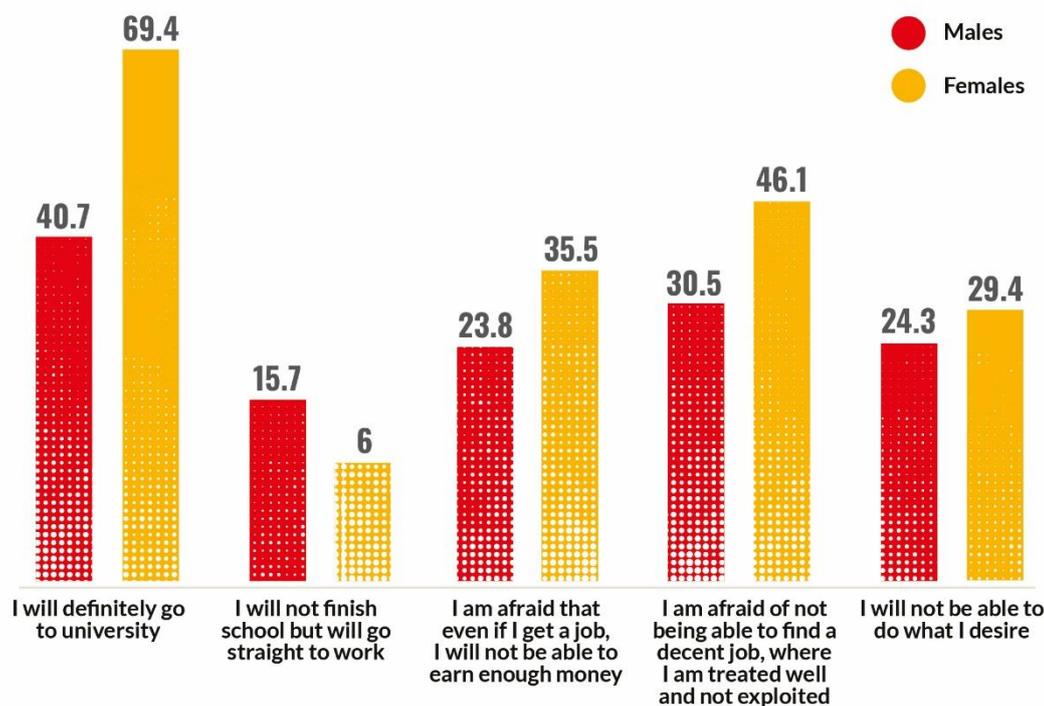
Even regarding the continuation of their studies, girls generally have higher aspirations than boys. Indeed, 75.7% of girls consider university an important goal to achieve, compared to 42.1% of boys. This determination is also reflected in what they expect to be able to achieve in their studies: 69.4% of girls believe they will attend university compared with 40.7% of boys (Fig. 22).

Everything changes, however, when one thinks about the future beyond school, where the picture seems to be reversed, with boys having higher expectations than their female peers regarding the world of work and the possibility of doing what they desire. In fact, more than one girl in three (35.5%) fears that when she finds a job, it will not pay enough to guarantee her adequate economic resources, a percentage that drops to 23.8% among boys.

This gap is also replicated with regard to the fear of not finding a decent job, where one is respected and not exploited. As many as 46.1% of girls have this fear compared to 30.5% of boys. The awareness of the difficulties one will have to face as a young woman is also confirmed by the fact that almost one in three girls declares that she will not be able to do what she wishes (29.4%), compared to 24.3% of boys (Fig. 22).

⁷⁵ The analysis does not include cases of minors who indicated that they identify themselves in a gender "other" or who answered "don't know" when asked about their gender, due to a too small number.

Fig. 22
Educational, work and life expectations of children aged 15-16, by gender (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)



The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

2.3.6. Is Italy my home?

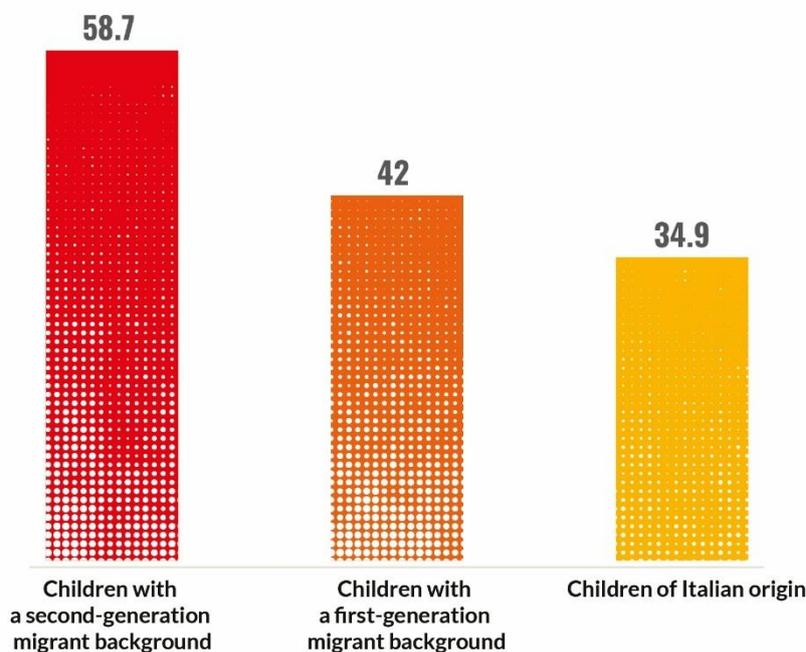
A migratory background does not seem to particularly affect the aspirations of young people in Italy with regard to work, university and social relations, contrary to material deprivation. Inequalities in terms of economic well-being and family poverty seem to weigh on the life prospects of adolescents regardless of whether they come from a family of Italian or foreign parents, or whether they were born abroad or in Italy.

A differentiation can be seen, however, about aspirations to move abroad to live. In fact, 58.7% of second-generation 15-16-year-old adolescents declare that they would like to move to another country in the future. This is a possible evidence of the difficulties encountered while growing up, also due to an uncertain legal status for many, considering the high number of minors born in Italy or who arrived in Italy as children who, according to the current regulations, cannot obtain Italian citizenship before reaching eighteen years of age⁷⁶. Even among first-generation migrant minors, a large proportion aspire to move abroad, but to a lesser extent (42%), perhaps because they are still bound to the hope of being able to realise their dreams in Italy.

⁷⁶ Cf. Miceli S., *La capacità di aspirare. Immagini di futuro di figli e figlie di migranti a Reggio Calabria*, in *Cambio*, Anno IV, Numero 8, December 2014, doi: 10.1400/228748, https://air.unimi.it/retrieve/28f9a51e-0e5a-45bc-879d-9ace7d275f70/phd_unimi_R12177.pdf; Save the Children, *Il mondo in una classe. Un'indagine sul pluralismo culturale nelle scuole italiane*, 2023

However, it must be considered that the aspiration to move abroad is also shared by a significant number of 15-16-year-olds of Italian origin, one in three (34.9%). A figure that should make us reflect (Fig. 23).

Fig. 23
Children aged 15-16 who aspire to live in another country, by migration background (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)



Ratings 4 and 5 (=more important) are considered.

Among minors with a migratory background (both first and second generation), one in five (20.4%), among their future expectations, shares that of returning to live in the country of his/her birth or moving to his/her parents' country of origin.

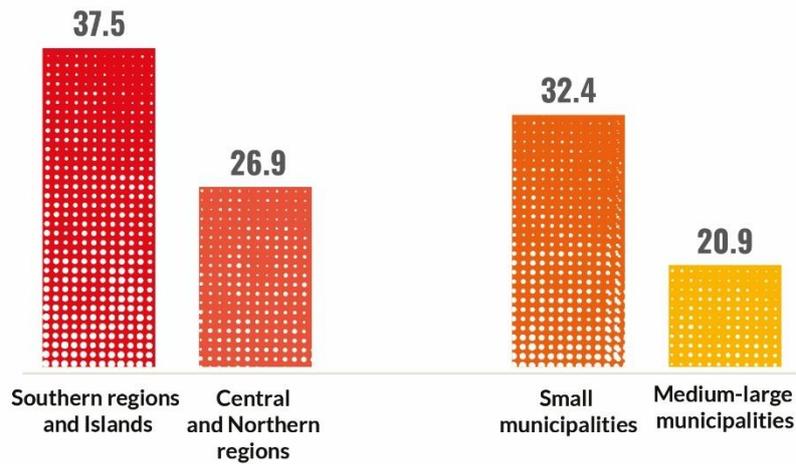
2.3.7. Wanting to leave

Thinking about their aspirations, almost a third of those who live in small municipalities⁷⁷ consider it particularly important to move to another municipality or city in the future (32.4% against 20.9% of minors living in medium-large cities). The same applies to those living in the regions of the South and the Islands (37.5% compared with 26.9% of those living in central or northern Italy) (Fig. 24).

It is worth remembering that these places have historically been more socio-economically disadvantaged and offer fewer opportunities for education, work and growth, reasons that may therefore lead many young people to want to move elsewhere.

⁷⁷ A city size is considered small if it has less than 5,000 inhabitants, medium if it has between 5,000 and 250,000 inhabitants, large if there are more than 250,000 inhabitants.

Fig. 24
Children aged 15-16 who aspire to live in another municipality/town in Italy, by macro-region and size of place of residence (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)

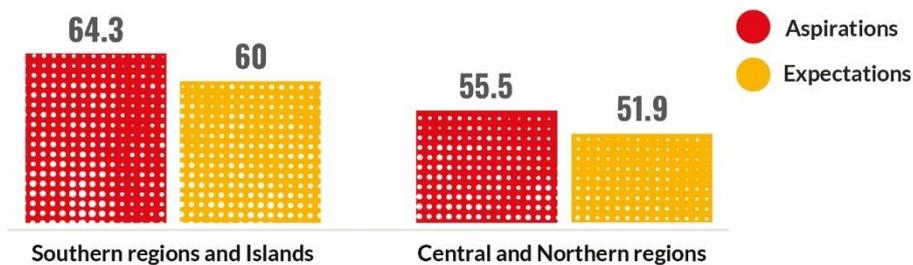


Ratings 4 and 5 (=more important) are considered.

For the same reason, boys and girls living in the southern regions are more likely to favour the idea of going to live abroad (38.2% compared to 35.6% of those living in the Centre or North).

Attending university to obtain a degree is among the main aspirations of those living in the southern regions (64.3% compared to 55.5% of those living in the Centre or North of Italy). This factor also affects the expectation of attending university with certainty, a goal that minors in the South believe they are more likely to achieve (60% vs. 51.9% for boys and girls in the Centre or North) (Fig. 25).

Fig. 25
Aspirations and expectations of children aged 15-16 to go to university, by macro-region (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



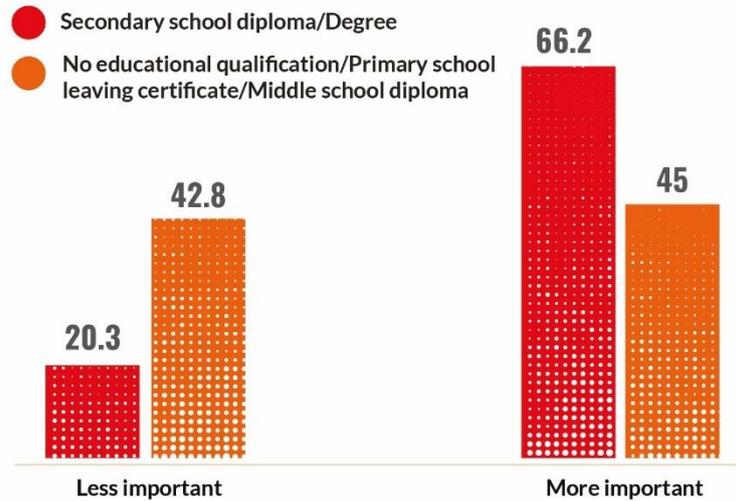
For the expectations the answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered; for the aspirations ratings 4 and 5 (=more important) are considered.

2.3.8. School (even beyond school) is still a social ladder

In line with the literature, the survey results show a strong link between the mother's level of education and the children's life paths, a link that is much less pronounced than with the educational choices of the father, whose level of education counts less in the aspirations of boys and girls.

The aspiration to attend university and obtain a degree is in fact shared and considered very important by two thirds of adolescents aged 15-16 whose mothers have a high school or university degree (66.2%). However, the percentage drops to 45% for their peers whose mothers have a primary or middle school diploma or do not possess any educational qualification. Conversely, 42.8% of the latter consider the prospect of studying at university unimportant, a percentage that is halved (20.3%) for minors whose mothers have a high school diploma or a university degree (Fig. 26).

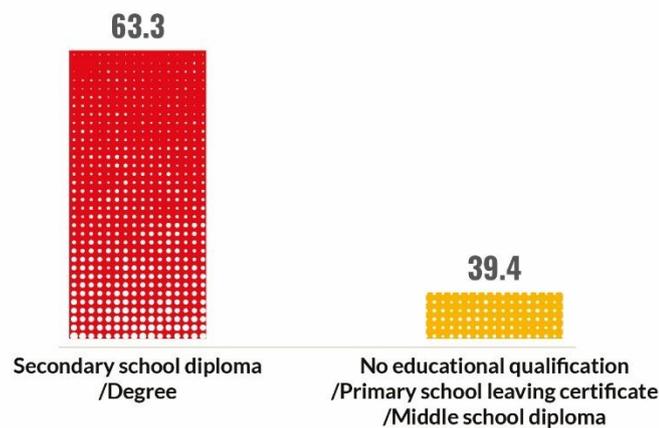
Fig. 26
Children aged 15-16 who aspire to attend university and obtain a degree, by mother's educational qualification (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



Ratings 1-2 (=less important) and 4-5 (=more important) are considered.

Expectations regarding further education are perfectly consistent with aspirations: almost two-thirds of 15-16-year-old adolescents (63.3%) whose mothers have obtained a high school diploma or university degree state that they will definitely go to university, while the percentage drops to 39.4% for their peers whose mothers have obtained a primary or middle school certificate or no certificate at all (Fig. 27).

Fig. 27
Children aged 15-16 with the expectation of definitely going to university, by mother's educational qualification (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)

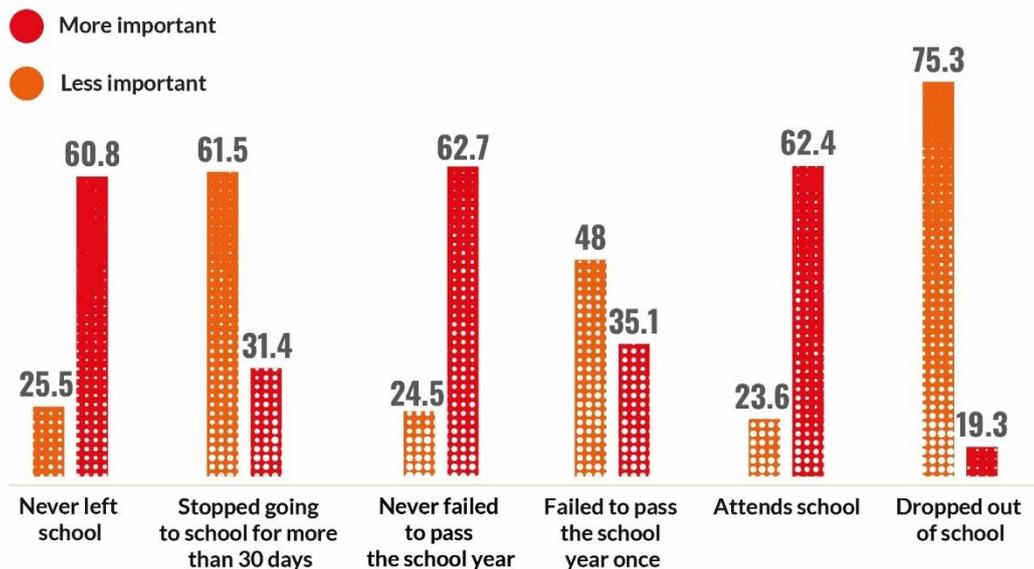


In addition to the mother's educational qualification, the personal educational background also matters in shaping the image of the future. Dropping out of school significantly influences the future prospects of boys and girls.

Among those attending school, the aspiration to pursue university studies is considered important by 62.4% of the adolescents surveyed and is among the expectations of 58.8% of them. Among those who dropped out of school, on the other hand, it is easy to imagine that continuing their studies and attending university is not an aspiration shared by many (75.3% do not consider it important). However, it is worth noting that 12% of school drop-outs include, among their expectations for the future, that of attending university, indicating a desire to return to school that should be valued and supported by the community (Fig. 28 and 29).

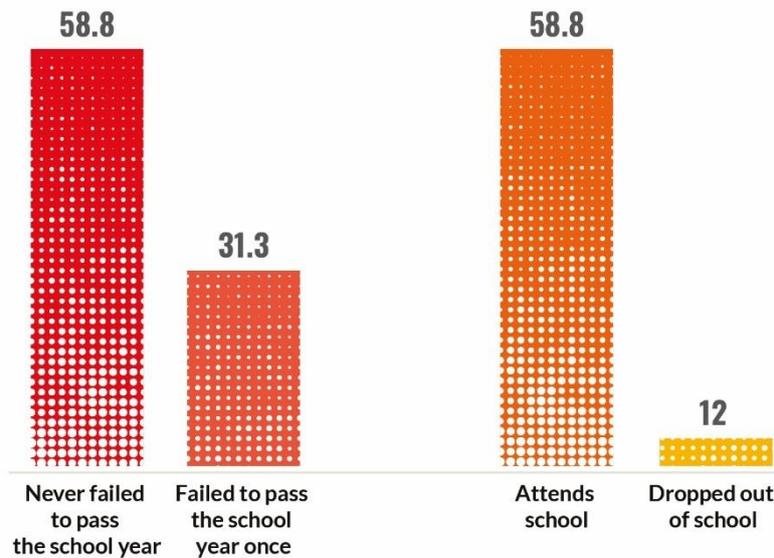
Signs of school drop-out, a more varied phenomenon that may precede abandonment of studies, also have an impact on self-image in the future. Only one third of minors who stopped attending school for more than one month consider continuing their studies up to tertiary education (31.4%), in contrast to those who have attended school without interruptions for more than one month (60.8%). A similar picture is found among those who have failed once (35.1% vs. 62.7% of those who never failed) (Fig. 28). Data are in line with the expectations of these young people: 58.8% of 15- and 16-year-olds who have never failed are sure of going to university, while in contrast 31.3% of those who have failed once expect to go to university (Fig. 29). In summary, the data confirms that minors who experience rocky school paths tend to be less capable of imagining themselves continuing their studies and attending university.

Fig. 28
Children aged 15-16 who aspire to attend university and obtain a degree, by school education (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



Ratings 1-2 (=less important) and 4-5 (=more important) are considered.

Fig. 29
Children aged 15-16 with the expectation of definitely going to university,
by school education (%)
 Source: Save the Children (2024)



The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

As we have seen, among the interviewed adolescents, the expectation of not finishing school and going to work is shared by 10.7% of the sample. For those who have failed once this percentage rises to 27.1% and for those who no longer attend school it reaches 58.7%. The percentages drop to 8.1% and 6.6% respectively among minors who have never failed and among those currently attending the school, respectively.

Still in relation to work, but looking at aspirations, minors who have failed once or more during their school career tend to consider it less important for their future to have a job with satisfactory pay (76.8% if they failed once - 68.9% if they failed several times), which is not risky (80.4% - 82.9%) and which allows them to have free quality time to spend with family or friends (82.2% - 80.2%), compared to those who had a more linear path. In essence, school failure seems to be associated not only with a lower ability to aspire to higher educational levels, but also with rewarding, dignified and secure jobs for one's physical and mental health.

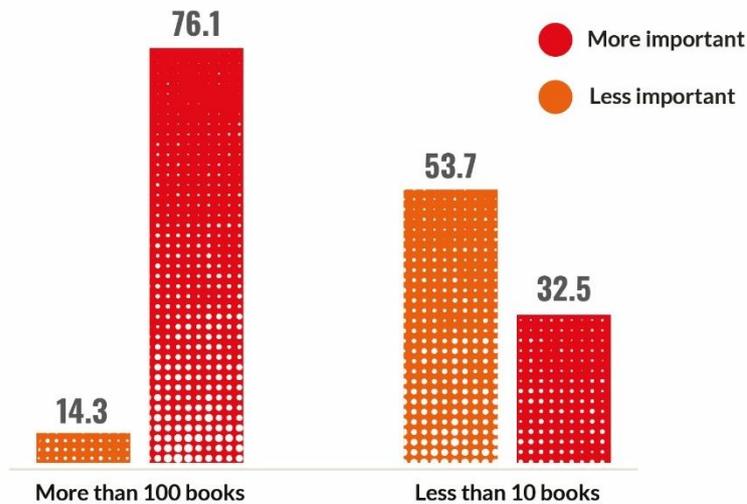
Educational opportunities as a whole encompass many different aspects, from the spaces and tools available for study, to the possibility of using devices (books, internet, etc.)⁷⁸ that allow knowledge to expand beyond school. The range of educational opportunities available to boys and girls also appears to be a crucial factor in defining future aspirations and expectations of going to university and determines inequalities in perspectives and opportunities among adolescents, regardless of their condition of material deprivation.

Looking at the individual items, more than 76% of those living in homes with more than 100 books (schoolbooks excluded) aspire to continue their studies and consider it important to obtain a university degree. This reflects the expectation of these young people, 74.3% of whom state that they will certainly go to university.

⁷⁸ Regarding the deprivation of spaces, tools and materials useful for learning at home, continuous variables were created to account for the number of deprivation items present. The higher the number of items, the more severe the deprivation.

Going to university, on the other hand, is an aspiration of only a third (32.5%) of the peers living in homes with no more than 10 books. Among the latter, only 26.1% expect to actually continue their studies at university (Fig. 30).

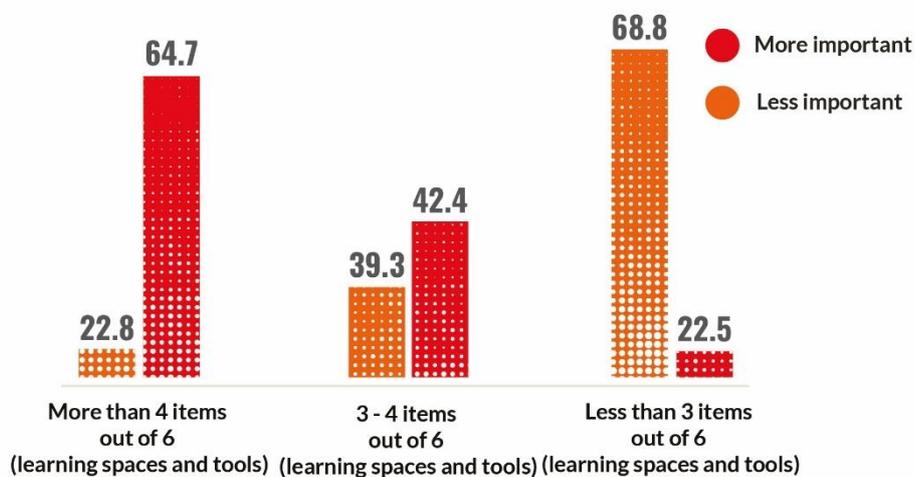
Fig. 30
Children aged 15-16 aspiring to attend university and obtain a degree, by number of books available at home (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



Ratings 1-2 (=less important) and 4-5 (=more important) are considered.

Similar differences are found when considering the other variables that contribute to shaping educational opportunities as a whole (Fig. 31).

Fig. 31
Children aged 15-16 aspiring to attend university and obtain a degree, by number of items* related to learning spaces and tools available at home (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



Ratings 1-2 (=less important) and 4-5 (=more important) are considered.

* Items: quiet place to study/read, desk, smartphone for studying, tablet/PC, fast internet, multimedia services

2.3.9. The future

In addition to exploring the aspirations and expectations relating to their personal situation, children aged 15-16 were asked a series of questions concerning their view of the future more broadly. The first data that emerged concerned adolescents' feelings about the future. Although almost half of the young people stated that they mainly experience positive feelings when thinking about the future, more than 40% experience negative feelings such as anxiety (24.8%), distrust (5.8%) or even fear (12.1%) (Fig. 32).

This data adds a further element of reflection to the analyses described above, which highlight the discrepancy between the minors' aspirations and the awareness, already reached during adolescence, of the hurdles they will have to face in order to achieve them. It is possible to hypothesise that, in addition to socio-economic status, the development of feelings such as anxiety and fear may have been affected by having gone through the Covid pandemic in years that were crucial for their socialisation and opening up to the world, and by having experienced the climate emergency, in addition to the latest conflicts that are still ongoing.

Most adolescents aged 15-16 seem to be aware of the inequalities in opportunities experienced by their peers and the uphill path that awaits those with socio-economic disadvantages. Almost two-thirds (64.6%) of teenagers think, in fact, that today in Italy a boy/girl living in a family in economic difficulty will have to face many obstacles in order to keep up with other more affluent boys/girls (Fig. 33).

This finding is common to all minors, regardless of their economic status, gender, origin or geographical provenance.

Fig. 32
Prevalent feelings about the future (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)

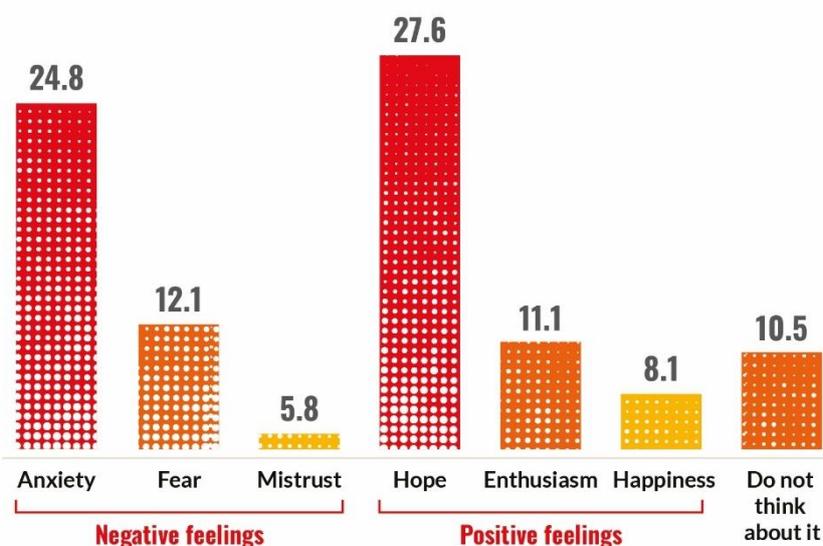
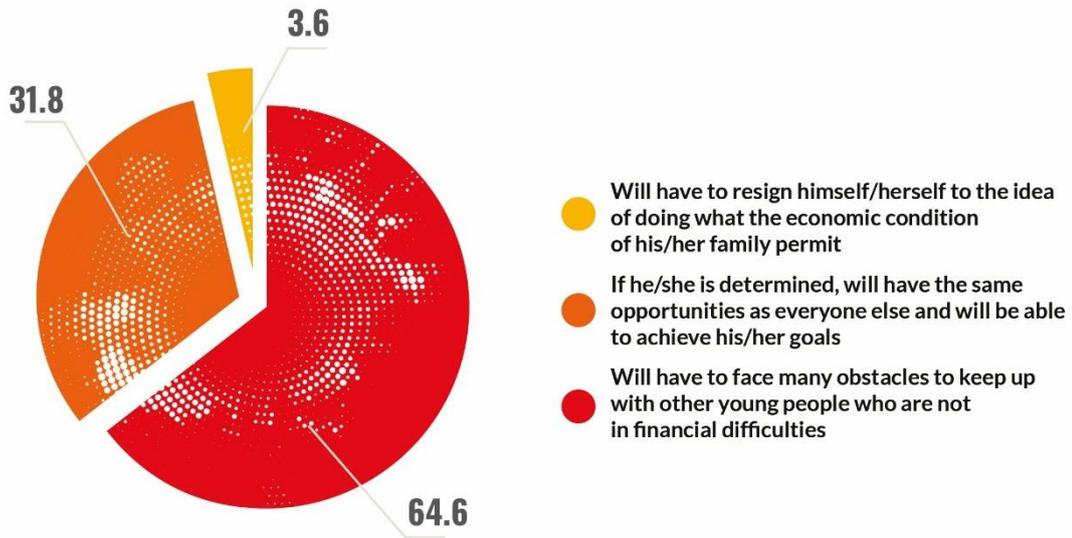


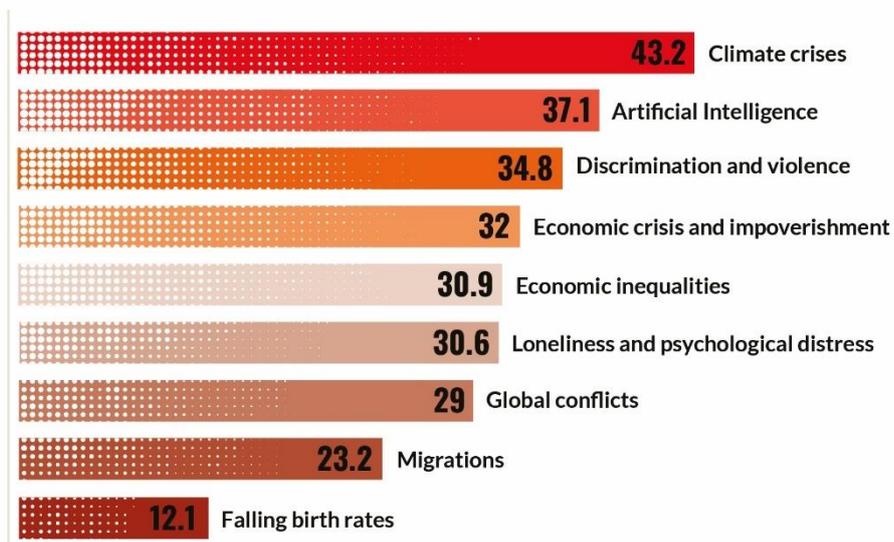
Fig. 33
According to children aged 15-16, today in Italy a boy/girl living in a family in economic difficulty (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



We also observed a common feeling regarding the importance of the challenges their generation will have to face in the future. The greatest concern of the interviewed children are climate crises (43.2%). In second place, as a crucial challenge, teenagers indicate Artificial Intelligence (37.1%), while in third place they place the issue of discrimination and violence (34.8%). Almost one in three teenagers (32%) strongly agrees that the economic crisis is one of the most important challenges, and 30.9% consider the growth of economic inequalities, which affect future prospects, to be worrying. Loneliness and psychological distress (30.6%), as well as global conflicts (29%) are also mentioned among the most important challenges.

In contrast, migration (23.2%) and falling birth rates (12.1%) are perceived to a minor extent as important challenges for the future (Fig. 34).

Fig. 34
Future challenges according to children aged 15-16 (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



The answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' are considered.

According to the 15- and 16-year-old boys and girls, public institutions, from schools to the government, should support the new generations in addressing these challenges, in particular that of inequality and poverty, through measures such as, for example, economic support for families living in poverty, which half of the minors (50.9%) consider the most important one (Fig. 35)⁷⁹.

It is striking that in second place, just after support for families in poverty, adolescents call for the introduction of free psychological aid for all boys and girls. Almost half of all respondents (49.4%) support this need, together with the need to financially help teenagers so that they can continue their studies (48.7%) and to guarantee free schoolbooks, digital devices or materials for school or training courses (48.6%) (Fig. 35).

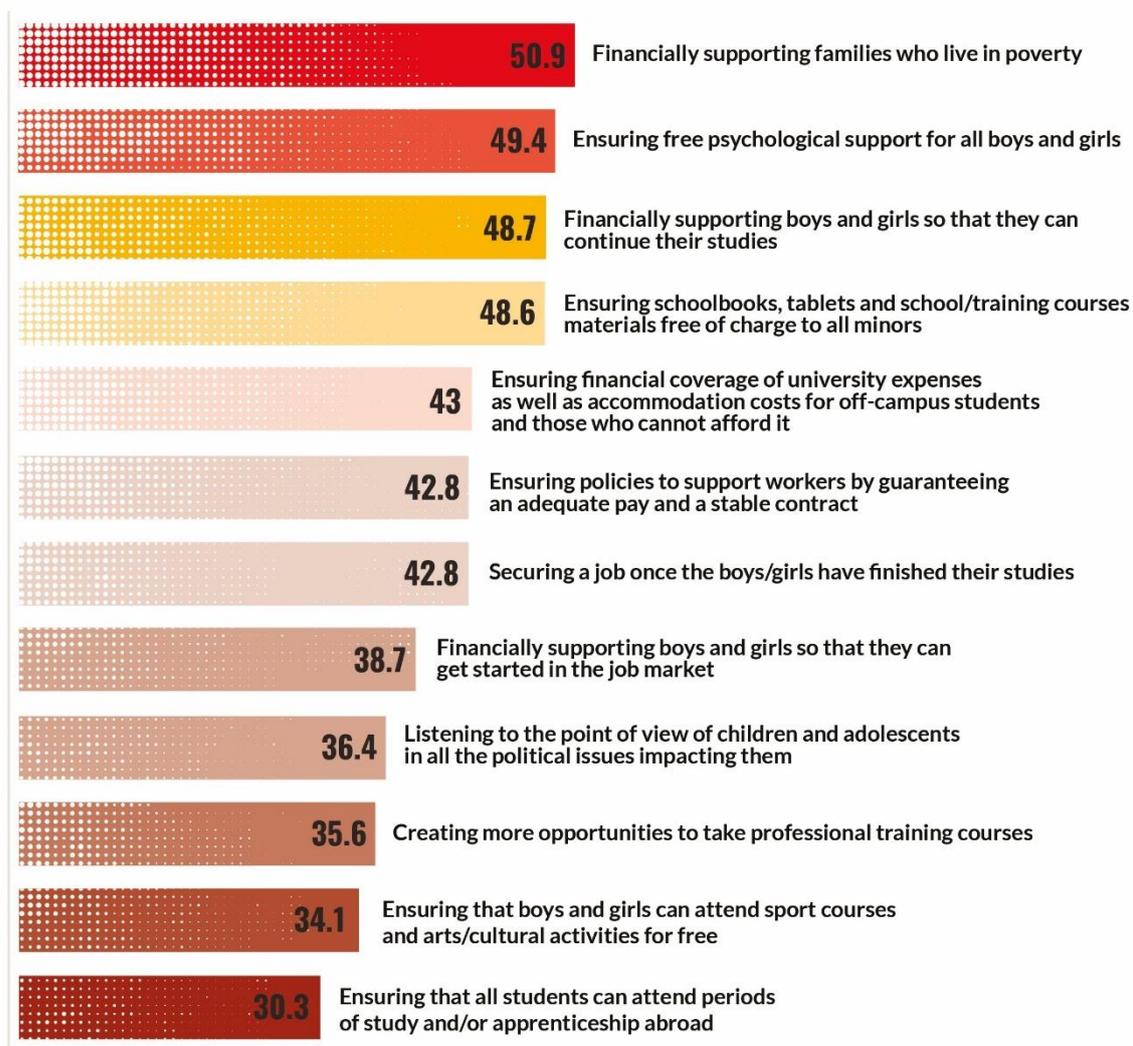
Measures to ensure financial coverage of university expenses as well as accommodation costs for off-campus students who cannot afford it (43%); a job once they have finished school (42.8%); adequate pay and a stable contract for workers (42.8%) are also considered particularly important (Fig. 35).

In addition, 38.7% of 15- and 16-year-old minors ask for support from institutions to financially help young people so that they can get started in the job market, while 35.6% would like more opportunities to attend vocational training courses. Slightly more than one minor in three (34.1%) calls for measures to ensure that boys and girls can attend free sports and artistic/cultural activities and 30.3% would like all students to be guaranteed the possibility of attending study and/or apprenticeship periods abroad (Fig. 35).

Finally, their right to participation and to be heard remains a priority for many adolescents. For 36.4%, it is in fact particularly important for institutions to listen to the views of children and adolescents in all political choices that affect them (Fig. 35).

⁷⁹ In this case, only answers that equate to a mark = 5 ('more important') are considered.

Fig. 35
Measures needed to help young people overcome deprivation (%)
Source: Save the Children (2024)



Rating 5 (=more important) is considered.

Nevertheless, the survey reveals a widespread lack of trust in public institutions on the part of adolescents. Almost 60% of 15- and 16-year-old minors have little or no confidence in the institutions' ability to cope with the challenge of economic inequalities and poverty, to support disadvantaged minors. On the contrary, 40.3% of them trust that institutions can help children in economic difficulty to overcome this condition.

3. THE VOICES OF TEACHERS AND ADOLESCENTS

To enrich the framework offered by the quantitative survey, qualitative analyses were carried out to investigate, on the one hand, the issue of material poverty of minors from the point of view of their teachers, considering the consequences on their educational paths and aspirations and detecting good practices initiated by schools to combat deprivation and promote positive aspirations. On the other hand, the experiences, challenges and aspirations of adolescents experiencing conditions of poverty and social exclusion were investigated, through peer research fieldwork that collected their direct testimonies, analysing the family and territorial context in which boys and girls live.

3.1. Schools facing the challenge of poverty: the teachers' perspective

In order to get the teachers' point of view, a focus group was conducted with 7 female teachers from secondary schools in the provinces of Bari, Naples and Turin, trained in guidance and tackling school drop-outs, working in contexts of particular deprivation and with minors in socio-economic disadvantage. The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate the teachers' perceptions of the extent to which material, family and contextual poverty affects students' educational pathways, choices and aspirations. In addition, experiences of good practices developed by schools and aimed at tackling material and educational poverty, reducing the risk of school drop-out and orienting disadvantaged students towards better life prospects, were collected.

From the discussion with the teachers, a number of particularly relevant elements emerged concerning the experiences of poverty and deprivation of their students, starting from the contexts in which they live: from working-class neighbourhoods - in which people historically rely on the consolidated territorial network -, to those more exposed to degraded, precarious and criminal realities, and to those isolated, rural but "happy oases" which do not offer opportunities for inclusion and socialisation.

3.1.1. Young people in poverty, between school and work

According to the perception of the teachers interviewed, the phenomenon of material poverty of their students manifests itself through certain indicators, in particular the extent of work experience in parallel with school. Indeed, the teachers interviewed encountered a significant number of pupils engaged in work activities, either to meet their personal expenses independently and not to burden the family economy, or to support the family business. This phenomenon is particularly widespread in rural areas, where some cases of adolescents involved in agricultural work after returning from school emerge. These activities - sometimes carried out before the legal age allowing access to the labour market and therefore without safeguarding - very often coincide with the time that should be devoted to study, leisure or rest, thus affecting adolescents' school career: studying loses priority, learning difficulties increase and prolonged absences from school are more and more frequent, thus increasing the risk of dropping out of school⁸⁰.

⁸⁰ These data are in line with the findings of Save the Children's survey "Non è un gioco. Indagine sul lavoro minorile in Italia" (2023), where 25% of interviewed minors aged 14-15 with experiences of child labour stated that they work or have worked even during school days and 4.9% that they do not go to school or skip classes to work. Furthermore, while 52.3% of the minors with experience of child labour stated that they could study and work at the same time without any problems, almost one out of two respondents (40.4%) stated that work affects their ability to study: 19.9% emphasised that they can do it although it is tiring, while 14% stated that when they are working they cannot study and 6.5% only manage to combine study and work occasionally. The survey showed that the percentage of minor children who have failed once during secondary school is almost twice as high among minors who worked before the age of 16 than among those who have never worked. On the other hand, the proportion of minors with

I personally have a case of a middle-school girl who does not really have time to study, because she must help the family with work in the countryside, taking care of the animals in the barn, and then only late in the evening does her homework, so she manages to do very little.

(Teacher, Bari)

I teach Italian and history in high school. What struck me first, in relation to the issue of poverty, is that many children work in the afternoon. Many of them, for example, work as a rider or in a bar, at a hairdresser's or beauty salon. We realise it the moment there are school failures. The other day, one of these boys, who had just turned 18, had to take a test at school and he said to me: "Teacher, I studied but bear in mind that I came home at four o'clock in the morning because I'm working as a rider and so last night I was out on my scooter making deliveries".

(Teacher, Naples)

A second indicator of material poverty, noted by the teachers interviewed, is that relating to the students' and their families' inability to meet education-related expenses, such as purchase of textbooks, the payment of voluntary contributions (even when symbolic) or for participation in school trips or extracurricular activities like sports, language courses, etc. In addition, there are other alarming signs such as the regular lack of a snack and poor clothing.

We see poverty, for example, from the voluntary contribution of 11 euros we ask from each family or from the fact that they lack textbooks because they cannot afford to buy them. Economic difficulties are also seen in relation to school trips. It happened to me just this year: we were supposed to go on a trip to Krakow, so the cost was clearly quite significant: 450€ for 4-5 days. The class was enthusiastic about participating, but at one point had to give up the trip because hardly any pupils could pay this amount.

(Teacher, Naples)

Failure to participate in a school trip is not only a missed opportunity for learning and socialising, but also fuels inequalities and the sense of marginalisation of children and adolescents from poorer families.

We often use our mobile phones during lectures, because the students don't have all the schoolbooks, so we take pictures of the pages and they read them from their mobile phones.

(Teacher, Turin)

They are aware of their condition of poverty, but they do not show it. It often turns out that they would like to do something, like sports, but they cannot because they can't sign up for five-a-side football or swimming course like the other classmates.

(Teacher, Bari)

Despite the existence of funds to support students from low-income families - not always sufficient to cover the minor's needs - many families still fail to qualify for support due to very stringent criteria.

work experience before the permitted legal age who temporarily interrupted secondary school is more than double compared to their peers without work experience.

Among the most socio-economically deprived pupils, the teachers particularly mentioned those from families of foreign origin and Roma ethnicity, as well as large families or cases of separated parents. These families often find themselves unable to meet their children's material and educational needs, certainly because of their disadvantaged economic situation, but also because the greater difficulties parents face in organising family life in these situations can lead to less educational investment. This can result in frequent absences, lack of school materials, lack of educational opportunities and poor learning outcomes for male and female students. The deprivation of these households adds to the fragility of many families in the care of social services, with whom schools work on a daily basis.

One thing I would like to highlight is the number of files opened with social services because we collaborate so much with them. (...) These parents are severely deprived, they have already been through school failures and have not been able to build effective safety nets for their children.

(Teacher, Turin)

Despite their efforts to address these situations, schools fail to address children's and adolescents' sense of deprivation and perception of their own disadvantaged condition. Indeed, the interviewed teachers noted the tendency of some teenagers to mask their deprived economic situation, in some cases even creating an alternative narrative.

They are good at camouflaging, at not showing where the economic problem is. But this problem hinders and blocks them, prevents their desires, their ambitions.

During one of my courses, there was an Indian boy whom I had been following since arriving in Italy. I asked him "what do you like to do?" He used to tell me "I like basketball, I always play basketball, I play basketball in the afternoons, I have fun", even telling me the days and times he went to practice. I knew his parents didn't have the financial means because he was one of those pupils coming from the rural context of our country, but he said it with such conviction that I was finally convinced. When I later spoke with his teacher, she widened her eyes and told me that he doesn't actually play basketball, he's not enrolled in any basketball class. I was stunned that I had believed it because he had made me believe it so convincingly and enthusiastically.

Actually, what he was telling me was what he would have liked to do, which perhaps he did when he was in the countryside. By throwing the ball into a basket he imagined he was taking part in a basketball class. This episode shocked me because I understood his true aspiration, what he wanted to do in his free time and what he could not do because financially his parents could not afford it.

And he imagined this world like that of his schoolmates who maybe actually attended basketball. He imagined a different reality, one that doesn't exist.

(Teacher, Bari)

Economic deprivation is sometimes also followed by the risk of marginalisation and social exclusion. The presence of economic disparities often results in the creation of distinct social groups within classes or schools.

Apparently, they try to get on with their lives peacefully, maybe socialising with other peers who have other problems, although perhaps not of an economic nature.

However, in the classroom it becomes evident that there are these little groups. Of course, where there is a bit of a daddy's boy, someone who is a

bit more 'in', then he tends to exclude, to marginalise the kids who are living in a way that is not as positive on an economic level.

(Teacher, Bari)

3.1.2. Missing models

A socio-economically disadvantaged starting condition deprives minors of educational, growth and social opportunities, limiting their exposure to stimuli and models other than those they encounter in their daily lives. In particular, the impact of poverty on schooling and on the possibility of participating in educational, cultural and recreational activities limits the aspirations of students, reinforcing the vicious circle between economic poverty and educational poverty, which the school is committed to breaking.

From the observations made over the years, I believe that educational poverty and economic poverty feed off each other. These two elements are highly conditioned by each other. It is inevitable that pupils with financial difficulties are then limited in their social relationships, in participating in activities beyond school, and consequently their own aspirations are also conditioned because it is often seen that for these children school becomes the only educational agency.

(Teacher, Bari)

However, during the focus group, the teachers highlighted a growing mistrust of school on the part of the students, who often reject the idea of committing themselves to their studies in favour of models that, unlike school, lead to immediate, easy success that requires - apparently - a minimum of effort.

The models and messages with which children, especially slightly older ones, are bombarded are those of easy success, without sacrifice or commitment.

There is an incitement to disengagement.

(Teacher, Naples)

As a result, there is a growing desire to get out of school as soon as possible and enter the world of work to make easy money quickly, which, in some contexts, also means entering the world of illegality.

In our context, unfortunately, there is also the singing of the mermaid of the underworld saying "Here's the easy money. I'll show you how to do it". If I fail at school, I say that school is no good and I get enticed by other things. This becomes hard to undo in difficult contexts where on every street corner there is the pusher who is selling drugs.

(Teacher, Naples)

Faced with this disconnect between school and the everyday reality of young people, the teachers interviewed reported an increasing inability to cope with school failure on the part of students, when understanding a text or carrying out an equation become insurmountable obstacles. This frustration not only has an impact on aspirations but can also result in social closure, rejection of school and difficulty in coping with challenges. The opposite reaction also occurs: the idea, as outlined above, that success can come outside school, without effort and sacrifice.

Children experience great frustration: the moment they are no longer able to cope with failure they shut down, they attend school less. In doing so, the failure logically increases considerably and becomes almost a social

closure. They have difficulty even getting out of bed in the morning. (...) A mother once told me "Come and get my son out of bed" so I went to their home, but I couldn't get him of the bed either.

(Teacher, Turin)

In short, young people's aspirations often turn out to be limited to their direct experience in everyday life, which also has an impact in terms of gender:

(In this neighbourhood) there is a basic poverty due, first of all, to precarious jobs, to moonlighting which their parents do and which they now induce their children to do as well, believing it to be the norm. The children cannot understand that moonlighting is not work, but they consider it as such.

(Teacher, Naples)

Boys and girls want to grow up too fast. Girls, for example, in the last year of middle school are already thinking about dropping out of school when they finish compulsory schooling to start a family and have children. This is their highest aspiration. Boys, on the other hand, project themselves into the world of work to have autonomy, to buy whatever they want, including, of course, what is superfluous (designer T-shirts, moped, etc.).

(Teacher, Naples)

The comparison shows how, in the formulation of one's aspirations, a fundamental role is therefore played by the models one encounters in the community and in daily life, which can positively or negatively influence the educational and life path of young people. Familiar experiences of school failure can undermine boys' and girls' confidence in school.

At the same time, however, the teachers point out that this spirit of sacrifice and redemption through school is still present, particularly among families of migrant origin.

The parents of these pupils make very important sacrifices to ensure a different, better future for their children, nurturing and supporting their ambitions for the future.

Many foreign parents are making sacrifices to educate their children, they plan long career paths for them, tend to invest in their futures as doctors, lawyers. Foreigners are counting so much on their children, especially the girls, to go far.

(Teacher, Turin)

3.1.3. Good practices to break the link between economic and educational poverty and promote positive aspirations

Faced with the challenge of poverty, the school responds daily to the material needs of pupils, for example by offering free loan of textbooks - as well as PCs and tablets - for students who do not have the resources to buy them, or, in some cases, by providing clothes or snacks; or, again, by ensuring free school transport and ensuring that all minors can participate in school trips, covering the fees and minimising the costs of educational outings.

At school we have adopted this kind of strategy of giving books on loan, i.e. the school bought them a few years ago precisely to ensure everyone the use of textbooks, because some were unable to purchase them.

(Teacher, Naples)

Many children have financial problems. Social services or Caritas intervene and we as teachers also do what we can (...).

For example, last year we noticed that during break time some children were regularly not bringing snacks. So, we took steps to ensure that everyone had a snack, according to a principle of inclusion. Or clothes, because some also lack clothes.

(Teacher, Bari)

When organizing school trips, we often reduced the number of days or visits thus cutting the costs and allowing these students to come. In short, to avoid putting them in a difficult situation because, of course, there are those who can afford costs, but there are a good number of students who cannot.

Furthermore, we favour free public museums for students. We have wonderful state museums for free, so why should I take them to an expensive place which could jeopardise the participation of some kids in financial difficulty?

(Teacher, Naples)

In addition to these actions aimed at satisfying educational and material needs, the teachers interviewed emphasised the need for and importance of building positive relationships between themselves and their students. The personalised attention and empathy shown by teachers can have a significant impact on pupils' well-being and involvement in school, leading to educational success and stimulating positive aspirations.

What I find an added value is the relationship. It sounds like a given, but it is not. Real care, however, that is, caring for the person, showing awareness of the needs, saying "I look at you, I see you, I understand that you are messed up (...)". But this is the hook, beyond what he does at school, which only interests us up to a point.

(Teacher, Naples)

Taking care of everyone's needs, this is the prerogative of many initiatives activated by schools to offer psychological support, guidance and orientation both to their students and their families. Counselling services with trained external professionals are set up and customised meetings are organised in many institutions, thanks to the collaboration with local organisations and associations, to provide emotional and motivational support. Specific support is given to students attending the last year of secondary school, to help them better understand their inclinations and passions and orient them in their choice of the next school.

Particularly noteworthy are the mentoring experiences activated in some schools, which have offered students a safe space to express themselves and receive individual support, contributing to their personal development and academic success. One teacher tells us of a positive experience at her institute, where, despite initial mistrust on the part of pupils, teachers and parents, the mentoring project proved effective in stimulating students' motivation:

Using the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) funds, we are experimenting with mentoring, carried out by competent people, by psychologists who were recruited by the school through a public tender.

Clearly, we chose external professionals because it is easier for children to open up to them. We have about a hundred students, which is a fifth of our students, who do one hour a week of mentoring. (...) Since this has already been going on for several months now, we are seeing some results, some situations that have recovered. Many young people tell us that they want mentoring because they need to talk to someone. (...) There is a lot of talk about relationships at school with teachers and with one's peers, family relationships (...). Almost all the adolescents were initially against this proposal because they experienced it negatively, today instead there is great demand because they have understood that there is absolutely no judgement, it is rather a place where one talks about oneself, someone listens to you, gives advice, motivates you. (...) Probably, in this social moment - let's call it that -, there is a need to institutionalise the figure of the mentor, especially in such delicate moments as the end of middle school and part of high school as I believe that everything is closely connected to loneliness, to the absence of roles, even parental roles.

(Teacher, Naples)

In order to combat economic and educational poverty, another essential element is full-time education, the opening of the school in the afternoon, so that students, especially those in greatest difficulty, have opportunities for extracurricular activities. Leveraging resources made available by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), National Operational Programme (NOP) and other funds, these activities are provided free of charge and include, for example, remedial courses in basic skills, Italian L2 courses, digital courses, STEM workshops, theatre, sports activities and study support, aimed at keeping students in school as much as possible and promoting their involvement, thus preventing school drop-out and failure.

We thought to implement 40-hour-packages activities carried out as extracurriculars, i.e. in the afternoons (...) to keep the children busy with sports courses (swimming pool, volleyball, etc.), a podcast course, and also a drama course. Starting in September, this will be supplemented by 30-hour-packages of Italian, maths and foreign language courses to support those children who do not have the possibility of attending private lessons or an after-school club.

(Teacher, Bari)

These are moments that the students appreciate, in which they participate with pleasure. As a matter of fact, these activities not only foster the development of students' abilities, transversal skills and motivation, but also become opportunities for socialisation that stimulate a sense of belonging to the school community. In this sense, peer tutoring experiences are interesting, as they allow students to create spaces for discussion, dialogue and relations with their peers, also establishing new friendships. It means offering minors the possibility of a peaceful space, where they can overcome difficulties and express themselves freely.

In my opinion, afternoon activities, when you do workshops, are very effective (...). There are work tables where children from different classes do maths, French, etc. together. Over the course of a few months, we create a large group of these children who happily come to school because in the meantime they have developed that sense that school is good for them. (...) We have kids who may not fit in well in class, but they have friends in another class that they meet in this workshop and so in the afternoons we try to reinforce those transversal skills.

(Teacher, Turin)

These experiences highlight how networking, the work of the entire educational community, is a cornerstone for effective interventions to support students, particularly those in vulnerable situations. The school's openness to the territory and the collaboration with external professionals, social services and the Third Sector greatly enrich the educational and experiential offer aimed at children and adolescents, thanks to interventions that extend into afterschool and the summer period, reaching beyond a purely educational dimension to provide an integrated and multidimensional experience. This recalls the importance of the active involvement of families for an alignment on their children's educational project, which nevertheless presents obvious challenges:

Everything we do should involve the parents much more, but when we call them in, they are always busy. (...). Nowadays, raising children is not just about dressing them, feeding them and getting them to school (...). When a teacher calls a parent, it is because he or she wants to be there for them and help them grow and educate their child (...). If one wants to, one finds time for many other things, one must find time for this too, otherwise we walk on two parallel tracks that will never meet and then those who pay the price are the children.

(Teacher, Naples)

This more general trend is then intertwined with the specific needs of certain families. The experiences recounted by the teachers interviewed in fact reveal the impossibility for the most disadvantaged families, especially those of migrant origin, to participate in the activities offered by the school or to be able to manage their children's afternoon activities, due to work-related reasons or for lack of resources. The school therefore finds itself having to understand these needs and find solutions to encourage involvement in inclusive and stimulating activities.

Parents often do not have a car or cannot leave their work in the fields and pick their children up in the afternoon. Our principal is very attentive to this need and has managed (...) to obtain from the municipality a free of charge contribution for afternoon projects. For international pupils, she has provided a municipal school bus free of charge.

(Teacher, Bari)

However, schools often lack the means to expand their activities, especially those of support for minors and their families. The schools point out that ensuring a high-quality and comprehensive education offer - also in the afternoons and during the summer - is a challenge they face without the financial resources and staff that would be necessary. In fact, the initiatives and good practices described by the teachers are often the result of the will of individual teachers, principals, of the community or are tied to the deadline of public tenders. The teachers therefore consider it necessary that these practices become a structural governmental measure, with dedicated funds, in order to ensure quality education and positive prospects for all students.

One very nice thing that I hope to be able to implement in the future is to provide support for homework as an after-school activity, not as private lessons, but something perhaps carried out by volunteers, always within the school framework (...), giving the possibility of having also more extended time classes, so as to keep the children in school and doing activities.

(Teacher, Bari)

In my opinion, institutionalising mentoring would be very, very useful. (...) Why not make mentoring a stable and structured practice in all Italian schools, and not just an extraordinary situation?

(Teacher, Naples)

3.2. Poverty in the experiences of boys and girls: peer research

A second axis of the qualitative research was aimed at investigating the experiences and perceptions of minors living in socio-economically disadvantaged contexts to understand how this condition affects their aspirations and expectations. The method used was that of peer research, and the technique was that of the semi-structured interview, based on the consideration that the "peer" approach allows interviewees to overcome barriers and obstacles in the telling of their experiences, thanks to the role of interviewers assumed by peers.

With the active participation of services and projects promoted by Save the Children and/or other local organisations, 26 boys and girls aged between 12 and 23 were selected in four territories: Milan, Rome, Naples and Catania. Through a number of participatory workshops led by a senior researcher, the young researchers became the protagonists of a survey on the living conditions and aspirations of their peers, collaborating primarily on the focus of the research questions, the drafting of the interview outline and the selection of potential interviewees. The peer research course was also enriched by a workshop on the technique of participatory enquiry by means of video-making, conducted by an experienced professional, which enabled the young researchers to test this technique first-hand in interviews carried out in the field.

A total of 37 interviews were conducted with young people aged 12 to 22 years living in areas characterised by socio-economic disadvantage. The interviews, which lasted on average 30 minutes, were recorded and subsequently transcribed by the junior researchers themselves. The interview outline consisted of questions designed to investigate the wishes of the interviewees, their perception of their own opportunities for social mobility starting from school, family and neighbourhood, and their possible proposals for improvement. To complete the qualitative survey, a focus group was carried out with 7 operators who accompanied the peer researchers in the survey and who, due to their profession and role, contributed as privileged witnesses to the understanding of the contexts and life paths of the boys and girls participating in the research.

3.2.1. Life, training and work projects

The adolescents interviewed belong to socio-economically disadvantaged families that, in several cases, present multiple elements of vulnerability or risk factors (single mothers, large families, forms of social and/or psychological as well as material distress, etc.). Many of them are in the care of social services and attend the spaces and projects promoted by Save the Children and other Third Sector organisations. They live in disadvantaged suburban neighbourhoods, lacking spaces and growth opportunities for children, often stigmatised contexts, spatially and socially isolated from the rest of the city.

The analysis of the interviews shows that a substantial number of the young people interviewed have very concrete life plans aimed at learning a profession.

The studies undertaken are consistent with the job they want to do in the future: some children choose the hotel and catering school to become waiters or cooks, some study fashion to become stylists, some are attending hairdressing school with the dream of opening their own shop, etc. In general, most respondents aspire to professions in the commercial or service sector, some want to go to university:

I'm attending the hotel and catering school; I like cooking and hope to work as a cook in the future. I also like travelling so I hope to work especially on ships, something like that.

(Girl, 17 years old, Naples)

I'm in the first year of secondary school, following hairdressing and beautician courses. I don't know what I will be doing next, because I can't make it to study at university. It's already difficult for me to attend secondary school (...) I'm studying just to get a diploma and start working. (...) I want to be a hairdresser. I like doing hairdressing, even at home I cut my own hair, I also cut my father's and my brother's hair.

(Boy, 17 years old, Milan)

Then there is a second group that claims to have more general or vague plans, showing little awareness of the path and qualification required and/or little knowledge of the obstacles they might face in realising them:

As a job I would like to be a vet or a chef, because I like cooking. I don't know what you have to do to become a vet, I just know that I would like to do it because I quite like animals. I would like to go to university to do this job, or work as a chef.

(Girl, 15 years old, Rome)

I do mechanics at school. I like practical things, let's say, also my brother used to go there, and it seemed like a good school (...). I have a goal; I would like to do a job with my father and my brother. A real estate job. It's something that my brother and I have wanted to do for a long time. Maybe when we grow up a bit, we will start thinking about it more. A real estate job, buying houses, reselling them, renting them out. But not an agency, maybe just between us, maybe working, you make your first money, then from there you buy your first house, renovate it, sell it and start like that.

(Boy, 16 years old, Milan)

Finally, there are some, especially among the youngest, who have not yet started wondering about their professional and educational future.

Although most of the interviewees have an idea of what they could realistically do as adults (and therefore show that they have job expectations), it is different when analysing aspirations. The stories do not reveal the dimension of dream, desired study path or job (except for a couple of boys who dreamed of being footballers when they were younger).

When the interviewees do show that they have aspirations, these are not purely related to the labour or educational dimension but are more general and linked to the desire to have a better quality of life, to live in a more welcoming environment with more opportunities, to have better economic conditions than at present, and to emancipate. Some project themselves into the long term and dream of being able to guarantee all this for their children in the future.

I hope my future will be better than what I am experiencing now, because it is complicated to always be worried and every day not knowing if we will have something to eat.

A bit difficult, especially now that they have also taken away our Citizens' Income. In the future, I wouldn't want my children to also worry and have the same thoughts, like "I can't afford this now". Mum is trying really hard, I would like to live up to what she is doing, I don't want to say "mum has worked for nothing all these years". And I wouldn't want my children to worry about this in the future, I would want them to be able to go out blithely with their friends without worrying if they can eat or take something. I don't want them to feel guilty if they use money, I don't want

them to wonder whether they can eat or not, buy something or not, I don't want them to feel guilty because they are using mum and dad's money to eat or even buy things outside of school with their friends.

(Girl, 18 years old, Rome)

I want to do different things from my parents, go to university, make other decisions, and have a better future (...). My mum's job is a bit heavy, my dad's I don't know. (...) So I want to have a job that is less grinding than my mum's.

(Boy, 15 years old, Rome)

Well, first of all in 5-6 years I would like to say that I have finished all my studies and, in any case, will start looking for a job and immediately leave. Honestly, I don't like the environment I live in very much and then I'm really aiming to go abroad. Because the way Italy is organised, well, is not so good, even on a governmental level, I don't like it. First, I don't like the way Naples is organised in general. I mean, in the sense that it does not reflect me completely. Especially in the neighbourhood where I am: it is very rough, very run down. I mean you know that there are various problems here, so I would aim for something more peaceful and easier. Then, I would like to move abroad because Italy on a governmental level is - let's say - a lot of talk, no action, and mainly I don't like the way it is run. So, again, my plan is to graduate here, do my studies here in Italy, and then leave.

(Girl, 14 years old, Naples)

It can be assumed that the boys and girls involved in the research have, with respect to work, clear expectations but few or no aspirations for two reasons. On the one hand, as the teachers interviewed also told, they are young people living in marginal family and social contexts, where there are few opportunities to gain different and new experiences and to compare the opportunities they could potentially have. It is difficult for these young people to widen their gaze, to see something else and to come into contact with different contexts, people and experiences that act as stimuli. As the operators well explain:

What we see is a kind of isolation, a lack of experience and vision. They don't even have any idea of what "normality" is, that it's normal to have your own room, it's normal to have your own bed and not sleep maybe four in a double bed... that's what happens (...).

What is happening in Milan more and more is that school is less and less a place of social cohesion. In the past they all went to school together: the lawyer's son with the drug dealer's son, with the worker's son... Now in our neighbourhood we have class A schools, class B schools (...).

I'm simplifying it, but to make it clear: the adolescents don't meet each other anymore, those living in council houses no longer meet their peers living in private homes. (...) What we do is to try to create these meeting opportunities mainly through volunteering. (...). When a junior high school girl tells the volunteer that she has six siblings and they all sleep on one bed, and the volunteer looks a bit taken aback, a bit shocked, then the girl realises that this is not normal. But there is a lack of these meeting places, and young people no longer know what their possibilities are, their possibilities remain those of poverty, of immigration, of being a kebab maker if their dad is a kebab maker.

(Operator, Milan)

They don't really think about it, they don't see themselves as different from what they experience, unfortunately. Or rather, in my opinion there is really a gap, they desire a different condition from their parents, but this vision of the future is so short that they don't really get to see themselves as "tomorrow I will be, I can be". Yes, of course, they all aspire to a different condition from their current one, either with money or with a degree, but then if you actually ask them "Can you see yourself, what do you want for your future?", they are too much about the here and now, about today, "I really don't know about tomorrow". It is difficult for us to have a future perspective, imagine for them (...). Certainly, the age factor does not help you to make long-term plans, let's say. It is the family that helps you find your way (...). In the average family you have few certainties, but one is that the studies continue till university and so you have an idea of the future somehow (...). The families of these children are just as poor culturally as economically. Therefore, even those who might perhaps have the desire, the idea that their child could study, perhaps do not have the economic possibilities. But in our experience, they are also often families that do not place a great value on education, in which the urgency is that at 16 you pay your own way, possibly, and indeed, "you don't go to school anyway, you risk dropping out, that's it, leave school at 14, get a job, stop". And it's also to get a problem off your back, i.e. your child becomes a problem to manage. So, in that sense I think they have a harder time imagining a future, because their families too live according to the "here and now".

(Operator, Rome)

This is partly due to family economic poverty, compounded in several cases by a lack of educational tools, which does not support the children in opening their horizons, and partly to the territorial context in which they live, which does not offer access to places of leisure, culture and socialisation, thus limiting opportunities for education and growth:

Our neighbourhood actually has both good and bad sides; therefore, I can say that I don't feel so good, but I don't feel bad either. I don't hang out with people from the neighbourhood so much, but I think growing up here is very difficult. You may be interested in various topics, but being in a group with people who are not, you tend to devalue school and to be more practical, in my opinion (...). I think that growing up in this neighbourhood, especially when you are a child, is even more difficult (...) it limits your dreams and you can't see, you can't see much of a really bright future compared to growing up in another, quieter neighbourhood. Because, as I said before, you are influenced by friendships, people with the same mentality - and in this neighbourhood it's very closed -, so you tend to think in a very limited way and even when you talk about the future it's a bit limited.

(Girl, 16 years old, Milan)

Even in those contexts where there are potentially more opportunities or it is easier to reach nearby places where one can experience them, social isolation persists, sometimes fuelled by prejudice and discrimination. It is difficult to want something different for oneself when there are few or no opportunities to see other paths of life, other worlds.

On the other hand, it can be assumed that work and training expectations are quite clear and defined for most because they are young people who, due to the conditions of socio-economic hardship in

which they live, are in the care of social services or, if not, attend services, centres and spaces made available by the Third Sector.

They are therefore supported and accompanied in their school and life paths, some from childhood onwards, and thus probably helped to make choices congruent with both their interests and passions and the resources available to them.

3.2.2. The role of schools in supporting children's paths

According to the opinions of the children interviewed, and in contrast to the perceptions of the teachers who took part to the focus group, school does not seem to help students broaden their horizons and instil self-confidence:

I also feel that the school is absent: nowadays we young people have really had it... I mean, no one believes in us, absolutely no one, not even the school. As for me, I go to the hotel and catering school and I don't see that they do even the slightest bit for us, but they want a bit too much from us, I mean, I do cooking, but they're really taking away my desire to cook because they make us do just the minimum.

(Girl, 17 years old, Naples)

Many students find it difficult and tiring to study and relate to teachers who are perceived as not very motivated, not very optimistic about the students' abilities and not very attentive to their needs.

This attitude of adults as perceived by young people evidently has a bearing on the consideration one can have of oneself, one's abilities and what one can aspire to do or become.

On the contrary, in those cases where teachers appear in the eyes of the students as competent and eager to transmit knowledge, expertise and passion, the students themselves benefit, are more motivated, more willing to learn and sometimes the teachers themselves become important reference points and/or are elected as role models to aspire to:

I have been somewhat fortunate because in the class where I am now, my teachers are competent and I can get the information so that I can then have this cultural basis for the future. Instead, many other teachers do not give this to their pupils, so yes, I have been lucky, but the school does not do what it should do. For example, there are some teachers who take their work to heart, they also take it somewhat as a personal challenge to give us, younger generations, a hand in living in the world we live in and understanding reality. Other teachers simply concentrate on the programme they have to deliver to the students, therefore on the topics, but then they lose a good portion of the class (...). I would like to be a teacher, let's say I would also like to do it to allow the new generations that are not ready to live in the world they are in, and I would like to give them the opportunity to understand where they are, what they will have to face.

(Boy, 17 years old, Naples)

Thus, the school context itself contributes to shaping aspirations and expectations of life and work for young people, through both the approach of teachers and the school climate and the more or less inclusive attitude of the institution and people, including peers, towards those perceived as more marginalized.

3.2.3. The neighbourhood as an obstacle to the pursuit of one's goals and desires

The young people involved in the research were also asked whether, and if so how, the neighbourhood in which they grow up could influence their life plans. The interviewees are mostly aware that they live in marginal territorial contexts, where spaces for young people, green areas, sometimes schools and/or services for citizens are few or totally absent. Contradictory feelings seem to coexist: on the one hand, a feeling of affection or, more generally, a bond with the neighbourhood, where one was born and grew up, where the main social relations of these young people are often rooted; on the other hand, a desire for redemption from the stereotypes linked to the neighbourhood and/or a strong will to get out of that context in the future, knowing that they will not be able to realise their projects there. As in the words of this girl, who expresses a desire to get out of her neighbourhood and out of Italy:

I would say my neighbourhood doesn't offer many opportunities. If you say "I'm from XXX" people look at you almost with a kind of suspicion just because you're from XXX... So no, I don't think my neighbourhood can give you opportunities. People look at you that way simply because of things that happened here (...) even if you are not part of this underworld, they look at you like that (...).

Mine is an abandoned neighbourhood so there are not many activities for us young people. That's also why leaving it for me is not a big problem: because it's a place abandoned by everyone and everything, not just because of people's prejudice (...). I only regret leaving my friends and family, but this place in itself does not give me much... also because I'm not here very much. I may miss Naples, but it will only be a moment. Also because I have to feel good: if I stay in Naples, yes, it's beautiful, the sea, the sun, I like it all, but if I don't feel good, either economically or because I really don't feel good... I mean, I'd rather leave and then maybe the discomfort will pass.

(Girl, 17 years old, Naples)

While the interviewees believe that to achieve their future goals they will have to move elsewhere, they seem less aware of how the neighbourhood is limiting their opportunities for growth and education in the present. These were the words of an operator:

When you live in the capital, indeed, the city has so much to offer, but getting there and getting kids there is not so easy. We too often find ourselves in difficulty with respect to home education because the same cooperatives operating in this area are unable to provide services to users living in the outskirts as they are not connected by public transport (...). So, integrating these kids, making them see different realities that paradoxically we have on our doorstep, is not so easy. It is sometimes the case that 18-year-olds have never been outside their neighbourhood, that they do not know the Colosseum or St. Peter's, which are nationally known monuments. Also, these are neighbourhoods where there is not a range of social classes, I mean, they are thoroughly working-class neighbourhoods, so comparison with other socio-economic realities is not possible. They are small ghettos, not all so totally deprived but definitely there is a certain isolation and a very low level of socio-cultural opportunity. They are neighbourhoods where there are often no libraries, no cinemas, sometimes not even shops, maybe there are just basic services and nothing else. There are no spaces to go that facilitate meeting others: there's no

playground, no hangout, no meeting points. What we find to be a great limitation (...) for access to recreation, socialising, even culture, is that you must have the financial resources: there is nothing, absolutely nothing, for free.

Practising sport is also very expensive: in Rome, a family that sends its children to football spends about 400-500 euros, which is beyond the budget, so how to get out of isolation? How to get out of the critical situation? How, if not through socialisation with fellow peers, sport, culture?

(Operator, Rome)

Some of the boys and girls interviewed, on the other hand, show a certain awareness of the limits that living in a particular neighbourhood puts on their possibilities and they are also the ones who are already seeking life experiences and opportunities to socialise outside their home context:

There are people who share my thoughts about my neighbourhood, about what I see here. There are other people who have different understandings, who don't even think that they live in a neighbourhood that doesn't give them everything it could give them; it's a bit complicated, it always depends on the person (...). I go to school in Naples, and even though the area where I live is a suburb of Naples, I still have to travel about an hour and a half to get from home to school. I think my neighbourhood in this respect is failing, because I am going to achieve my goals elsewhere. And so, it is normal to say "I have achieved my goals elsewhere, my place is elsewhere". (...) I think that in general both I and all the other young people who, like me, are creating goals for themselves find it difficult to achieve them in a neighbourhood like this one. If there were a few more possibilities here I would see it with a different eye, I mean I wouldn't be somewhat sad for all those people, those young people who maybe don't realise these things, who maybe don't even go to school because the school they want to go to is an hour away by public transport.

(Boy, 17 years old, Naples)

The social and cultural deprivation of the context in which these adolescents grow up often also has to reckon with the scarcity of public funds and projects aimed at creating opportunities and spaces for young people. According to the testimonies of the operators, the Third Sector organisations that come up against these limits try to compensate with their own means where possible and intervene with requests for support and facilities aimed directly at public and private entities, such as museums, swimming pools, cultural and recreational centres, which can in some way offer children and teenagers stimuli and opportunities for interaction.

3.2.4. Living in a poor family: between awareness of difficulties and optimism for the future

A third part of the interviews conducted by the peer researchers was aimed at understanding how, in the opinions of the interviewees, family economic status may influence their aspirations and expectations.

The image that young people give us is that of a family context in which parents, albeit with obvious material difficulties, try at all costs to provide them with what they need, especially in terms of their education and training:

I find my father a wonderful person and he always supports me. Not only me, also all my brothers. He always helps us, when we are in need, he is always there for us. He encourages me to become an architect, he helps and supports me, always (...). I take private maths tuitions, it costs 10 euro/hour.

My father tells me "If you need any support course, just say so" and he does it. We are five brothers and mum and dad, there are seven of us at home, it's a bit of a burden for my dad with all his children on courses, private lessons. In my opinion it's really tiring and needs more money.

(Girl, 17 years old, Milan)

From the operators' testimonies it emerges that in some cases this approach by parents is dictated by a strong desire for social redemption for their children and the willingness to distance themselves from their own life paths, which is passed on to the children themselves. Taking the example of parents (mostly fathers) involved in crime circuits, an operator from Catania tells us the following:

Generally speaking, I find great support from the families, because they all share a common point: none of them would ever want their children to follow in their footsteps and for them this is something they do not deviate from. "I did wrong, but my child must not do the same", so true is it that within their culture the child often does not even know the father's world - I speak of fathers because it is almost always them who are the protagonists of this hidden world - until they are able to understand what is happening. And children are also given distorted information, the truth is only told later. So basically, there is this sort of protection and this wanting to prevent their child from falling into situations that they have chosen, but that they would not want for their own children.

In the adolescent group there is this strong desire for redemption, but it is a redemption that fundamentally they want in their own land, they have also been in a certain way a victim of the disadvantage they have experienced.

(Operator, Catania)

The children appear to be aware of the sacrifices their parents are making for them and as a reaction state that they want to become economically independent early, at least paying for their own expenses, or that they want to work and study at the same time (especially for those planning to go to university) or to help the family with day-to-day expenses.

Confirming the teachers' findings, some of them are already doing some casual work, often off the books, without safeguarding, even before the legal age for entering the world of work. It is evident how this awareness on the part of boys and girls (and the consequent decisions, e.g. to work and study at the same time) risks making it more difficult and tiring to achieve their goals:

Even now, I'm doing a little restoration work: near my house, there's a person who has seen a bit of my and mum's financial situation, because she's not very well. This person wants to help us, so he asked me, "well... are you good at drawing?" My mother - because she was the one who talked to him - answered "yes, yes, my daughter is doing well enough, since she goes to art school". So, he's helping me with this restoration work, and I can help mum, because in the end all the money I earn I give to her to pay the rent, the bills, all these things. And for the university expenses too, maybe I'll do a little job like this, or I'll do some tutoring.

(Girl, 18 years old, Rome)

My father told me he will pay for my university, he said, "Yes, I will manage to pay for it, I will try as hard as I can to pay for it".

Then if he can't do it and the costs are high, I have to try and find a job and then pay for the university by myself. In fact, I am also working for that, I am working for my future which is university, I'm giving a small contribution to my father.

(Boy, 20 years old, Catania)

Awareness of family difficulties sometimes leads interviewees to feel like 'a burden' on their parents and to deny themselves some purchases (food, clothes), as well as educational and/or recreational opportunities, in order not to burden the family budget, even when this implies hardship.

For example, I gave up going on school trips that cost 350 euros and lasted several days, I couldn't go because I didn't have the right financial support.

Not because my father didn't want to, but because there was no money for it. There's rent to pay, so it was difficult to meet other expenses as well. And this... I'm not saying I feel bad, rather I feel a little bit of a burden for my father because he couldn't give me this little financial help.

Even today, I still have these problems, for example, if I ask my father, "Can you give me some money to buy food?", he very often cannot give it to me, so I have to grit my teeth and resist (...).

(Boy, 20 years old, Catania)

At school I attend the 'Fashion' course, it's quite expensive because materials cost money, fabrics cost money, everything costs a bit, and then it's difficult because you never find the fabric you need anyway...

On top of that, I also find it difficult to go out with my friends. On several occasions I couldn't buy anything... I was staring at them, I was walking around in a fast-food place for example (...) sometimes when people saw that I wasn't eating, I said "I can't buy anything, because I don't have any money", so they bought it for me, but this made me feel uncomfortable, because you know ... depending on someone made me feel uncomfortable.

(Girl, 18 years old, Rome)

Despite the obvious economic difficulties, the young people interviewed seem confident in the future and at times optimistic. The vast majority strongly affirm that succeeding in realising one's plans and dreams depends on willpower, commitment, and determination:

That's how I see it: that you must believe in yourself and therefore with this commitment I think I will be repaid in the end, because if you put your mind to it, sooner or later you'll see some good results from the years you've spent, so... you just have to dream, don't you? Even the silliest thing. "If I want that thing, all I have to do is make an effort and I'll get what I want".

(Boy, 20 years old, Catania)

It has nothing to do with money, but it has to do with how good you are. That's what it depends on.

(Boy, 17 years old, Milan)

For the moment I can say that I feel positive towards the future, I am in my first year and there are still many more to go before I finish my studies.

However, I have high expectations because I know how many sacrifices I have made (...). I know what I have to face and I think that in 10 years' time all my expectations will have been fulfilled, at least half of them. A complication could be that maybe 10 years from now I won't have left Italy, but I think that in the near future that will definitely be the case.

(Girl, 14 years old, Naples)

If someone works and gives his best, he gets everything he wants and dreams, in my opinion.

(Boy, 17 years old, Milan)

Although they are aware that their starting conditions are disadvantaged compared to those of other peers, most interviewees believe that they can overcome the initial differences and difficulties that arise by relying on their own strengths:

If you don't have the means, you don't have the incentives that maybe rich people may have, and they achieve their goal much faster than you. If you are a poor person, your starting position is very disadvantaged because you have no one to galvanise you nor do you have the same means as a rich person to achieve the goal. A poor person will take much longer than a rich person to reach a goal.

(Boy, 19 years old, Milan)

If, in the interviewees' testimonies, the family economic situation has a significant influence on what they can and cannot do in the present (school trips, sports, buying books and clothes, going out with friends, etc.), it does not seem to be as relevant for them in conditioning future plans and opportunities.

It can be assumed that the reason why these young people show a certain confidence in themselves and their abilities is related to the family context in which they live: where the parents do not have the possibilities to support their children financially and/or with parental support, the young people know that they can only rely on themselves. As one operator also says:

Among teenagers there is an attitude of saying "I will make it if I count on myself". In my opinion, there is a double interpretation: on the one hand, the awareness that no one helps you, in the sense that they don't feel supported by any context, and thus saying "if I make an effort" is certainly because I realise that I don't have real family support, so I can't ask my family to pay for me to study at university, but it will be me who will have to find a job and go to university. So yes, on the one hand there is this relying on oneself because "I don't rely on anyone"...

And then, in my opinion, saying "I'm counting on myself, and I'll make it" is a somewhat generational factor, because in adolescence there is a bit of this sense of invincibility.

And there is a little of the dynamic "yes, I will do what I want to do, I will succeed" because there is a lack of awareness of what are then the real opportunities that I have or not, I don't know who has opportunities how they have them, what other people's opportunities look like. So, I don't really know, and I say "yes, yes, I will have the opportunities, I will succeed, that is, I will count on myself".

And then I think there is a bit of fear in admitting that you can't do it, admitting that you are afraid, because nowadays fear and insecurities are not allowed, they are not good. I see a combination of all these factors. What alarms me most is that probably if they had interviewed me at that

age I would have said "because I rely on my family, what am I going to do without my family?!". Instead, in these cases there is a full awareness that the family is not there, the State does not help you, so I have to rely on myself.

(Operator, Naples)

To prevent the expectations of these young generations from becoming disillusioned, relying on the confidence in the future that they show, it is necessary to devise and design policies and programmes that support them from now on, so as not to deprive them of the educational and social opportunities that will shape the adults of tomorrow. It is essential to enable these young people to have new and different experiences, to see and get to know other worlds, to expand their range of possibilities, also with a view to fostering their social mobility.

3.2.5. What solutions do the teenagers propose

The last section of the interview sought to investigate what young people consider to be the most effective solutions to support them in their life projects. Most of the young people responded by proposing economic support for educational activities and school-related materials, thus meeting concrete and immediate needs (rather than a long-term perspective):

To help young people first of all I would give them the possibility of free medical examinations. But also provide schools with school supplies, maybe give them things they need, and try to give them maximum support.

(Girl, 14 years old, Catania)

Many made a general reference to the State government, but focused on issues that were relevant and close to them:

Well, I think the fact that we work and study at the same time doesn't make it easy for me, or for other young people like me, because we should only concentrate on studying to give hundred per cent. To try to prevent having distractions, because we know that work takes up at least 8 hours a day and another 8 hours are devoted to sleep, so there are few hours left to study. The government can make it easier for us, because not everyone has the strength or even the good fortune to find a job to pay for their studies. Because it's not easy to find a job, it's not easy for adults, let alone for us, so...it's not sure that it's a good job and that we won't be exploited, we can also work more than eight hours and still be underpaid, so in this we can only be helped by those who are above us, above our families: the State.

(Girl, 17 years old, Catania)

Let's say there is some economic support now, but from the age of 18 onwards benefits are all taken away because, in my opinion, the Government thinks that at 18 you are already economically stable enough and legally allowed to work, but they don't think that at 18 you are in school and you would like to continue studying, and maybe you have a problem in your family and can't afford to buy books, find a school that can really help you with your future plans. The State doesn't think much about that, but it thinks that at 18 you can afford anything you want. We have tried to apply for the Inclusion Allowance, but no one in the family benefits from this support...(...) At the moment, no one in the family is over

60, no one is underage, no one in the family seems to need social and health support.

What makes me angry is that they fail to consider 18-year-olds who may want to continue with their future (...). I would propose funds for young people who want to go to school, who want to have a future, funds to help them as early as high school, in other words, from the fifth grade to perhaps go to university, or young people who wish to continue their education but cannot afford it. Perhaps many young people leave school at the age of 16 not so much because they no longer want to study but because many of them think of the burden their parents carry on their shoulders, so maybe funds from the third year of high school onwards for young people who want to continue their studies could help.

(Girl, 18 years old, Rome)

In general, a critical attitude towards institutions, which should support young people in realising their life plans, seems to prevail. The interviewees are not very trusting, in some cases they feel abandoned and experience a feeling of injustice. Their appeal, more or less explicit, is to be given the opportunity to live, not to survive:

I think that surviving first of all is something that... I mean you survive because it's in the nature of the human being, so everybody does everything to get what they can and then live life.

Whereas living means that you do what you are happy to do, your job and other things, and if you have, well, I don't know, whims or things that it is your dream to achieve...that is called living life, in my opinion.

(Boy, 19 years old, Milan)

Save the Children's intervention: Punto Luce and educational grants

In 2014, Save the Children decided to take action to tackle educational poverty in Italy by setting up the Punto Luce, high educational intensity spaces located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods lacking services, that offer quality educational and training opportunities free of charge to children between the ages of 6 and 17. To date, there are 26 Punto Luce, in 15 regions: Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardy, Marche, Piedmont, Apulia, Sardinia, Sicily, Tuscany, Veneto. A twenty-seventh Punto Luce is being set up in the Gallarate district of Milan and will represent the 'Punto Luce Green': a social and educational territorial centre with green architectural and programmatic characteristics, an incubator of ideas capable of experimenting and intercepting new needs, focusing its intervention on environmental sustainability and educational innovation.

Each Punto Luce is run in cooperation with a partner association with strong local roots, through multidisciplinary teams of educators, social operators, psychologists, experts in specific workshops and volunteers. Within the centres, children, adolescents and families can benefit from a variety of activities, including study support, art and music workshops, the promotion of reading, workshops to strengthen digital and STEM skills, sports classes, and periodic cultural and/or recreational visits and outings.

Parenting support courses are also offered in the spaces, and meetings with paediatricians, nutritionists and care and education experts are also organised for families. The boys and girls are the protagonists around whom all programming revolves. This starts by listening actively to them and the programmes are periodically reshaped to include activities of interest to them.

Punto Luce also offers educational grants, individual educational plans for children and adolescents living in certified conditions of economic hardship, which, for example, provide for the purchase of books and school kits, enrolment fees for sports or music courses, participation fees in summer camps and other educational activities to which they would not have access for economic reasons.

The peculiarity of the intervention lies in its ability to put the minor at the centre, to work on strengthening abilities, desires and aspirations, not focusing only on needs but generating a virtuous mechanism capable of enhancing the minor's resilience. Depending on the case, the educational endowments can take the form of three types of pathways: 'right to study', to guarantee essential goods for the continuation of studies, such as texts and school kits; 'knowledge and experience', to give the opportunity to develop talents and passions through sports, art, STEM or vocational training courses; 'open one's horizons', to give the opportunity to get to know and explore other realities through participation in summer camps or study trips.

As of 2020, educational grants have been earmarked both for minors identified at Punto Luce and for children and adolescents referred by schools, social services and formal and informal social networks in the area. Community educational grants have made it possible to address extreme situations that otherwise would not have received a response; the educating community has also been strengthened through the spread of the grant methodology, which envisages, in addition to the setting of an educational and monitoring plan, the signing of a pact by the minor, the family and any other actors involved in the intervention.

Thanks to the variety of activities they offer, but above all to the continuity of the service they provide, for the last 10 years Punto Luce have represented a real social-educational centre in the areas where they are present, capable of supporting, in synergy with other local players - first and foremost schools and social services - the growth of children and adolescents, supporting them in discovering their passions, aspirations and abilities and in freely imagining and planning their future.

Since 2014, more than 55,000 children and adolescents have been involved in Punto Luce activities and more than 6,000 educational grants have been activated.

4. FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AGED 0-3 IN POVERTY ASSISTED BY CARITAS: SOCIAL PROFILES, DEPRIVATIONS, EXPECTATIONS, DREAMS AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

The first thousand days of life have a very significant influence on an individual's development and life. The entire scientific community agrees that during the first few years of life we acquire those early cognitive (language, memory, intelligence), socio-emotional (individual behaviour, adaptability, sociability) and physical skills (nutritional and health status, body mass, visual and auditory abilities) that are essential for future life⁸¹. The Nurturing Care Framework (NCF)⁸², produced by the World Health Organisation, Unicef, the World Bank and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, clearly states that in the time span from pregnancy to three years of age, children are most sensitive to influences from the external environment.

It is a period that actually lays the foundation for a person's health, well-being, learning and productivity and whose effects will last a lifetime. The internationally renowned document also offers valuable insights and recommendations on how to invest in the early stages of life, from pregnancy to the age of three.

To reach their full potential, children need adequate nurturing care, i.e. the five interrelated and indivisible components of care: good health, adequate nutrition, safety, responsive parenting and learning opportunities. 'Nurturing children' therefore means not only providing them with food, but also with health and safety, paying attention and responding to their needs and interests, encouraging them to explore and interact with the world around them⁸³. But to do so, parents themselves must experience conditions of emotional, economic and social security⁸⁴.

Situations of poverty, deprivation and social exclusion severely undermine these processes by directly affecting the lives of minors and, at the same time, also those of caregivers (i.e. parents), reducing their ability to protect, support and promote the development of their children.

As already seen in the first chapter, in Italy there are many households with minors in a state of poverty and, paradoxically, it is precisely children between 0 and 3 years that have the highest incidence of absolute poverty (14.7%)⁸⁵. Virtually, more than one in seven children in the 0-3 age group today live below a minimum standard considered decent, and with them of course their parents. Being born and growing up in a poor family can be the prelude to a future and a life characterised in its entirety by deprivation and poverty⁸⁶.

⁸¹ Precisely because of the centrality that the first thousand days assume in an individual's life, Save the Children has promoted various projects over the years to tackle poverty, including the 'Per mano' project aimed at supporting very young children. For more details see https://retezerosei.savethechildren.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/mano-contrastare-la-poverta-nei-primi-mille-giorni-di-vita_compressed.pdf

⁸² The Nurturing Care Framework for Early Child Development (NCF) was presented on 23 May 2018 in Geneva. For more details see <https://retezerosei.savethechildren.it/download/cura-per-lo-sviluppo-infantile-precoce/>

⁸³ CSB Onlus, *La Nurturing Care per lo sviluppo infantile precoce*, 2018, p.15 (Italian version). <https://retezerosei.savethechildren.it/download/cure-per-lo-sviluppo-infantile-precoce/>

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.15-16

⁸⁵ Istat, *Le statistiche dell'Istat sulla povertà - Anno 2022, 2023*, <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2023/10/REPORT-POVERTA-2022.pdf>

⁸⁶ According to a national study by Caritas Italiana conducted in 2022, among the people assisted by the Caritas network almost 60 % comes from families that were themselves in fragile conditions. For more about hereditary

To better understand the living conditions and difficulties of families with minors, a national study was conducted on families that turn to the Caritas network for support - therefore in a condition of overt socio-economic difficulty, comparable to absolute poverty- and that have children between zero and three years within them. The study developed along two distinct but complementary research paths, one quantitative and the other qualitative. The first, was carried out on a representative sample of people assisted by Caritas, while the second through focus groups conducted with families in a state of deprivation and with operators of Caritas services and Save the Children projects.

4.1. The quantitative research path

4.1.1. Methodological elements

The research was conducted on a representative sample of families with children 0-3 years old benefiting from Caritas services, mostly emporiums/solidarity markets, food distribution centres and listening centres, stratified by region and citizenship. A total of 1,612 people were interviewed, representative of a universe of 12,591 assisted family units with children 0-3 years old⁸⁷. This is because the assistance always responds to family needs, never to individual needs. The survey instrument was the usual data collection form commonly utilized by the Caritas network to which was added a short structured questionnaire focused on the needs/fears of families with children 0-3 years old⁸⁸.

The aim of the survey was to better understand the social profile of families with children in the 0-3 age group in poverty, to read their needs and frailties, to investigate the area of difficulties and withdrawals and to learn about the services they use and the support networks they can rely on.

The survey took place from 15 January to 15 March 2024 and involved 115 dioceses (52.7% of the total), where all those who turned to the places of support mentioned above in the indicated time frame were interviewed. Representativeness with respect to the target audience is ensured at macro-regional level: North-West, North-East, Centre, South and Islands⁸⁹.

The sample design of the survey

The target population

The data source chosen for the calculation of the sampling quotas is mostly the Caritas-assisted households benefiting from the AGEA (Italian Agency for Agriculture Supplies) food aid distribution, within the framework of the EU FEAD (Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived)

poverty see De Lauso F., *Pavimenti appiccicosi: quando la povertà si tramanda di generazione in generazione. Prima indagine nazionale su un campione rappresentativo di beneficiari Caritas*, in Caritas Italiana, *L'Anello debole. Rapporto 2022 su povertà ed esclusione sociale in Italia, 2022*, <https://www.caritas.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/10/rapportopoverta2022b.pdf>

⁸⁷ These families represent about 9% of the total families with minors assisted by Caritas in 2022.

⁸⁸ Many Caritas listening centres and services in Italy routinely use computerised data collection systems that make it possible to regularly acquire information on the people assisted. In particular, the user card - shared at the national level - includes several sections dedicated to socio-anagraphical and family data, needs/vulnerability, requests expressed and interventions enjoyed. Every year Caritas Italiana publishes a national report on poverty in Italy with data taken from this database, see <https://www.caritas.it/category/rapporti-poverta/>

⁸⁹ Not all regions in the identified time frame were able to meet and interview the expected number of people according to the allocated regional quotas, which is why representativeness is only guaranteed at macro-regional level. For more details on the methodology see box 'The sample design of the survey'.

programme. This is because the overall data on all persons met by the Caritas network do not guarantee total coverage of the data on minors, since the National Basic User Form in its main section detects the presence of minors in the household, but not their age. Instead, households applying for FEAD-AGEA aid undergo in-depth screening, during which the composition of the family and the age of all the minors present in the household are also recorded. It was therefore decided to consider the subset of families assisted under this initiative as the target population.

The estimated target population

The FEAD-AGEA aid data actually available on the database for the construction of the sampling plan included 131 dioceses distributed over 19 regions⁹⁰ for a total of 7,057 beneficiary families with minors aged 3 and under, of whom 1,825 were Italian families. The incidence of the dioceses covered by the data is just over 60%, so it was decided to extend the data coverage to all diocesan Caritas, estimating the missing data with the help of pivot variables already included in the Ospoweb database. In detail, the extension of coverage was carried out from data on the presence of minors in families (available for all dioceses), applying to dioceses not covered by FEAD-AGEA data the fixed ratio (equal to 0.105) between FEAD-AGEA beneficiary families with minors in the 0-3 age group and the total number of assisted families with minors in dioceses with available FEAD-AGEA data.

At the end of the assessment operations, the reference collective was calculated to be 12,591 households, of which 3,176 were Italian families and 9,415 of other citizenship.

Type of sampling

The theoretical target sample agreed between Caritas and Save the Children was set at a minimum of 1,000 completed interviews. It was decided to adopt a regionally proportional stratified sample, thus assigning each region a total number of interviews proportional to their respective target population estimates. Once the total was assigned, this was divided between households with Italian citizenship and households with other citizenship, according to their respective estimated weights within each region⁹¹.

The theoretical maximum error of the estimates against the planned sample size, calculated with a 95% reliability percentage, is 3%⁹².

The instructions sent to the territorial Caritas bodies responsible for carrying out the interviews included non-binding indications on the ideal distribution of the interviews per diocese, as well as recommendations on the adoption of sampling steps, the distribution of the interviews within the survey period and more generally on the effectively random selection of the households to be interviewed.

⁹⁰ The only region not represented is Valle d'Aosta.

⁹¹ The breakdown thus obtained excluded Basilicata from the sample, so that the sample size of Basilicata was exceptionally set at 1, correcting downwards the value of Abruzzo, i.e. the region with the highest sample size within the southern breakdown.

⁹² The error is actually lower, both because of the efficiency induced by stratification, which can only be calculated accurately if the values of the phenomenon under study in the various sampling layers are known in advance, and because the theoretical error decreases as the distance between the actual value of the percentage under study and the fixed value of 50% increases, which maximises the sampling error. In literature, it is considered that the efficiency of rate estimates induced by stratification is, however, low.

Actual sample and post-stratification weights applied

In some territorial realities, an operational organisation of the survey was set up that allowed for more interviews than the assigned objective. In other realities, however, there were operational difficulties that did not allow the target to be fully achieved.

The variance between the theoretical and actual sample was managed a posteriori by calculating and applying appropriate post-stratification weights inversely proportional to the respective actual interview probabilities⁹³. For the application of the weights, the sample was aggregated in advance into the five Istat geographical areas so as to avoid the increased variability of the estimates associated with an excessively wide range of post-stratification weights.

The actual sample thus consisted of 1,612 interviews, of which 497 were carried out in the North-West, 401 in the North-East, 499 in the Centre, 115 in the South and 100 in the Islands. 386 households with Italian citizenship were intercepted and 1,162 with foreign citizenship, to which 64 households of stateless persons or persons with dual citizenship or for whom no citizenship data were indicated must be added.

Given the higher than planned sample size, the maximum sampling error was limited to 2.3%⁹⁴.

4.1.2. The social profile of families with children aged 0-3

Families with children from zero to 3 years old were mostly intercepted in the Caritas centres and services of the northern Italian regions (altogether the North-East and the North-West reach 49.4% of the users) followed by those of the Centre (31.5%) and those in the South and Islands (19.1%) (Tab. 4). This distribution, leaning more towards the central-northern regions, is very similar to the overall distribution of Caritas beneficiaries, exceeding 269,000 in 2023 (considering only computerised centres and services)⁹⁵. The number of people met in each area tends to be proportional to the number of listening centres and services present, which operate mostly thanks to more than 84,000 volunteers throughout Italy⁹⁶. However, the lower interception of the need in some areas may also be linked to other factors such as, for example, the different types of computerised centres/services (in southern regions and the Islands there is a greater incidence of parish centres, which have a smaller catchment area than diocesan ones), a different way of using data collection programmes (also in connection with the number of active volunteers dedicated to data entry) and/or a different "social representation" of the Caritas world, which may determine a greater or lesser predisposition to refer to services in the area (in some centres, especially the small ones, the request for help may be socially stigmatised and therefore avoided).

⁹³ In the application of weights, quadrature was safeguarded through the modification of a unit (plus or minus according to cell residuals), applied to a randomly selected subset of statistical units.

⁹⁴ The same considerations as in footnote 85 also apply to this estimate of the maximum statistical error. It is noted, however, that the presence of variable expansion weights in a relatively wide range (7 to 16) leads to a worsening of the level of statistical error. The balance between the reducing effect induced by the stratification and the increasing effect of the error associated with the variability of the weights depends again on the actual (unknown) values of the variables under investigation in the actual population.

⁹⁵ The number of people encountered in 2023 in computerised centres and services alone (a total of 3,124) amounted to 269,689, broken down as follows: 47.1% in northern regions, 30.2% in central regions and 22.7% in southern regions and islands.

⁹⁶ On the subject of volunteering in Caritas see Caritas Italiana, *Tutto è possibile*, Palumbi editore, Teramo, 2024, <https://www.caritas.it/presentazione-tutto-e-possibile-il-volontariato-in-caritas/>

Table 4
Caritas network beneficiaries with children 0-3 years old,
by macro-region (absolute value and %)
 Source: Caritas Italiana (2024)

Macro-region	Absolute value	%
North-West	3,216	25.5
North-East	3,004	23.9
Centre	3,961	31.5
South	1,328	10.5
Islands	1,082	8.6
Total	12,591	100

Among the targeted households, the incidence of foreign people is very high, amounting in overall terms to 73.2%⁹⁷. This is not very surprising: the difficulties of foreign people in Italy, especially those with minor children, have long been known. Istat's preliminary data on absolute poverty in 2023 confirm a worsening in the conditions of foreign-only households for which the poverty incidence is 35.6% (compared to a percentage of 33.2% recorded in 2022)⁹⁸. Among foreign families, more than one in three is in a condition of absolute poverty compared to 6.4% among Italian families. If we then consider foreign households with minor children (especially those aged 0-3), the figure rises even higher.

As many studies confirm, the reasons why migrants experience a disadvantage compared to Italians are well known. First, there is the labour factor: migrants are often offered humbler positions in the labour market, have lower wages and are more frequently in irregular positions compared to Italians. Another important aspect concerns the size of households, which tends to be larger if compared to the one of Italian households. Last but not least, there is a disadvantage regarding the family support: unlike Italians, foreigners often do not have a family network that can support them; on the contrary, they are those who help their families in their country of origin by sending remittances⁹⁹.

Among households with foreign citizenship, the top five nationalities are Morocco (20.9%), Nigeria (16.3%), Albania (8%), Senegal (5.9%) and Romania (5.7%)¹⁰⁰.

Regarding presences, the data collected show a prevalence of regular situations, at least according to the answers recorded: 78.8% of foreigners, in fact, declare that they have a residence permit, 6.4% are waiting for it (including situations of renewal of the document), there are then other residual situations such as, for example, that of EU citizens with appropriate civil registration. Cases of irregularity are not very frequent, concerning just 6.4% of foreigners, although the high number of no-answer could hide a greater incidence of cases of administrative irregularity¹⁰¹.

⁹⁷ This percentage reaches 82.3% in the North-East regions and 78.1% in the North-West regions. If we look at the overall figures of Caritas beneficiaries, the weight of foreigners appears much lower, amounting to 57% in 2023.

⁹⁸ Istat, *Resta stabile la povertà assoluta, la spesa media cresce ma meno dell'inflazione*, 25 Marzo 2024, https://www.istat.it/it/files//2024/03/STAT_TODAY_POVERTA-ASSOLUTA_2023_25.03.24.pdf

⁹⁹ For more on the condition of the foreign population in Italy see *Caritas e Migrantes, XXXII Rapporto Immigrazione. Liberi di scegliere se migrare o restare*, 2023, Tau Edition, Perugia

¹⁰⁰ The top ten nationalities include Bangladesh (4.4%), Tunisia (4.1%), Afghanistan (3.2%), Peru (3.0%) and Ghana (2.2%).

¹⁰¹ The figure is missing in 35.2% of the foreigners' records.

Table 5
Caritas network beneficiaries with children 0-3 years old, by macro-region and citizenship (absolute value and %)
 Source: Caritas Italiana (2024)

	Beneficiaries with Italian citizenship	Beneficiaries with other citizenship	Stateless or dual citizenship persons	Total
North-West	19.5	78.1	2.4	100 (N = 3,117)
North-East	16.1	82.3	1.5	100 (N = 2,996)
Centre	20.4	76.3	3.3	100 (N = 3,937)
South	47.6	52.4	0	100 (N = 1,245)
Islands	52.1	46.9	1	100 (N = 1,071)
Total	24.6	73.2	2.1	100 (N = 12,366)

When small children are present, it is mainly mothers who ask for help from the Caritas network, accounting for about 70% of the total number of accesses (69.8%)¹⁰². This figure is not very surprising also in the light of the fact that women, compared to men, more frequently experience situations of single parenthood, characterised by a greater condition of need. And in fact, among female beneficiaries, more than a quarter declare that they do not live with a partner (25.6%), compared to 8.2% of men (Tab. 6). Among Italian women, cases of single parenthood rise to 32%, practically one mother in three.

This justifies the high incidence of family needs expressed during the interview, which are mostly related to unmarried motherhood, pregnancy/puerperium, separation and divorce and/or difficulties in caring for small children.

Overall, however, among those assisted, married people or those in a couple (with a cohabiting partner) represent the highest percentage, both among Italians (73.2%) and foreigners (81.5%) (Tab. 6).

Table 6
Caritas network beneficiaries with children 0-3 years old, by family type (single parents/couples) (absolute value and %)
 Source: Caritas Italiana (2024)

	Beneficiaries with Italian citizenship			Beneficiaries with other citizenship			Total		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Single-parent families (non-cohabiting partner)	32	8.6	26.8	23.7	8.1	18.5	25.6	8.2	20.3
Couples (married couples, de facto couples, cohabiting partners)	68	91.4	73.2	76.3	91.9	81.5	74.4	91.8	79.7

Due to their low numbers, data on stateless persons or persons with dual citizenship are not shown in the table.

¹⁰² If only Italian households are considered, the female incidence is even higher: 77.8% compared to 66.9% for foreign households only.

As regards the number of children, the majority of the sample is represented by households with only one child between 0 and 3, accounting for 84.9% of the total; they are followed by those with two children (9%) and those with three or more children (6.1%) - in both cases with at least one under the age of three - whose incidence is slightly higher among foreigners. The average age of the beneficiaries is 36, very low, against a national average of 46; overall, the 18-34 (45.8%) and 35-44 (45.6%) age groups comprise almost all cases (91.4%).

There appears to be a strong correlation between deprivation status and low levels of education, despite the young age of the sub-universe. On the whole, in fact, more than 60% of the assisted persons with children aged 0-3 have at most a middle school certificate¹⁰³. Closely associated with the level of education is then the data on professional status, which tells a lot about the fragility of these times. Those who turn to Caritas are mainly unemployed people (38.8%) followed by the working poor (29.6%) and housewives (24.4%)¹⁰⁴.

Looking at the data disaggregated by citizenship, the specific situation of foreigners is particularly striking: for them, the incidence of unemployed persons and that of people affected by in-work poverty is practically identical (both stand at 34%) (Tab. 7). If we then analyse the data by gender, an even more worrying picture emerges on the in-work poverty front: among male foreigners, the employed make up 62.9%, while the unemployed just 28.7%. They are people with rather articulated work histories from the point of view of tasks and contractual situations (with precarious jobs, often without a contract or in 'grey' mode), employed in mostly low-skilled occupations such as cleaners, workers, manual labourers, restaurant and trade workers, or as domestic helpers or caregivers¹⁰⁵.

Among Italians, on the whole, the incidence of those seeking a first or new job is much higher, compared to a smaller percentage of employed people (Tab. 7)¹⁰⁶; however, if we consider only male Italian beneficiaries, the weight of employed persons rises significantly from 15% to 29.8%. There is a high percentage of housewives, mainly of foreign origin (38.4% compared to 29.6% of Italians).

¹⁰³ This figure exceeds 66% among persons with Italian citizenship. Foreigners, with generally higher educational qualifications, face the problem of adequate recognition of diplomas obtained abroad.

¹⁰⁴ This distribution is very different from that of the overall Caritas beneficiaries among whom unemployment cases are much more pronounced.

¹⁰⁵ For an in-depth study on the working poor who turn to the Caritas network see Pellegrino V., *Fuori busta: i working poor, partecipazione e vissuti*, in Caritas Italiana, *Povert  plurali*, 2023, Edizioni Palumbi, Te-ramo. Also, for an in-depth study on the working poor see Baldini M., Gallo G. and Gatta A., *Se non basta lavorare per uscire dalla povert *, in rivista *Eco*, n. 1/2024

¹⁰⁶ Due to low numbers, data on stateless persons or persons with dual citizenship are not shown in the table.

Table 7
Caritas network beneficiaries with children 0-3 years old, by professional status and citizenship (%)
 Source: Caritas Italiana (2024)

	Beneficiaries with Italian citizenship	Beneficiaries with other citizenship	Total
Unemployed person seeking first/new job	49.7	34.7	38.8
Employed person	15.3	34.5	29.6
Takes care of the house	22.5	25.5	24.4
Retired person	2	0.2	0.8
Totally or partially unable to work	0.8	0.8	0.8
Student	1.2	0.2	0.5
Other	8.5	4	5
Total	100 N=2,435	100 N=6,955	100 N=9,622

Due to their low numbers, data on stateless persons or persons with dual citizenship are not shown in the table.

4.1.3. Hardship and deprivation

One of the objectives of the national survey was to investigate what difficulties families with children aged 0-3 have in coping with expenses¹⁰⁷. Considering that the survey was carried out among Caritas beneficiaries, therefore within a sample of people who are certainly socio-economically disadvantaged (in fact, among the interviewees 90% show forms of economic poverty¹⁰⁸), it is interesting to analyse which are the items of expenditure related to children's products and services that families face with the greatest difficulty and thus to reflect on the inevitable repercussions on minors.

Overall, parents of children aged 0-3 mostly show difficulties in the purchase of everyday products, such as nappies (58.5% of the assisted people have difficulty in bearing this cost), baby clothes (52.3%) or baby food such as powdered milk (40.8%). Then the health issue comes back into sharp focus: 40.3% of parents say they find it difficult to pay for private paediatric specialist visits on their own and 38.3% find it difficult to purchase medicines or medical aids for newborns, especially in cases of disability (including some cases of autism) or language disorders (such as dyslexia). Among foreigners, the weight of such difficulties appears much more marked. Similarly, among the interviewees of foreign nationality, the percentage of those who express difficulties in buying children's furniture, such as changing tables or cots, is much higher (42.8% compared to 27.8% of Italians). Not insignificant then is the percentage of those who manifest problems in buying toys for

¹⁰⁷ The questionnaire asked people to express their purchasing difficulties, if any, for the following items: 1. nappies, 2. baby clothes, 3. powdered milk/baby food, 4. paediatric medical examinations, 5. baby furniture/furniture (changing table, cot, etc.), 6. kindergarten/baby space fees/ playroom, 7. medicines/medical aid for babies, 8. toys, 9. babysitting fees.

¹⁰⁸ After economic problems, the other most widespread areas of need are employment (which concern 52.1% of those assisted with children 0-3), family (25.7%), housing (20.5%), education (12.9%), and immigration-related problems (9.9%). Very frequent are the cases of multi-problems, in which two or more areas of need overlap. Among those assisted with children in the 0-3 age group, only 33.4% manifested only one type of vulnerability, 31.4% manifested two and 35.2% three or more.

their children (39.3% among foreigners and 30.2% among Italian respondents). In this regard, it is worth remembering that the issue of children's toys, especially in the first years of life, is of great importance: forms of educational poverty actually result from deprivation in terms of play opportunities, as it is precisely through play that children experience and learn. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right to play as a fundamental right for children, on the same level as primary rights such as health, family, education¹⁰⁹.

The budgets of families in difficulty are also clearly burdened by the payment of fees for day-care centres or baby spaces (38.6% of households) and also, in cases of necessity, the payment of babysitting services (32.4%) (Tab. 8).

Table 8
Caritas network beneficiaries with children 0-3 years old, by purchase difficulty and citizenship (% of persons)
 Source: Caritas Italiana (2024)

Purchase difficulty	Beneficiaries with Italian citizenship	Beneficiaries with other citizenship	Total
Nappies	54.9	59.6	58.5
Children's clothes	47.3	53.8	52.3
Powdered milk/ baby food	38	41.2	40.8
Private paediatric visits	32.5	42.4	40.3
Furniture (changing table, cot, etc.)	27.8	42.8	38.9
Nursery/baby space/playroom fees	37.2	38.9	38.6
Medicines/medical aids for infants	35.5	38.9	38.3
Toys	30.2	39.3	37.2
Babysitting fees	28.5	33.2	32.4

Due to their low numbers, data on stateless persons or persons with dual citizenship are not shown in the table.

To investigate the issue of the right to health even for the youngest children, the survey also dedicated a specific focus to the family paediatrician. The family paediatrician is in fact the doctor in charge of safeguarding childhood, which every child should have (it is in fact compulsory for children from 0 to 6) also to access all the services and benefits guaranteed by the National Health Service, included in the Basic Levels of Assistance (LEA). This right is recognised for all children, regardless of their citizenship and the regularity of their status¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁹ See <https://www.datocms-assets.com/30196/1607611722-convenzionedirittiiinfanzia.pdf>

¹¹⁰ As stated in Article 63 of the Prime Ministerial Decree of 12 January 2017: 'Foreign minors present in the national territory who are not in compliance with the rules on entry and residence are enrolled in the National Health Service and benefit from health care on an equal footing with Italian citizens'. With compulsory registration with the Italian National Health Service, all minors, whether children of parents without residence permits or unaccompanied minors or regular minors but awaiting the issue or renewal of their permits, are entitled to free-choice paediatricians or general practitioners, as recipients of the most extensive safeguarding measures in

Given the importance of the family paediatrician, Caritas beneficiaries were specifically asked whether they had access to one: 84.8% said yes, while 15.2% answered they could not count on it¹¹¹. Respondents who answered negatively were asked to give reasons for it, but not all of them gave an answer. Overall, among the most frequent reasons given by foreigners was the lack of a residence permit, which in their opinion precludes this opportunity ("I do not have a residence permit", "The child is not registered with the National Health Service"). There are two considerations to be made on this issue. On the one hand there is the question of the enforceability of rights: in fact, not all foreigners know that paediatric healthcare should be in principle guaranteed to all (and on these and other essential rights, the Caritas network is also strongly committed to providing information and guidance). On the other hand, it must be emphasised that, to date, not all Italian regions have implemented the provisions concerning the mandatory registration of foreign minors with the National Health Service, even if their parents do not have residence permits¹¹², and therefore in some territories the difficulties of foreign beneficiaries may be so explained.

The second explanation cited by those who claim not to have a family paediatrician is the unavailability of local doctors: "there are no paediatricians available nearby", "the nearest paediatrician is 12 km away and there is no public transport to get there". In many contexts, as confirmed by many studies, there is also the real problem of a shortage of family paediatricians. In Italy – as certified by the Gimbe Foundation – each public paediatrician exceeds the maximum threshold of 800 children by at least 100 units; the national average is 896 patients per doctor. At the regional level only Umbria, Sardinia, Sicily and Molise do not breach the ceiling and respect the prescribed threshold. Seventeen regions, on the other hand, exceed the average of 800 patients per doctor. Among them, Piedmont (1,092), the Autonomous Province of Bolzano (1,060) and Tuscany (1,057) go beyond the average of 1,000 patients. Therefore, at least 840 paediatricians seem to be missing in our country¹¹³.

Other reasons, less recurrent than the previous ones, include the problems related to some doctors' office hours which are not compatible with parents' working hours ("there are no paediatricians available at the weekends"), or the situation of some families who have not yet dealt with the 'paediatrician issue' as they have – they say – very young children or children who have never been ill.

relation to their natural vulnerability. See

<https://www.salute.gov.it/portale/lea/dettaglioContenutiLea.jspl?lingua=italiano&id=4773&area=Lea&menu=vuo>

to

¹¹¹ Disaggregating the data by citizenship does not reveal any particular differences, the incidence of persons without a health service paediatrician standing at 15% in both cases. On the contrary, there are clear macro-regional differences: in the southern regions the incidence of those without a health service paediatrician rises to 19.6%.

¹¹² The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, ratified by law in Italy in 1991) stipulates that every minor, regardless of the legal status of his or her parents, must be "provided with the protection and care necessary for the child's well-being". The national regulatory framework safeguards the health of foreign children and adolescents, considering both active social inclusion policies and the accessibility of health services. Specifically, the LEAs (DPCM 2017) ensure that all non-EU foreign minors, not in compliance with the rules on entry and residence, are enrolled in the National Health System, including the assistance of the Free Choice Paediatrician, exactly as Italian children. As of today, the two most important bureaucratic-administrative obstacles to the application of this legislation – the failure to assign a tax code and the failure to assign an exemption code – have been overcome by a Circular letter from the Revenue Agency and a note from the Ministry of Health, respectively. In spite of this, many of these children still cannot enjoy the continuous care of a freely chosen paediatrician who provides them with screening and prevention as well as health education for their parents, in addition to early diagnosis and treatment of pathologies. Added to this is the still uncertain regulatory situation concerning EU minors. At the time this report is written, the regions that have fully implemented the national legislation (DPCM 2017) are: Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lazio, Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Marche and Sardinia. In this regard, SIMM (Italian Society of Migration Medicine) carries out continuous monitoring and advocacy activities in this area, see <https://simmweb.it/2-simm/1113-un-pediatra-per-ogni-bambino-articolo-su-vita-it>

¹¹³ GIMBE, 6° Rapporto GIMBE sul Servizio Sanitario Nazionale, 2023, <https://www.quotidianosanita.it/allegati/allegato1696924905.pdf>

Given the difficulties in coping with expenses, the survey also explored the area of deprivations experienced by families with children aged 0-3, analysing individual perceptions and feelings, also with reference to the needs and the presence of small children in the household¹¹⁴. The form of deprivation most frequently acknowledged by parents concerns the 'training and job opportunities' that cannot be enjoyed precisely because "one does not know who to leave the children with"; this situation is shared by about two thirds of those assisted, equally Italians and foreigners (66.6% and 64.1% respectively). Among women, on whom the care and custody of children falls more heavily, the incidence rises to 69.5% (Tab.9).

Another striking form of deprivation, linked to parenthood, is that of feeling that you do not have time for yourself, you don't have the 'possibility of having a personal leisure time'; this feeling is shared by about half of the women (50.6%) compared to 39% of the men. Some mention the impossibility of devoting time to their personal care and hygiene: "only when my husband comes home from work, I can take a shower". Thirdly, there is the sense of frustration linked to the impossibility of providing their child with recreational activities that may be financially impactful, including, for example, "the impossibility of celebrating birthdays". Almost 40% (38.2%) of parents acknowledge that they are forced to make similar sacrifices, with no particular differences related to citizenship.

In fourth place is the issue of health, which is mentioned mostly by women: 42.7% of Italian women admit to having to give up taking care of their health; among foreign women the incidence drops to 30.9% (Tab. 9). On this subject, Istat states that in Italy 7% of the population (about 4 million people) have had to forego necessary health services (specialist visits, X-rays, ultrasound scans, magnetic resonance scans, etc.). The two main causes of it are access problems linked to long waiting lists and the costs that families are unable to bear. The very long waiting times represent a strong element of inequity within a healthcare system with a universalist vocation, since they create distance between those who can turn to private healthcare services and those who, for economic-social reasons, cannot afford them. A recent study conducted by Censis for the Italian Private Hospital Association highlighted precisely this issue: in 2023 42% of Italians with low incomes were forced to postpone or forgo healthcare because they were unable to access the National Health Service and bear the costs of private medical care¹¹⁵. Among them undoubtedly can be counted many of the Caritas beneficiaries¹¹⁶.

With regard to deprivation, the consistently lower values expressed by foreigners are striking; this, however, should not be associated with conditions of lesser deprivation, but one could hypothesise a failure to elaborate the sense of privation and at the same time perhaps a different attitude to what one has; in many forms, especially for citizens from Morocco and Nigeria, 'no deprivation' was indicated as if to say that one is content with what one has or that the indicated items of expenditure could be felt as superfluous or at least secondary, compared to the many daily urgencies and

¹¹⁴ The questionnaire included a series of possible disclaimers on which each respondent had to comment: 1. training and job opportunities for not knowing who to leave the child(ren) with; 2. possibility of having a personal leisure time; 3. possibility of sending the child to recreational activities; 4. taking care of one's own health; 5. meeting friends; 6. inviting other families home.

¹¹⁵ The share of those who are forced to postpone or forgo treatment drops to 32.6% for citizens with incomes between EUR 15,000 and EUR 30,000, 22.2% for those between EUR 30,000 and EUR 50,000, and 14.7% for those over EUR 50,000; cf.

<https://www.censis.it/sites/default/files/downloads/21%C2%B0%20Rapporto%20%20Ospedali%26Salute.pdf>

¹¹⁶ Of the more than 269,000 people supported in total by diocesan and parish Caritas services during 2023, 12.8% saw economic problems associated with health-related vulnerabilities (in particular: depression, mental problems, cardiovascular and oncological diseases, dental problems). Altogether, the interventions carried out by Caritas health services were over 58,000. Of these, more than half involved the drug distribution, one third medical/clinical examinations (including many dental examinations); this is followed by other forms of intervention with a much smaller percentage incidence such as nursing services, hospitalisations or other services. In addition, there are also the many activities providing guidance on the rights to access public health services of which people living in poverty are often unaware. See www.caritas.it

difficulties to be dealt with, such as precarious and exploitative work conditions, housing problems, the burdens of daily expenses (utility bills and rent), the needs of the little ones. With respect to such urgencies, even one's own health somehow 'can wait' and this is often not even perceived as a privation. Moreover, as seen for the family paediatrician, the issue of privations concerning health also calls into question the lack of awareness among foreign citizens about the ownership of essential rights guaranteed to all in Italy.

Table 9
Caritas network beneficiaries with children 0-3 years old, by type of deprivation, citizenship and gender (% of persons)
 Source: Caritas Italiana (2024)

Type of deprivation	Beneficiaries with Italian citizenship			Beneficiaries with other citizenship			Total		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Training and job opportunities	71.6	49.1	66.6	68.3	55.6	64.1	69.5	53.3	64.6
Possibility of having a personal leisure time	56.8	44.8	54.1	47.3	38.7	44.5	50.6	39	47.1
Possibility of sending the child to recreational activities	43.6	23.2	39.1	38.7	37.5	38.3	39.8	34.4	38.2
Taking care of one's health	42.7	30.3	40	30.9	29.7	30.5	35.4	30.2	33.8
Meeting friends	31.4	36.1	32.4	26.7	17	23.5	29.4	20.6	26.7
Inviting other families home	22.5	24.1	22.9	24.4	16.6	21.8	25.1	18.2	23

Due to their low numbers, data on stateless persons or persons with dual citizenship are not shown in the table.

4.1.4. Access to daycare

An important dimension for the growth and development of children is the one revolving around early childhood services which play an important social role: on the one hand they are essential in balancing family and work responsibilities - favouring women's work in particular - and on the other hand they can make an important contribution in tackling educational poverty and reducing inequalities and social disparities among children¹¹⁷. Encouraging children from low-income families to attend nursery can in fact break the vicious circle of social disadvantage and positively affect labour participation, also reducing the gender gap¹¹⁸.

In Italy, according to the latest stat report on the availability of nursery and supplementary services for early childhood, the percentage of nursery places available with respect to residents (0-2 years

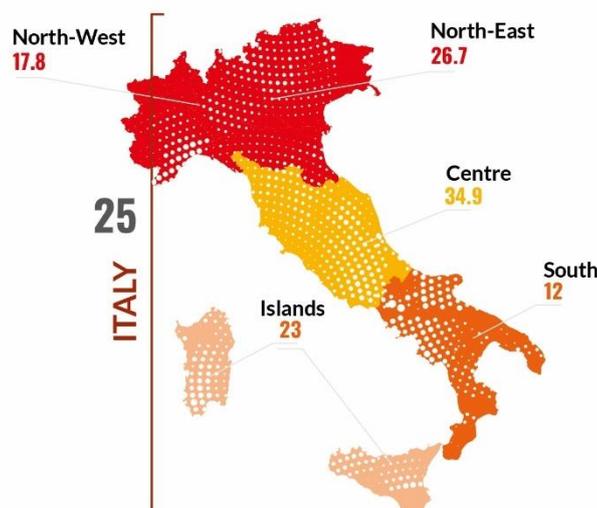
¹¹⁷ See Sabbatinelli S., *La disparità nell'accesso ai servizi per l'infanzia*, in rivista *Il Mulino*, *L'Italia dei Divari* 4/2022, 2022, *Il Mulino*, Bologna; *Save the Children*, *Il miglior inizio. Disuguaglianze e opportunità nei primi anni di vita*, 2019

¹¹⁸ Istat, *Offerta di nidi e servizi integrativi per la prima infanzia - Anno educativo 2021/2022*, 2023, p. 3, <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2023/11/REPORT-ASILI2021-2022.pdf>

old) reaches 28% (with an increase of 0.8% compared to 2020-2021)¹¹⁹. However, the territorial differences are wide: Central Italy and the North-East, on average, have the highest availability, respectively at 36.7% and 36.2%. The North-West stands at 31.5%, while the South and Islands both stand at 16%¹²⁰.

According to the survey of Caritas beneficiaries, 25.5% of the parents interviewed declare that they have enrolled their child in nursery; among Italians, the incidence is slightly lower than among foreigners, at 23.3% and 25.7% respectively (Tab. 10). The enrolment/child ratio is 25%¹²¹. The highest percentage of enrolled children is recorded in the Central regions (34.9%) and then in the North-East regions (26.7%), in perfect assonance with stat data; on the other hand, the lowest levels are recorded in the Southern areas (12%) (Fig. 36). In all five macro-regions the levels of enrolment in nursery among the families assisted by Caritas are lower than the national average.

Fig. 36
Children enrolled in nursery school among those (0-3 years of age) belonging to Caritas-assisted households (%)
 Source: Caritas Italiana (2024)



The criteria for defining rankings for access to public or affiliated services are very heterogeneous at the municipal level. Among the requirements entitling parents to a higher score is undoubtedly their work, safeguarding work-family conciliation (this criterion is recognised as important by almost all municipal administrations). On the other hand, the weight of the family's economic condition is still not very relevant (in fact, only a quarter of the municipalities consider the Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator – ISEE – among the criteria used to formulate rankings).

However, as Istat attests, there are priority criteria that guarantee access to services beyond the rankings: right after disability - which gives absolute priority - another enabling factor is being part of households in the care of and reported by social services for serious social and economic hardship; being adopted or foster children and orphans, being children placed in residential facilities and

¹¹⁹ The percentage is the sum of public sector places per 100 children aged 0-2 years (13.6%) and private sector places (14.3%). See *ibid.*, p. 2.

¹²⁰ If we go down to the regional level, Umbria is the region with the highest coverage (43.7%) followed by Emilia-Romagna (41.6%), Valle d'Aosta and the autonomous province of Trento (41.1%). Tuscany, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Lazio stand respectively at 38.4%, 36.8% and 36.1%. In Southern Italy, the regions with the lowest values are Campania (11.7%), Sicily (13%) and Calabria (14.6%); Sardinia, on the other hand, with 32.5%, has the highest level. In addition to the regional differences, there are also marked differences within the same region, for example, between the provincial capitals and the rest of the municipalities (35.3% vs. 24.9%). See *ibid.*

¹²¹ For the calculation, households with only one child in the 0-3 age group were considered, corresponding to 84.9% of the surveyed households.

children with only one parent¹²². If we look at the Caritas-assisted households with children aged 0-3, the incidence of those in social service care is very high (44.5%, almost one in two) and, in fact, among them, the incidence of those who declare they have enrolled their children in nurseries rises to 31.7% (compared to 21.3% among households not in the care of social services)¹²³.

While a quarter of parents say they have enrolled their children in nursery, 66.6% say they take care of their children themselves or rely on a family network or supportive friends (among Italians the incidence rises to 68.2%). Much smaller values refer to early childhood schooling for 2-year-olds (5.5%)¹²⁴ and other childcare services (4.2%) (Tab. 10).

Table 10
Your child/children in the 0-3 age group is/are usually cared for by
(% of Caritas beneficiaries by citizenship)
 Source: Caritas Italiana (2024)

	Beneficiaries with Italian citizenship	Beneficiaries with other citizenship	Total
A family member (parents, grandparents, other family members) or friend/neighbour	68.2	65.6	66.6
Full-time or part-time nursery	23.3	25.7	25.5
Early enrolment in kindergarten	6	4.9	5.5
Other childcare services/playroom	4.9	4	4.2
He/she is cared for at home by babysitter/nanny	0.8	1.2	1.1

Due to their low numbers, data on stateless persons or persons with dual citizenship are not shown in the table.

The total percentages exceed 100% as the question allowed for multiple answers, and several children in the age group 0-3 may also be present in the same family unit.

Among the motivations of those who decided not to opt for enrolment of their child in nursery school, undoubtedly prevail (69.4%) those who made this choice because of the presence of a parent who does not work (almost always the mother). Then there are those who choose not to enrol their child in nursery because the fees are too high (27.4%). On the other hand, the percentages of those who complain that their child has not entered the ranking (6.1%) or that there are no facilities available in their neighbourhood or area of residence (4.2%) are smaller.

4.1.5. Support networks

The last dimension investigated was that of support networks, meaning the formal and informal support structures available to families, capable of providing help on the material front, but also in

¹²² Istat, *Offerta di nidi e servizi integrativi per la prima infanzia – Anno educativo 2021/2022, 2023*, p.5.

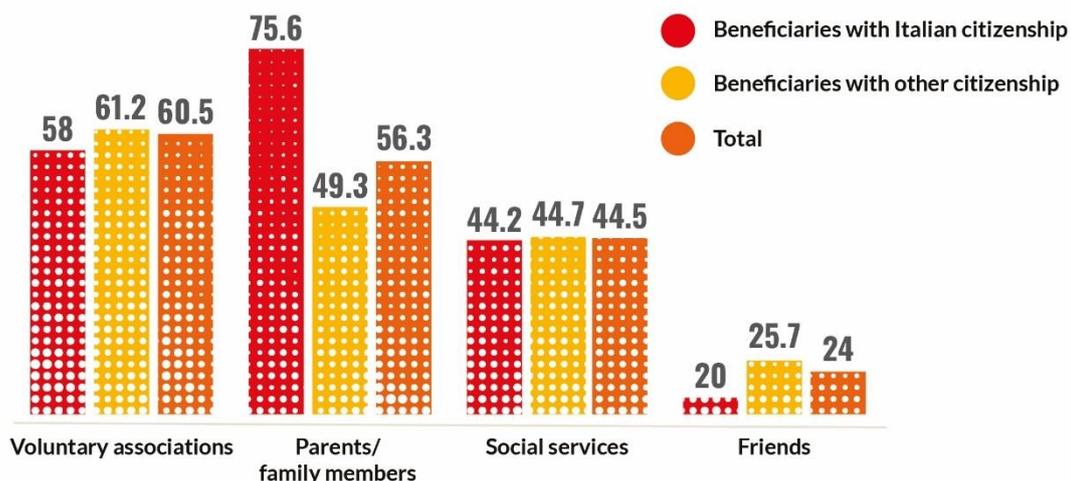
¹²³ Percentages are calculated based on parents. The most evident effect on enrolment at the nursery among the households in the care of social services is recorded in the North-Eastern regions (where the incidence of those who declare they have enrolled their children at the nursery rises from 26.5% to 36.2%) and in the Centre (where it rises from 32.4% to 38.3%).

¹²⁴ In Italy, the national average of two-year-old children enrolled early in pre-school is 13.5%; the phenomenon is more widespread in the southern areas of the country, In the South the share of children enrolled early compared to their resident peers is 20.9%. The greater incidence of the phenomenon of early childhood enrolments in the South appears to be closely correlated with the historical territorial inequalities in the supply of educational services for 0-2 children. Istat, *Offerta di nidi e servizi integrativi per la prima infanzia – Anno educativo 2021/2022, 2023*, p. 8, <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2023/11REPORT-ASILI2021-2022.pdf>

terms of relationships, friendship, and responses to daily needs. These informal networks - especially those linked to the family sphere - represent a great resource that can be counted on in a country like Italy, whose welfare system still relies heavily (too heavily) on families. Indeed, the networks that people have at their disposal constitute an indispensable resource. Moreover, the breadth and variety of the networks one is part of also lead to greater trust in others, with positive implications for society, also in terms of social capital. In general, individuals belonging to more advantaged social groups can refer to a higher level of social support that contributes to their overall quality of life¹²⁵.

Among the Caritas beneficiaries, the first support network they indicate are voluntary associations: 60.5% of the total (without significant differences between Italians and foreigners) declares receiving aid by them¹²⁶. The help provided by voluntary associations mainly concerns food aid (76.9% of the beneficiaries), baby products (62.6% of the beneficiaries get powdered milk, nappies and other items related to the needs of newborn babies), housing-related expenses (39.2% of the beneficiaries gets help to pay rent/housing costs) and economic contributions (38.7%). In second place, following shortly after voluntary organisations, comes the support received from the parental network, understandably with clear differences between Italians and foreigners. Italians receive more support from family network than from voluntary associations: 75.6% of Italians versus 49.3% of foreigners. The most frequent forms of support provided by the parental network concern childcare during the daytime (80.3%), food aid (53.8%) and the specific needs of newborns (43.9%); quite relevant is also the financial aid provided by parents and relatives about housing (30.9% are supported in paying rent, utility bills, etc.) and for other needs (36.2%)¹²⁷.

Fig. 37
Caritas network beneficiaries with children 0-3 years old, by support networks they can count on and citizenship (%)
 Source: Caritas Italiana (2024)



Due to their low numbers, data on stateless persons or persons with dual citizenship are not shown in the table.

In third position are social services, which take care of 44.5% of the households with small children; the incidence is very high if compared to that recorded for Caritas beneficiaries in overall terms. The form of help that is most acknowledged by the municipal administrations, without any specific

¹²⁵ Istat, *La popolazione, le reti e le relazioni sociali*, in *Rapporto Annuale 2018. La situazione del Paese, 2018*, <https://www.istat.it/storage/rapporto-annuale/2018/capitolo3.pdf>

¹²⁶ This figure is not very surprising given that the survey was conducted within the Caritas assistance circuit, which can in fact be likened to a Third Sector association.

¹²⁷ The percentages are calculated among those who recognised the support of the parental network.

differences linked to citizenship, concerns economic contributions (reported by 65.3% of those taken in care), support for rent and/or any other housing costs (54.2%), and food aid (45%). Only a quarter of those receiving assistance say they can count on support from their friendship network (24%). Foreigners also report receiving forms of help from co-nationals in 10% of cases.

Not everyone, however, claims to have a support network. In fact, almost one person in ten (9.1%, with no major differences between Italians and foreigners) does not recognise any form of help for themselves or their household, either formal (social services), or informal (family members, friends, co-nationals, Third Sector), or from volunteers (despite being supported by diocesan or parish Caritas).

DRC03 Research - Interrelationships between income, parenting and the development of children aged 0-3

Edited by Sara Serbati, Armando Bello, Daniela Moreno Boudon, Anna Salvò, Paola Milani, Research and Intervention Laboratory in Family Education, University of Padua

The peculiar conditions of adversity and stress faced by families in socio-economic poverty can generate difficulties for parents to respond to the growing needs of a young girl or boy, whose physical, cognitive, emotional and social development is determined by the relational experiences lived in the family context. Supporting parenting during the first years of life, especially in contexts of family vulnerability, is therefore considered the intervention of choice to promote child development and break the 'cycle of social disadvantage' (REC 2013/112/EU). The Citizens' Income (RDC), i.e. the main measure to tackle poverty in Italy, now transformed into Inclusion Allowance (ADI), recognises the importance of flanking the economic benefit with actions to support parenting in particular in the first thousand days of children's lives. In this regard, the law has established that for families with children aged between 0 and 3 with multidimensional needs - economic, social, educational, cultural and health needs - a Social Inclusion Pact will be activated to provide parenting support pathways to respond to their children's development needs.

In this context, the LabRIEF - Laboratory for Research and Intervention in Family Education of the University of Padua, which has held scientific responsibility since 2011 of P.I.P.P.I. (Programme of Intervention for the Prevention of Institutionalisation), conducted the research "Interrelationships between income, parenting and the development of children aged 0-3 years" (so-called 'RDC03' research) from 2020 to 2022, promoted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. The research involved, in 51 Social Welfare Divisions (Ambiti Territoriali Sociali), 123 families with children between 0 and 3, recipients of the Citizens' Income or another equivalent income support measure, who meet the criterion of multidimensionality of need, to assess the impact of the joint activation of a customised social inclusion project and economic support on the different ways of exercising parenting and, ultimately, on the positive development of children.

During the research, the participating operators were able to experiment and use, together with the families, various assessment and co-planning tools in accordance with the participative and transformative evaluation method, which requires that the tools with which the outcomes and processes of the interventions are documented and evaluated are also used by the operators and families to construct the interventions themselves. Furthermore, according to the research-training-intervention framework, the intervention and evaluation practices with families carried out by the operators were accompanied by initial and continuous training actions aimed at the operators themselves, thus constituting a context of co-research and capacity building between

operators and researchers, in which the data and information on the pathway become the basis for shared consideration with a view to improving practices.

The main instruments used in the initial (T0), intermediate (T1) and final phase(T2) of the research were:

- The World of the Child (MdB): a multidimensional model, already used for P.I.P.P.I., which aims to support operators in carrying out, with families, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the overall situation of the child and his/her family and to co-define the strategies to be adopted to respond to them, in relation to 17 sub-dimensions grouped into three fundamental dimensions: the child's development needs, the parents' skills to meet these needs, and family and environmental factors that may influence the response to these needs.
- Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3): a system of questionnaires for screening children's development, completed by one or more parents together with the operator, in five areas: communication; gross-motor skills; fine-motor skills; problem solving; personal-social skills.
- Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes (PICCOLO): a checklist, compiled by both operators and parents, for the observation and identification of parenting behaviours that help to support children's development in four areas: affectivity; responsiveness; encouragement; teaching.

Overall, the data collected indicate a starting condition (T0) that, despite the presence of situations where specific needs are found and which require special attention, is characterised by a prevalence of situations where there are no serious deficiencies relating to the developmental needs of children. In fact, the MdB instrument reports higher average scores than the sub-dimensions which concern the child's development and the fulfilment of his/her developmental needs, while the most critical sub-dimensions are on the side of parental responses (Parental self-fulfilment and Guidance, rules and values) and on the side of environmental and family factors (Work and economic status, Relationships and social support, Participation and inclusion). The ASQ-3 results also indicate that about 70% of the children show good levels of development in the areas of problem solving, personal social skills and gross-motor development, a percentage that drops slightly in the area of communication (66.3%) and in the area of fine-motor skills (58.2%). That is to say that approximately one third of children manifest dimensions of need in one or more areas, in respect of which accompanying actions and/or interventions of a preventive nature are required. At the same time, around 70% of parents express concerns about one or more areas of development: the main one is the area of language (for 35% of children), followed by that of physical-motor development. Finally, with respect to parental interactions, the PICCOLO results show an evident presence (in over 70% of cases) of parental behaviours that support the child's development in the areas of emotional involvement, responsiveness and encouragement, while in the area of teaching such behaviours are absent or rare in about half of the observed interactions.

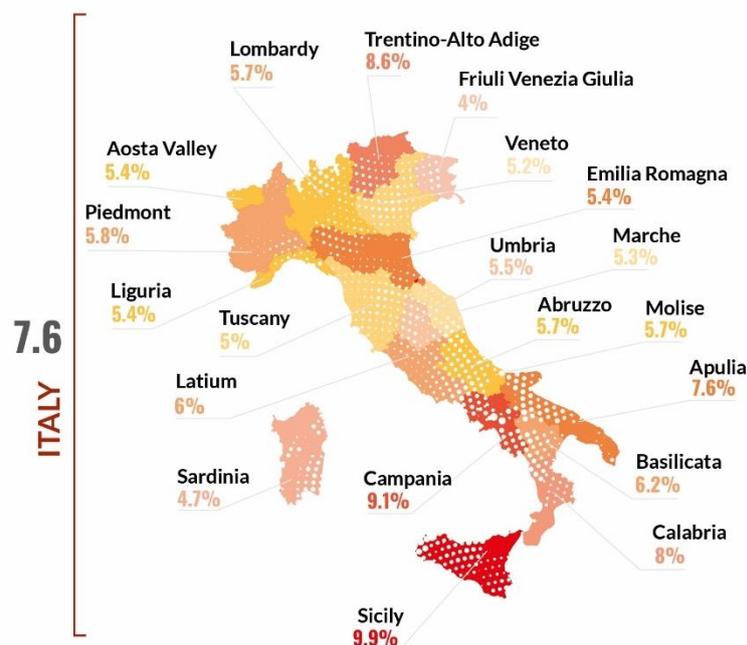
The time devoted to the intervention with the families was limited (16-17 months) and coincided with the lockdown periods following Covid, and the starting situation indicated clear adversities in the families (which did not, however, produce particularly serious outcomes on the children's development at T0). Despite this, moderate improvements were recorded through all three instruments administered with regard to both the children's developmental needs, the parents' responses to these needs, and environmental and contextual factors. In particular, the most evident improvements are observed in those sub-dimensions where a greater need was identified, such as parental self-fulfilment and economic and working conditions, but also in certain aspects of child development related to health and growth, autonomy and fine-motor development.

Finally, it was noted how the presence of support and/or devices in response to specific family needs responds to the complexity of the vulnerabilities faced by families. In particular, it is evident that the economic benefit, when integrated with support/devices aimed at social and educational aid, produces positive effects on different dimensions of the child's development and the quality of parental responses to his/her developmental needs. It is not the individual interventions, but their integration in a unitary project built with the family that produces positive effects on the different dimensions considered.

This panorama, only briefly outlined here, leads to believe that working with the families of children aged 0-3 offers the opportunity to intervene in an area where preventive actions can still be a powerful resource. The Social Inclusion Pacts, provided for by the Guidelines of both the Citizens' Income and the Inclusion Allowance (ADI) and their focus on intervention in the first thousand days of life, have brought to the attention of social services families and contexts in which it is important to invest. Social services provide parents with opportunities and tools to identify and cope with emerging needs, at a time when the situation still shows a high potential for intervention. At the same time, intervention in the first three years of life gives the opportunity for the operators to be recognised by families as partners and important resources to whom to turn before reaching serious critical situations.

These results appear in line with multiple studies, which have documented the association between family poverty and health, school performance and behaviour of children, demonstrating the observed correlation between poverty and child development outcomes. That is why, to break the cycle of social disadvantage and the intergenerational transmission of poverty, this research demonstrates the importance of investing in two intertwined directions: the first, relates to supplementing the income of families with children with appropriate support for the parental function so that positive attention to the specific developmental needs of children is realised, in a social context that provides families with a qualified set of protective factors; the second, concerns investment in targeted methodological proposals, through training courses accompanying both operators and families in a targeted and evolutionary use of income support measures.

Fig. 38
Households with children aged 0-2 years old benefiting from Citizenship Income out of total beneficiaries, by region (%)
Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy data (2023)



4.2. The qualitative research path

The qualitative research was developed with the intention of delving into certain aspects of the perception of the problems experienced, the use of services and the expectations of families with children aged 0-3 in a situation of socio-economic hardship. It was developed along two axes to explore both the point of view of parents and of the operators involved in early childhood projects.

Five focus groups were carried out for the first axis: two groups with Italian families, two groups with foreign families who have resided in Italy for at least five years and one mixed focus group with Italian and foreign families. The focus groups were carried out in the diocesan Caritas of Ancona, Caltanissetta, Perugia and Venice, identified in relation to the distribution in the three territorial macro-areas (North, Centre, South). A total of 20 families with children aged 0-3, beneficiaries of Caritas services, such as listening centres, solidarity emporiums and foster homes, participated in the focus groups. The thematic dimensions investigated concerned the relationship with the children and the impact of the lack of resources on children's well-being, socio-economic conditions and management of family expenses, expectations for raising children, support received and suggestions for improving social policies.

The second axis, on the other hand, envisaged the realisation of two online focus groups with operators of the Caritas services and of Save the Children projects, aimed at gathering their points of view on the prevailing needs of families in poverty with minors aged 0-3 and on the impact that the vulnerable conditions of adults have on children in the first years of life. A total of 14 operators from different territorial contexts from the North to the South of the country were involved, with the aim of investigating the transversal elements that characterise the poverty of families living in different areas in Italy. With them, we analysed the dimensions of households' material deprivation, the consequences on parents and minors, and the tools for tackling child poverty.

4.2.1. Families in distress with children aged 0-3: experience, obstacles, hopes

The identikit of the families we listened to reflects the picture of the population groups most at risk of poverty. They are families with children, at least one of whom is between 0 and 3 years old, including some large households with three or four children. About 2 out of 3 are foreign families, reproducing the breakdown of the quantitative sample. The countries of origin are Morocco, Pakistan, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Nigeria and Iraq. These are mostly family units with at least one of the parents working, confirming the growing trend of families with children in poverty with at least one person employed¹²⁸.

Time with the children: everyday life, activities, points of reference

The narrative of the relationship between parents and their children from 0 to 3 years primarily passes through the description of daily life. In some cases, the parental role appears to be almost exclusively linked to caring activities to satisfy basic needs: feeding, cleaning, sleeping. In this framework, sometimes smile is seen almost as an item to monitor the child's well-being.

I do many things with my baby. At home there is always a lot to do. I feed him, I look after him. Now, the first thing he does as soon as he wakes up is asking for food. So, we go to the kitchen, change his nappy and play a little. Then I put him in the buggy because he doesn't like being in the

¹²⁸Istat, *Resta stabile la povertà assoluta, la spesa media cresce ma meno dell'inflazione*, 25 marzo 2024, https://www.istat.it/it/files//2024/03/STAT_TODAY_POVERTA-ASSOLUTA_2023_25.03.24.pdf

playpen, and after that we eat and play. That's how the day ends. He likes to play with things that make noise, the small piano, the music.

(B., Caltanissetta)

All that matters is health. He eats, laughs, is dressed and smiles: that is the whole of life.

(N., Caltanissetta)

I'm not working at the moment: I have a 7-month-old baby, and I stay at home. In 2022 I was a domestic helper with a regular contract. My husband is a worker. Our children go to school, sometimes they play in the garden. Then they take a shower, I prepare food, and they go to bed. With the small child I spend the day breastfeeding, I clean him, change his nappy and take him out.

(B., Venice)

In most cases there seems to be a lack of awareness that, in addition to nurturing and emotional relationships, early exposure to educational experiences is necessary for children in the first years of life. Games are often considered by parents as secondary goods for their children, with which they do not always associate an educational value, but more of an entertainment function. Moreover, the parents interviewed point to the excessive cost of toys, which is why they often have to give up buying them. In many cases, however, they manage to find them through emporiums, associations or Third Sector organisations that provide them free of charge together with other children's goods.

A mobile phone is often used to entertain children, even those under one year old. Parents use smartphones to calm them down, put them to sleep, listen to music, look at photos or cartoons. Exposure time to mobile phones and tablets averages at least one hour per day, albeit in separate time portions (morning, afternoon, evening).

There is a small proportion of mothers and fathers who are aware of the possible damage to health that these tools can cause, to the extent that they do not use them or limit their exposure time to a few minutes a day.

Even more widespread is the use of television or rather web TV: almost all children watch cartoons or listen to music and dance in front of a screen.

Our older daughter has her own time. The little one watches more TV, uses the mobile phone and takes photos...

(M., Caltanissetta)

Our son eats, sleeps. A few games to sleep. We let him watch the mobile phone at night to make him fall asleep or when he has toothache and cries.

(H., Caltanissetta)

He does not play with the mobile phone so much. Only occasionally, when he cries or when we are out, just to kill time.

(N., Ancona)

During the first years of life, listening to someone reading a text or a story is one of the most important stimuli to support the cognitive and emotional development of children: it strengthens the adult-child relationship, nurtures vocabulary, increases attention span and concentration as well as

curiosity to learn about the world¹²⁹. There are basically two different attitudes among parents in a disadvantaged situation: non-reading parents who, for the most part, are unaware of the beneficial effects of reading; reading parents (a quarter of families) or potential readers, who are aware of the need to provide their children with stimuli for their cognitive-emotional development, sometimes also because they are motivated by the nursery school.

A mother in Venice, for example, told us that the teachers at the nursery school lent books to parents, inviting them to read the stories. In another case, a parent found a support in a municipal library, equipped to help young children. In other cases, the paediatrician recommended reading to stimulate language learning to a foreign mother, but unfortunately the prohibitive cost of the books did not favour this approach.

The price of books was reported with regret by several mothers, who were forced to give up reading, although they were aware of the benefit for their little ones.

He likes playing with toys or reading books, he wants to turn the pages.

(R., Ancona)

I have many books that were given to me in a community. It is impossible to buy books.

(C., Perugia)

I would like to buy books, but they are so expensive... The paediatrician told me that you must read something to children in the evening, give them stimuli... but yesterday I saw the price, 14 euros, it's a lot... What should I do?

(U., Ancona)

Finally, almost all the mothers and fathers shared the importance of taking their children out for a walk, a trip to the park for their psycho-physical well-being and to have the opportunity to meet other children. However, there are often problems linked to territorial differences: it happens, especially in the Centre and the South, that public areas do not have adequate playgrounds for children, or they are not so safe places as cars and motorbikes can pass or approach; sometimes they are few or far, and the most suitable for children are those with an entry fee.

Some families prefer to opt for shopping centres or spaces with children's games for which a fee is charged such as inflatables, or just stroll around the neighbourhood.

The absence of parks and outdoor playgrounds penalises all families, even those that are not poor. An intervention to address this would therefore have a universal character and would not only benefit the most deprived households.

Where I live there is a park, but there are cars at the back, so you must be on the alert. It's close to home, but it's dangerous, you must always look around. You must be good at managing them all, they're small children and there's not one that doesn't run!

(I., Caltanissetta)

You can go to the inflatables and pay for an hour to let them play. The city offers nothing.

(R., Caltanissetta)

¹²⁹ Tamburlini G., *Lettura condivisa in famiglia e sviluppo del cervello dei bambini*, in *Medico e Bambino* 8/2015

In the description of this daily life what is striking is the underlying loneliness of these families. Only few of them tell us of stable friendship networks. Foreign families often have a community of co-nationals, but they are not always perceived as resources to turn to for advice on children. The Italian parents too do not seem to have a particularly dynamic social life, certainly because of the hardship they experience and because they often feel judged.

From the moment the children were born, in most cases, the new parents had their mother and sisters or brothers as reference points, people they trust, even if they are in distant countries, facilitated in their relationships by long video calls. Just some mothers reported of having a friend with whom they shared their experience of pregnancy and motherhood. In a few situations, family relationships are unravelled and mothers report stories of complete loneliness.

Very few women were supported by counselling centres and only in three cases they attended prenatal courses through which they have built new parent groups who, even after some time, continue to talk to each other and discuss about their children's development. Unfortunately for the people interviewed, these are isolated experiences and, in any case, almost always limited to the first pregnancy experience.

We have no friends to go out with but an Italian friend of mine helps me, she too has grown-up children and gives me advice.

(S., Ancona)

There are so many difficulties! My paediatrician hasn't been there for a year because she's sick and they keep changing the paediatrician to whom I can refer. Having four children, there is always one who is sick... The system is a bit of a mess.

(P., Venice)

Paediatricians don't even give you appointments, you must wait 3-4 days to get one, but the baby is sick now. So, we must take them to the hospital.

(P., Venice)

Lost dreams: hardships, precariousness, deprivations

The precarious economic situation of families generates a series of deprivations and concerns that affect the growth of children and, to some extent, their future.

Families have a clear perception that their economic situation has definitely worsened since the birth of their child. A painful but realistic statement about their current living conditions. Those who have more children note a clear deterioration since the birth of their first child, seeing this as a marked effect of the socio-economic situation in the country.

Especially the costs for children's things are unaffordable. Nappies, for example: I remember how much they used to cost, now the price has gone up a few euros and it's no good, you can't not buy them.

(I., Caltanissetta)

It wasn't always like that, with my salary and that of my husband it was going pretty well. Now I no longer work, times have changed. It's hard with two children, I see the difference compared to when we only had one. We used to give ourselves a treat, a few Sundays out, a pizza. Now we can't anymore, we must give up.

(R., Caltanissetta)

One of the poverty factors is certainly linked to employment status and the issue of poor work is predominant. In most of the families that participated in the focus groups at least one of the two parents is employed. Approximately half of the mothers continue to work after maternity leave, almost all of them have undeclared, part-time or occasional jobs. The sectors are mainly cleaning services, care for the elderly, beautician activities at home: they are, therefore, low-paying jobs. More than half of the working women have their husbands unemployed or seasonal workers, or they are alone. Three quarters of the fathers work, but in underpaid, often undeclared jobs: they are couriers, construction workers, warehouse workers, cleaners, agricultural workers or waiters.

I worked from 1.30 p.m. until 11 p.m. and earned 500 euro a month. But I was alone, I wasn't engaged, I wasn't married, I lived with my parents so I didn't pay rent, bills, food. I used my salary to pay just for entertainment and holidays. Then you get married, you have children, you give up work because you have to look after the children and the house. Even if you would like to do something, you think you have a family. Now I can't find a job. Today I could not take a job like the one I had, working all those hours and so poorly paid. I would be forced to leave my children.

(I., Caltanissetta)

The mothers report having lost their jobs following the news of their pregnancy and, often, since they have no regular contracts, they could not benefit from the necessary safeguarding to get through this phase of life. Once children are born, finding a job becomes very complicated, especially in the regular labour market. According to the mothers interviewed, in fact, there is a tendency not to hire women who have children, fearing that they cannot guarantee continuity. Some of them sadly admit that their economic situation was better before the arrival of their child.

I worked as a warehouse worker and earned quite well. Then I had problems and was left alone. Now I can't find a decent job. As soon as they hear you have three children... It's an unpleasant truth.

(F., Perugia)

I found a job from 2 p.m. until 6 p.m., and another one at 6 a.m., but with the kids it's impossible for me. I have found work in hotels, but they also work on Saturdays and Sundays and I can't. When I worked, I was a waitress in Venice, I was a cleaning lady and a caregiver, but I can't work more than four hours per day. My children don't go to the same school and don't have the same school hours. I can't leave them alone at home. Others leave their small children at home.

(P., Venice)

The fundamental issue of reconciling work and family life and the possibility of using nursery facilities, is part of women's work. Among the children of the families involved in the focus group, only four attended the nursery, either free of charge or with difficulty in paying the fees.

Apart from the cases of infants, many parents choose not to send their children to the nursery because of the cost or because they are unemployed and prefer to care for them themselves, or even because they do not want to deal with the settling-in phase and separation from the child. If they then find a job, they cannot make the necessary arrangements easily.

In a few cases, parents do not consider nursery to be so essential; on the contrary, they see it as something to be avoided for such young children and prefer to rely on the family network. Most of them perceive day care as a service to reconcile work and family and not, instead, as an opportunity for the child's growth and development.

I don't want to take him to the nursery because since I have only one child and I don't work I dedicate myself to him. Later, when he goes to kindergarten...

(M., Caltanissetta)

My children were enrolled in day care, but they were always crying. I was unemployed and thought I would enjoy them at home. Then I started working and now it's a problem. I have my mum but now she is tired, so I have to try again to send them to nursery. There is the municipal one and it's free. I have a low Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE) so I can benefit from bonuses.

(G., Venice)

I have started working again as a caregiver. I had been carrying my son with me from the age of four months. Sometimes I used to leave him with the lady I was taking care of and she played with him, while I did the work and prepared lunch. Then the lady had a nap, and I stayed with my baby. When she died, I couldn't find work. Now I have found work again, but the baby has grown up and I can't take him with me because he moves around. So, I leave him with the nuns and at 2pm I pick him up.

(K., Caltanissetta)

Among the greatest economic hardships faced by families with children aged 0-3, healthcare costs were mentioned by all families: most of the medicines that parents routinely use for young children are over-the-counter drugs and are not covered by the healthcare system. For example, antipyretic medicines, cough syrups, nasal congestion drops and sprays, skin creams, etc. These are considerable expenses for families, especially if one considers the frequency of bouts of fever, flu, etc. to which children are subject, and even more so in the case of families with several children. Health expenses also include specialist visits and laboratory tests, where long waiting lists mean the public health service is not always accessible.

It's a problem when they get sick. Yesterday, for example, I went to buy suppositories for my son, I spent 15 euros for the flu [medication], even though the child is entitled to free prescriptions and is 17 months old.

(M., Caltanissetta)

If you must take them for a specialist visit and you have no money, you must wait. One of my children had a verruca, we had to wait six months and it was painful.

(B., Venice)

With all this flu going around, the doctor prescribed us the medicines and one costs 18 euros. Kevin¹³⁰ had the flu, the aerosol machine costs 35 euro and then I also had to buy the medicine to put in. I told the doctor "I think I'm going to jail this time!"

(R., Ancona)

My son was sick with an intestinal virus, all the medicines had to be paid for. Consider that I have three children and when one gets sick, then all of

¹³⁰ Not his real name

them get sick and we spend a month buying drugs. You tear your hair out, you want to cry as soon as you see that one of them is sick...

(I., Caltanissetta)

Among the most frequently mentioned expenses are those related to housekeeping, from onerous rents to excessive bills that sometimes limit even the use of heating, which is indispensable especially for young children. Families living in rented housing have small, run down houses and limited access to public housing.

The biggest difficulty in Italy is that while salaries are very low, the expenses are very high. You must pay the rent, the bills, a few things at home and so on... how do you manage to pay for it all? If only one of the two works, there are so many sacrifices to be made.

(S., Venice)

Food expenditure for families with children aged 0-3 is particularly high, specifically powdered milk and nappies, whose prices have considerably increased in recent years. Family food cannot be healthy and of high quality: families are not always able to buy meat, let alone fish, and are forced to resort to stratagems such as the use of baby food (even for older children) to ensure a minimum protein intake in their diet. For all the interviewed families Caritas support through solidarity emporiums or food distribution is fundamental.

Clothing is a lesser-mentioned item because it is possible to find clothes and footwear through associations that distribute second-hand clothes, or through family and friend networks or shops where they can be bought second-hand.

It is difficult to eat well, a good steak. I used to go every Thursday to the harbour to buy fish. Now I haven't done so for a long time. Eating mediocre, it is sad...

(R., Ancona)

I was lucky that I breastfed but friends of mine spent a lot of money. I have problems because there are so many of us, meat is quite expensive. I would like to give my children fish and meat. Now I put homogenised meat and fish in the pasta to make sure they eat it. It's hard to buy meat when you have a big family. I give them that now, so at least they eat one jar.

(B., Venice)

My daughter only takes XXX milk because she is allergic and each packet costs 32 euros. I don't buy toys or clothes.

(U., Ancona)

Deprivation affects not only children, but also the parents themselves.

In general, people give up leisure and free time, from ice creams shared with the family to holidays and convivial moments, reducing the time for fun and socialising.

Finally, extra activities such as, for example, attending football and dance classes for the youngest children to enable them to cultivate their passions, are not covered.

I give up going out, going to restaurants, I don't even take them to the fast-food. It's absurd. Even an ice cream for four euros each... I don't buy one for myself. For the swimming pool in the summer I must pay a

seasonal subscription, they don't even have reduced-price admission. There aren't many parks here.

(C., Perugia)

Dance classes, etc., they all cost so much and there is a fee to be paid, it's a space to relieve tension... Here there are no courses, no activities for small children.

(R., Caltanissetta)

I want to go back to the gym, I stopped many years ago, but it's 70 euro per month and I can't afford it even though it's good for your health and your head. When I came out of the gym, I did everything, I was energized, I slept very well. It's sad. Nobody does anything for themselves, just coffee in the morning (at home).

(R., Ancona)

Before giving birth, I earned good money doing nails. Since my son was born, I have worked little or not at all... He goes to daycare but we can't pay the fees, we have to decide what to pay for. If you want the truth, I have three bills from the nursery school that I did not pay for. This is a bad time. Before, we used to do 200 euro monthly grocery shopping, I'm not saying we bought everything, but we bought fruit and vegetables during the week. Today with 200 euro you don't take anything home... We used to go to a restaurant now and then, but we haven't gone for a long time. My husband has no one and sometimes I got 200 euro from [my country].

(R., Ancona)

I'd like to buy a cot for my children, I've seen one but I can't afford it. I would like to go on a trip.

(L., Ancona)

For us it's a disaster now. Sometimes I'm at the café in the summer and I don't even have the money to buy my children an ice cream, maybe they see and ask me, I'm ashamed, I don't even have the money for that... I also wanted to take them to a swimming pool course, but it costs so much. I get my salary and my Single and Universal Allowance, in three days it's over: you pay the rent, bills, groceries...

(G., Venice)

Contributions and income support

In the perception of families, the most effective economic contribution is certainly the Single and Universal Allowance, which has made it possible to meet some specific expenses for children and to pay rent in particularly difficult times. Mentioned by most parents then comes the shopping card that can be used in supermarkets and pharmacies and is worth EUR 80 every two months. In this case, opinions differ between those who consider this to be too low a contribution and those who, on the other hand, also count on this, for example, to guarantee the purchase of nappies.

In some regions, it is reported that there is the possibility of a contribution for access to nursery schools for children of families in an economically disadvantaged situation: an acquired and highly effective right that, however, reveals a real inequality generated by different local policies.

The families interviewed, moreover, state that they are not in contact with the network of counselling centres in the area and therefore there might be problems in intercepting people in a situation of economic distress.

The future: prospects and hopes

When thinking about the future of their children, hope prevails over fear. The common wish is that their children may have a life different from their own, at least not so complicated and with so many deprivations. Families, particularly foreign ones, have an optimistic view of their children's future and their career fulfilment, and see them projected towards a better life in which their dreams come true, despite the economic difficulties at the start, as they are confident in their children's personal abilities and willpower and are ready to back them up in terms of support and encouragement.

More than half of the parents wish that their children could graduate from university: a goal that was not possible for them, with the expectation that a degree would guarantee a good economic position. However, especially for Italian parents, the contemporary society's trend is worrying and the idea of not being able to support their children in their studies is pressing, starting with the consideration that books and school supplies to attend secondary school, even as early as middle school, are expensive. This leads many parents to ask their children to leave school early to go to work and provide support for household expenses.

You know what? I still have hope. I will do my part.

(U., Ancona)

I would like my daughter to graduate. It is my dream, I don't know if it will be my daughter's dream. I would like her to be a doctor and be able to live well. I think my daughter can do this. To achieve this, it is necessary to support her with advice and to give her encouragement.

(P., Ancona)

I hope that they can study or become someone. Right now, it scares me: I wonder what my children will do... what if they want to study and I won't be able to help them? Only one in the family works, he kills himself with work, he would also like another job, I would like to help him.

(I., Caltanissetta)

I see many difficulties in the society we live in. For example, to send children to school: I know people who don't even send them to school, they withdraw them and that is already a problem. They do so because they prefer to send them to work.

(M., Caltanissetta)

I am worried about the future mainly because of the economic situation. There are difficulties because we can't cope with the expenses for studying, but also for some activities they can't do like sports, music... already in middle school the costs are high, books cost 300 euros.

(G., Venice)

Suggestions for improving the situation of disadvantaged families

What can the State and society do to help families with children aged 0 to 3 to get out of poverty? Parents' proposals can be divided into three macro-areas: work, economic support and child-raising support.

The area of labour is the most frequently mentioned and it is clear that it is a macroeconomic and social problem. The most heartfelt request is for support in the search for a decent job, not underpaid and irregular, so that it is possible to support oneself decently. In particular, women ask for help to overcome employers' discrimination against mothers, an obstacle that sometimes seems insurmountable. Indeed, some focus group participants ask for a secure salary so that they can raise their children peacefully and not always troubled by the anxiety of financial shortages. This is because employers today, despite the law, do not easily accept absences for children's illnesses that, moreover, can arise suddenly.

It is clear that services such as day-care centres, with schedules adapted to the needs of the labour market and more flexibility at work are needed, among other things, to encourage mothers to work. One single mother interviewed reported, for example, the impossibility of accepting a job in a factory, that she desired so much, because of the incompatibility of her working hours with those of her children's nursery.

I would ask the State for a job. A woman must be able to work like a man, well paid. I don't want to be exploited at work. I am a grown woman, a mother.

(I., Caltanissetta)

The State must ensure a salary for us women, to raise our children, so we give them more love and peace of mind. We should not always have a thousand worries. The bosses don't care, for example, if my daughter is sick. Not a job, but a secure salary to raise children. (...) If the daycare centre calls me because the child is sick, the boss doesn't care, he tells you that you have to make arrangements. Even if you have a low salary.

(U., Ancona)

The other macro-area concerns the possibility of more substantial economic support, perhaps by reinforcing the already existing allowances for grocery shopping and medicines. Furthermore, support is also requested for paying bills and finding a home, driving the call for greater availability of public housing.

Some parents, generally aware of the benefits for the little ones, also ask for help to support their children's cognitive and emotional growth and development by offering the possibility of attending age-appropriate dance, swimming and sports classes. These parents include a number of mothers and fathers, mostly foreigners, who demand that their children be supported in their studies in the future, from primary school to middle school and secondary school, so that they can find their way through a school system that sometimes appears complex.

A babysitting service would be most helpful so that mothers can work. If I had to get a job in a factory, I couldn't accept it ... and then sport helps a lot, I see it with my child who plays rugby. It's an important help from an educational point of view.

(U., Perugia)

4.2.2. Poverty among families with children aged 0-3 as seen by operators

The critical dimension of poverty

The families that the operators meet have some recurring characteristics: large families, often single-income, of both Italian and foreign origin, single-parent families, reconstituted families with several children, thus confirming that larger families and single-parent families are at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion. However, there are also new forms of poverty affecting those families that have experienced break-up events (e.g. separation, sudden job loss), which have led to a redefinition of balances and needs but also to an increased socio-economic vulnerability. For all these families, the multidimensional nature of poverty and how this translates for children into a lack of access to several fundamental rights, undermining their development and growth paths from an early age, becomes evident.

According to the operators' opinions, the most critical dimensions, especially in terms of their impact on children aged 0-3, are housing, health and food. As regards housing, the greatest difficulties concern the payment of utilities and rent, which are among the first expenses to be cut, with the consequence that families find themselves in arrears and essential services are suspended (water, light, heating). On the other hand, access to public housing is a slow process with stringent requirements. In some contexts, there is also discrimination against these families and, in some cases, usury.

Housing has become the main problem. A foreigner has much more difficulty in finding accommodation on the private market. I would also like to add that in Trieste there is now a distrust of families with many children, regardless of whether they are foreigners or Italians; this is already an initial discriminator (...). I believe that the difficulty is also the landlord's fear of being unable to evict tenants, i.e. in the case of people in arrears it is not so easy to vacate a house where minors or elderly people live. We are now talking about minors, they are in any case fragile categories; therefore, it is clear that it is a bit more difficult, times are longer and therefore someone also makes a mathematical calculation: he says "if this family receives an income of 1,500 euro and has to pay for a rent of 600 euro plus the bills, after two months they will no longer pay".

(Caritas service operator, Trieste)

What we observe is that where there is economic poverty or lack of basic goods, such as an adequately equipped home, in conformity with standards, with healthy spaces - because what we find is that many homes are often overcrowded, undersized in relation to the number of children in the families - even the hygiene conditions of the home then affect the health of children and parents.

So, even though we live in a modern city like Milan, we still have many neighbourhoods, many social housing areas, with homes really undersized for 7-8 family members who may live in two rooms, and therefore there are also big problems. Economic problems also lead to difficulties in paying utilities. So, we have situations in which heating is not guaranteed even during the winter, and this then has an impact on health.

(Save the Children project operator, Milan)

As far as the health dimension is concerned, the operators working in the services dedicated to the children's first thousand days of life, also report critical issues around the health of mothers-to-be or

new mothers: once they access the service, various fragilities are found, including psychological and psychiatric ones.

Food issues are linked to health. The problem of not being able to buy groceries or follow a healthy diet, cuts across all families living in a vulnerable situation. In many cases, it is the local parish, Third Sector organisations and associations, and the food bank (Banco alimentare) that provide for these difficulties.

Another way to cope with food expenses is to shop at discount stores and/or buy products at low prices, which, however, are not always optimal from a nutritional point of view. A problem encountered by some operators concerns foreign families who, being used to different foods, find themselves unable to buy them in Italy as they are particularly expensive.

What they save a lot on is food. They buy a lot at discount stores or in foreign households they cook the food of the country they come from so they spend money on that.... What can't be bought at the discount store they buy elsewhere but the cheapest things possible (...) It's as if there is a break with their country where they maybe ate more fruit, juices and smoothies. These are hard to find here because the fruits come from far away and therefore cost more, so they turn to fizzy drinks. It's a change, they think "here I can afford it, it costs more there and instead here I can get it". But in reality, they are poor quality products that are bad for their health, full of sugars, additives and other things. I see that their budget is very much oriented towards these types of products.

(Save the Children project operator, Rome)

All these forms of poverty (housing, health, food) are intertwined with and amplified by the educational poverty of families. In the opinions of the interviewees, the families often lack the appropriate cultural and cognitive tools to identify priority expenditures, with the result that sometimes superfluous purchases are made at the expense of basic necessities, or, in the case of food shopping, unhealthy food is bought, especially for children. The lack of financial education is also particularly prevalent among women, who often lack economic autonomy and, when they find themselves having to manage family resources, they do not have the necessary tools and information to do so.

Families consisting of both parents are often single-income. They therefore have only one source of revenue. Another fact we observe is that many women, even where there is a sufficient balance of income, are not economically autonomous. They do not have access to bank accounts, they do not have an ATM card, they do not have a rechargeable card, they do not even have any savings. We also bring these issues under the theme of financial education. Without mentioning more extreme situations, where for example the husband is hospitalised, dies or has to be absent. In these cases, families are stuck because, since he is not there, no one has access to the bank account, no one knows how to withdraw money. So, this is a very critical issue that we try to devote time to, also with the mothers who participate in the groups, even here at the health advisory centre (...) obviously you can't deal with these issues when you are in the midst of emergencies, when a family has nothing to eat or has to buy clothes or to buy some paracetamol...

(Save the Children project operator, Milan)

Housing poverty

The deprivation in which families find themselves has obvious repercussions on children's living conditions, well-being and chances of growth.

Families' housing poverty means living in unhealthy, damp, sometimes cramped, overcrowded houses, where there may be no electricity, water or heating due to unpaid bills, with inevitable repercussions on children's health conditions.

In the historical centre of Sassari, one of the most critical things is housing, because no houses are rented, but rather closets or garages or even warehouses used as flats whose rent goes from 450 to 500 euro even if they are in a state of absolute degradation. We came across places where there were holes so big that rats got in and ate the kids' blankets.

(Caritas service operator, Sassari)

Very often we also find families who choose not to pay their bills because they are in dire straits, but this triggers the mechanism of not having hot water and not being able to do many things for younger children.

(Save the Children project operator, Rome)

Tools to tackle poverty

The Single and Universal Allowance is mentioned by operators as an important but not sufficient tool for families in poverty. The additional resources granted in some regional contexts (e.g. the measure "Al nido con la Regione" in Emilia-Romagna and the "dote famiglia" in Friuli-Venezia Giulia) are therefore considered fundamental to complement the single allowance.

However, the amounts of both the Single and Universal Allowance and local monetary supports are considered insufficient. Moreover, not all families apply for them, either because they are not aware or because they do not qualify for them.

In Friuli-Venezia Giulia we have the famous "dote famiglia" (family allowance), which is a contribution aimed at underage children to encourage the use of educational, recreational and leisure services and to reconcile family and working life... so, for example, there is the possibility of using it for after-school care, baby-sitting, cultural and tourist services. However, unfortunately, it is often not known to families who therefore do not apply for it. It is a pity because it would really permit, for example, one's child to play a sport, which is not within everyone's reach. Sport, in my opinion, is essential from the very first years of a child's life.

(Caritas service operator, Trieste)

These instruments alone, therefore, are not enough to support families emerge from a condition of poverty that is often passed on from generation to generation. In particular, the interviewees highlight two critical issues. First, regional forms of support contribute to increasing inequalities: depending on the context in which you live, you may or may not have certain instruments at your disposal. Second, even in the presence of economic aid, families need support, both in accessing and using these instruments.

According to the operators interviewed, to help poor families it is necessary to act on several fronts, especially through a universal offer of quality social and health services. Often, however, bureaucratic delays (e.g. for specialist visits) and stringent requirements (e.g. for access to nursery schools and public housing) do not facilitate access to services, which are scarce and/or inadequate. These critical

issues further fuel the economic, social, health and housing vulnerabilities of families and their children.

One of the critical issues concerns the way to enrol children, because the application is only made online. So, if a family is not assisted by services like ours, they are cut off, that is, they don't know what to do. And then we stress the inadequacy of the places available and also the criteria underlying the rankings: obviously those families in which both parents work have a higher score, but if a mother who has left the labour market wants to start working again, she can't, as her child has not made it onto the rankings and she would not know how else to make arrangements, because she does not have an informal or family support network, for example.

(Save The Children project operator, Naples)

What is needed, therefore, are more services, which are more efficient and of various kinds, capable of supporting families on several fronts: from child rearing, to reconciling family and work life, to health care, to support in vocational training and job search. In particular, according to some operators, it is crucial to invest in active labour policies, supporting families, especially women, in acquiring skills and job placement, through networking between social services, employment centres and temp agencies, with a specific focus on reconciling family life and work.

Policies to support families are still very fragile, other types of aid would be needed. The moment a child is born, what the family needs is a reinforcement of more direct actions with respect to all the policies that have to do with housing and work. (...) There are small experiments going on: one has started here in Milan, it is called 'Lavoro a chilometro zero' (zero-kilometre work). The aim of these projects is to help mothers and fathers find a job very close to home.

This is to be able to reduce travel time, i.e. to return home and go out in the morning, so as to make it compatible with possibly accompanying children to educational services, and to make schedules, especially for mothers, compatible with family care work.

(Save the Children project operator, Milan)

The network proves to be fundamental in assisting families to access services, both in terms of information and concrete support in encouraging people's empowerment:

Some interesting experiments, that are now just about fully operational, are food emporiums where families can do their shopping. Here, spending does not have a value expressed in euros, but in points. Families are sent to the emporiums and going shopping takes on an educational meaning, it is not just picking up the food parcel, where you are not the one to choose. So, you reduce waste and choose what can be useful for your family. For example, such a measure in my opinion should replace the Purchasing Card - the social card that is given by the National Social Security Institute - which allows you to buy goods. It may be fine for nappies and clothes, but where food is concerned it would perhaps make more sense to incentivise the experiences of food emporiums. Also because food emporiums that work in this way, with the possibility of choosing products, often also offer food education meetings.

(Save the Children project operator, Milan)

Measures to support the youngest: a look across the border

With the introduction of the Single and Universal Allowance (AUU), Italy has taken an important step forward in terms of investing in safeguarding the rights of children and adolescents, guaranteeing a universalist minimum contribution (even if the criteria for foreign families are under scrutiny by the European Commission, which has opened an infringement procedure), with increases based on the family's economic condition. To safeguard the youngest children, starting with the Budget Law 2023, a 50% increase in the AUU was recognised for the minor's first year of life and for children between 1- and 3-years old belonging to families with three or more children. Families with children under the age of three can also apply for the nursery bonus to cover, at least in part, fees for attendance at public and licensed private nurseries and home care.

In the European landscape¹³¹, the focus on the 0-3 age group (in some cases 0-6 age group) has been gradually increasing, with the introduction of family income support measures in addition to the AUU, policies on access to early childhood education and care services, and forms of support for parenting and the reconciliation of family life and work.

In France, among the various measures to support the youngest children, there is - depending on income - a birth premium and an allowance for families with children up to the age of 3, aimed at supporting the expenses related to the child's maintenance and education. In addition, there is a contribution of a universal nature (prestation partagée d'éducation de l'enfant) designed to allow parents to suspend their work or reduce their working hours to take care of their child under 3. There are also contributions to cover the costs of babysitting, nursery and childcare services, which vary according to income, the number of children and the type of service chosen. Investment in early childhood services and the resources allocated to maternity wards and mother and child protection centres have been very important, as well as the creation of new perinatal psychiatry units. These measures, which are part of the 'First 1000 days' approach announced by the French government in 2020, also include the extension of paternity leave and taking care of the family from the first months of pregnancy, during which an interview must be scheduled to identify possible health problems of the minor or social fragility of the household. Parents are offered a customised course here, which also includes a home-visiting service.

Belgium, in addition to the Universal Child Allowance (until the age of 25), provides for a contribution paid upon the birth of a child (Birth Allowance) and a childcare allowance to help families to cover costs associated with pre-school or out-of-school care (e.g. nursery, babysitting, day care centres or other childcare services).

In Austria, recipients of the Universal Allowance receive both a tax credit and financial support (Kinderbetreuungsgeld), which is increased for low-income families and is aimed at supporting care-related expenses. To receive this latter contribution, the expectant mother is required to undergo five examinations during pregnancy and the baby to undergo five paediatric examinations/visits after birth.

Germany, which, together with the Single and Universal Allowance equal for all minors, provides an additional allowance for families in poverty, pays special attention to parenting by recognising not only a 14-month parental leave that can be taken by both parents - whether

¹³¹ The information gathered here, updated to March 2024, is not intended to be exhaustive of the child support measures taken in the different countries considered. For more in-depth information and updates, see the ministerial websites of individual countries and the information shared by EU agencies.

employed, self-employed, public or private - but also an income support contribution in cases where they do not work or are employed part-time (Elterngeld). Younger children are granted the right to access nursery or early childhood care services from the age of one; the municipalities are obliged to provide these services and in several regions there is partial coverage of the costs or no charge at all for day-care centres, nurseries or private facilities for children under the age of 6.

In Finland, in addition to the Universal Child Allowance (the amount of which does not depend on income), there is a maternity grant, i.e. a cash benefit or, alternatively, a 'maternity package' containing baby clothes and childcare products. In addition, parental leave of 160 days for both parents is combined with the progressive cost of the municipal daycare centre, which varies according to family income, and an allowance for family care at home in the case of minors under the age of 3 who have not found a place at the municipal daycare centre, increased if the family is socio-economically disadvantaged.

In the UK, Scotland has implemented the Best Start Grant programme, which aims to provide financial support to families with young children, and the Baby Box, a kit containing essential items for infants up to 6 months, such as clothes, nappies and teething equipment. To foster early learning and prevent educational poverty, the Bookbug programme consisting of donating books, free reading sessions in local libraries, online resources and personal home services to families with young children, was implemented. Similarly, Wales has placed a strong focus on early childhood by implementing the Flying Start programme which aims to provide additional targeted support to children aged 0-3 in areas declared as severely deprived. Services offered include wider coverage of health visits, access to parenting support programmes, play and language sessions and free childcare for infants aged 2 to 3 years.

In 2019, neighbouring Ireland launched the First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-28) Plan, which includes parenting support measures for a better balance of care and work, new leave arrangements and more organisational flexibility at work. Efforts are also being made to promote healthy lifestyles with the support of specialised teams and to ensure increasing accessibility to the care system and early childhood education services.

Despite the commitment of many countries in supporting children, including through the measures highlighted here, the multidimensionality of child poverty means that this still remains a current challenge in the European framework.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though some steps forward have been taken in recent years (such as the introduction of the Single and Universal Allowance or investments in nursery facilities), the data on the increase in absolute child poverty as well as the evidence emerging from this research mark the urgency of a large-scale intervention in favour of children and adolescents.

Intervening to prevent and tackle child poverty - in line with UN Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal No. 1 - is indispensable to guarantee all children the right to aspire to and freely build their own future.

It is crucial that this becomes a priority objective in the Italian political agenda, through a national strategy capable of integrating education, health, labour and housing policies, in accordance with an approach that focuses on children's rights.

This intervention must necessarily start from an analysis of the serious inequalities currently present in our country and aim to overcome them.

First of all, the data on child poverty show deep generational inequalities: minors in Italy are the poorest compared to the rest of the population (with a gap of 7 percentage points against them compared to the over-65s) and they are also the age group that receives the least investment in social spending. Italy is historically one of the European countries that invests the least on child and family support, with social spending allocated to them amounting to only 1.4 % of GDP in 2022¹³².

Rebalancing this situation does not require piecemeal, one-off interventions, but a long-term strategy combined with a clear investment of resources. What is needed is a progressive commitment to children and adolescents becoming the determinant of the next budgetary manoeuvres and transparent monitoring (Child Budgeting)¹³³.

The data on child poverty highlight serious territorial inequalities: in the areas where child poverty is highest, the services are also 'poorer'. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the educational and social offer starting from the most disadvantaged contexts. Without such a preventive investment - and without the prior definition and adequate allocation of resources for the Basic Levels of Services - the implementation of differentiated autonomy would risk producing a further accentuation and chronicization of inequalities.

Finally, one of the clearest findings of this research concerns the difficulty experienced by adolescent girls in imagining a decent and fulfilling working future: a gender 'gap' clearly affecting what girls believe they can realistically achieve compared to their peers. It is essential to take this difference in expectations seriously into consideration and to define a strategy for girls, from childhood onwards, to accompany them in realising their aspirations, starting with the removal of gender stereotypes and ending with supporting young women's career paths.

In view of the medium-term Fiscal-Structural Plan to be approved by 20 September 2024, required by the new Stability and Growth Pact, Italy should define a medium-term investment path for children and adolescents based on an organic reform design to tackle inequalities and child poverty in its different dimensions (material, educational, health).

¹³² Eurostat, *Government expenditure on social protection*, 29 February 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Government_expenditure_on_social_protection

¹³³ On this topic, see the requests submitted by the CRC Group in the 12th CRC Report, <https://gruppocrc.net/documento/12-rapporto-crc/>

Investment in children and adolescents should include, inter alia:

- The definition of Basic Levels of Services (LEP) in matters relating to children and adolescents and their adequate financing, overcoming the principle of "historical expenditure" and the constraint of invariance of expenditure. In particular, the establishment of a specific LEP on school canteens is recommended, to guarantee the offer of one healthy meal a day at primary school, in accordance with the provisions of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Child Guarantee¹³⁴ and on the extension of full-time education starting from primary school¹³⁵. In light of the research evidence, the establishment of a specific LEP is also recommended for the provision of textbooks in all school cycles, as it is the implementation of the LEP for the right to university education¹³⁶.
- The establishment of a National Fund to support the aspirations of children and adolescents aimed at ensuring an educational allowance to be used for the provision of cultural, sports, recreational and personal development services. The allowance, as part of a proximity and network intervention between services and organisations in the territory, may take the form of the provision of a package of goods and services, defined with the participation of minors and their parents, aimed at supporting educational experiences and customised training for children and adolescents (0-17 years old) in a condition of socio-economic fragility, belonging to households benefiting from income support measures or meeting equivalent requirements. It is recommended that the Fund, initially set up on an experimental basis¹³⁷ as a contribution in favour of the Social Welfare Divisions (Ambiti Territoriali Sociali), becomes a structural measure envisaged in the State budget to support the aspirations of children and adolescents.
- The extension to all minors aged between 0 and 3 (i.e. the age group most affected by poverty) of the 50% increase in the Single and Universal Allowance, regardless of the Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE) threshold and the number of children in the household¹³⁸, thus ensuring additional and continuous support to families to meet early childhood expenses and guarantee better opportunities for growth¹³⁹.

These proposals, together with many others that have long been put forward by networks and organisations safeguarding the rights of minors (including Gruppo CRC, Alleanza per l'Infanzia,

¹³⁴ Offering the canteen service free of charge would entail a cost, at a national level, ranging from 243 million euros per year to more than 2 billion per year, depending on whether the service is offered free of charge to 10% or to all primary school pupils. See *Save the Children e Osservatorio CPI, Mense scolastiche: un servizio essenziale per ridurre le disuguaglianze. Policy paper, 2023.*

¹³⁵ To ensure full-time education in all primary schools, *Save the Children* estimated a cost of just over 1.4 billion euros annually. See *Save the Children, Alla ricerca del tempo perduto, 2022*

¹³⁶ As provided for in the Legislative Decree 68/2012, according to which the LEP and the related standard requirements for the right to university study should be determined by a joint decree of the Ministry of Universities and Research and the Ministry of the Economy and Finance based on a survey aimed at establishing the standard cost of maintaining studies.

¹³⁷ To guarantee an annual allowance of EUR 500 to 3 million children and adolescents belonging to family units with an Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE) below EUR 9,360, the Fund should provide EUR 1.5 billion.

¹³⁸ The Budget Law 2023 (Law No. 197/2022) introduced a 50% increase in the Single and Universal Allowance for each child under 1 year of age and for children between 1 and 3 years of age belonging to large households, with 3 or more children, for Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE) levels up to EUR 40,000 per year (revalued annually pursuant to paragraph 11 of Legislative Decree Law No. 230 of 29 December 2021).

¹³⁹ To implement this measure, an annual cost of about 1.4 billion euro per year is estimated, to be provided for permanently in the public budget. Considering that in 2023 the planned surcharges have already increased the expenditure for the AUU by about 480 million euro (the cost of the surcharge to all 0-year-old children was 363.8 million euro for about 400 thousand beneficiaries and the cost of the surcharge to children aged 1 to 3 of large families with an Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE) limit of 43,240 euro was 116.8 million euro for 107 thousand beneficiaries), the extension of these two measures already introduced in 2023 to all 0-3-year-old children would entail a cost of about 920 million euro.

Alleanza contro la povertà, EducAzioni, ASviS and others) should find a place in a framework of structural measures.

It is necessary to supplement the actions designed to meet children's growth needs with those aimed at fostering employment, particularly for women, tackling precariousness and poorly paid work, supporting family income, facilitating work-life balance, guaranteeing the right to housing and strengthening territorial welfare networks.

A combination of such policies, appropriately placed in the national context and taking into account the social, economic and territorial disparities that need to be redressed, requires a strong political will and a coordinated effort by the government and institutions at all levels, as well as the productive sector and civil society, to maximise their impact and ensure not only the right to aspire, but also concrete opportunities to build a better future for all children and teenagers in our country.

Integrated policies to prevent and tackle child poverty in all its forms

The multidimensional nature of child poverty requires an integrated approach, combining policies for children and their families, particularly those living in the most deprived conditions. These policies must have as their starting point the data, the concrete reading of reality, the experiences in daily life and within the territories. It is therefore essential to set up a national system for recording data on childhood and adolescence, collected at the micro-territorial level and updated on a yearly basis, which aim to measure the indicators that most affect the economic and social vulnerability of minors from a multidimensional perspective. It is also important to identify the priority territories for intervention and to plan the most efficient and effective actions to prevent and tackle child poverty. Last but not least, it is crucial to have clear and timely data on how much Italy invests in childhood and adolescence.

Among the requests that we consider fundamental to prevent and tackle child poverty, we would like to mention:

Actions needed for children in the 0-3 age group

- To invest in services dedicated to the first thousand days of life, ensuring multidimensional support for families (health, social, psychological, etc.) and for parenthood, from pregnancy onwards, for both parents. It is also essential to guarantee the right to basic paediatric care, with the assignment of a family paediatrician at birth, and to fully implement the territorial health reform, with the activation of Community Homes (Decree 77/2022).
- To activate a network of quality nursery facilities, evenly distributed at territorial level, to achieve by 2027 the Basic Levels of Services for at least 33% of the children in each municipality, and 45% by 2030 as envisaged by the Barcelona Goals¹⁴⁰.

¹⁴⁰ It should be noted that the National Action Plan for Child Guarantee (NAPGI), a policy document drafted in compliance with the Child Guarantee Recommendation, calls for the 50% target: "to develop initiatives to extend the supply of full-time education places in childcare services towards exceeding the 33% target and towards the trend of 50% for new nurseries and "spring sections", developing equitable and sustainable accessibility in the 0-3 age group and taking action for the gradual cancellation of fees for attendance at nurseries, as indicated in Actions 1 and 2 of the 5th Action Plan." (own translation).

- To make access conditions compatible with the spending potential of families, to guarantee free access for families in poverty, and a sufficient number of adequately trained education professionals to cover the growing need for resources¹⁴¹.
- To strengthen the Integrated 0-6 years System throughout the national territory by encouraging the presence of Childhood Poles - as envisaged by Legislative Decree 65/2017 - and guaranteeing adequate quality standards also through the training of the professionals required to cover the needs.

Actions needed to tackle material and educational poverty

- To activate 'high density educational areas' in the most deprived suburbs and inner areas, where a decisive strengthening of the educational, scholastic and extra-scholastic offer must be promoted, through the definition of educational opportunities' standards and rights (for the fruition of cultural, sporting, social, environmental and service access opportunities)¹⁴².

Actions needed to support the capacity to aspire

- To promote, based on existing good practices, the participation of children and adolescents in decision-making processes at all levels, through the provision of meeting spaces and structured forms of listening, consultation and co-planning, to give voice to their protagonism.
- To fully implement the educational guidance reform¹⁴³ in schools of every level, by activating the role of tutor teachers and guidance teachers also in middle schools and promoting guidance and mentoring paths to accompany students towards conscious and motivated choices. It is important for this investment to become structural, beyond the NRRP deadline, to ensure the continuity of the orientation pathways.
- To set up a free psychological service in schools to ensure ongoing support and networking with local social and health services for students and the entire school community.
- To increase and stabilise the fund for educational trips and visits, introduced by Directive no. 6/2023, as supplemented by Directives 26/2023 and 6/2024, extending the possibility of applying to primary and middle school students.
- To design, within the framework of active employment policies aimed at young people, a detailed outreach strategy, which envisages the strengthening of networking between the public and private sectors (employment centres, training and vocational system, social and health services, school and out-of-school services, local productive sector and universities/tertiary education institutions), new ways of involving NEET youngsters (e.g. through socio-educational activities)¹⁴⁴, starting from collaboration with the Third Sector and the creation of educating communities. In particular, we recommend planning specific actions aimed at young girls to tackle the gender gap in their expectations.

¹⁴¹ See the elaborations on the topic produced by Alleanza per l'Infanzia, www.alleanzainfanzia.it

¹⁴² This is the direction taken by the initiative promoted by the Fund to tackle child educational poverty, which will allocate 50 million euro to create and support the first 15 'strategic socio-educational areas' in the most socially vulnerable areas of Italy, <https://conibambini.org/2024/04/10/poverta-educativa-nuova-iniziativa-nei-15-quartieri-piu-vulnerabili/>

¹⁴³ Reform 1.4 Mission 4 NRRP.

¹⁴⁴ As called for in the 'strengthened' Youth Guarantee, in the National Youth, Women and Work Programme 2021-2027, in synergy with Mission 5 of the NRP and its transversal priorities dedicated to youth and gender equality.

APPENDIX - Adolescents' poverty and aspirations questionnaire

The questionnaire, addressed to 15–16-year-old boys and girls, was designed based on several other national, European and international surveys and consists of multiple sections with specific questions aimed at delving into different topics.

- **Demographic information and the socio-economic and cultural situation of the household**

This segment collects standard information, used by other surveys to understand the socio-economic and cultural level of households (e.g. the Socio-Economic and Cultural Index - ESCS, used by INVALSI).

- **The environment in which teenagers live**

This series of questions aims to examine the surrounding environment and resources available in the neighbourhood or area where the interviewed boys and girls live. It is based on a survey on the 'territorial' nature of deprivation conducted by Save the Children¹⁴⁵ using various surveys conducted by Istat, as well as ad hoc surveys conducted by Eurostat¹⁴⁶ and OECD¹⁴⁷ on subjective well-being.

- **The educational path**

This section explores the school experiences of adolescents, considering attendance at school, any interruptions or failures. The questions reflect the indicators generally used to measure school-related phenomena, for example by the European Union¹⁴⁸ or, at national level, by INVALSI¹⁴⁹.

- **Material deprivation**

There are also some questions concerning the children's material condition which specifically investigate the availability of material resources and the quality of living spaces. The indicators of the EU-SILC surveys¹⁵⁰ were adopted, but their wording, originally designed for an adult audience, was adapted for adolescent respondents.

- **Perceived poverty and socio-emotional deprivation**

This section examines adolescents' perceptions of their economic situation, compared with those of their friends, as well as the possible effects of deprivation on their emotional and social well-being. These questions are inspired by studies on perceived poverty and socio-emotional well-being conducted in particular in Anglo-Saxon countries¹⁵¹, but also by the recent survey launched by Istat - the first in Italy - carried out directly with minors (aged between 11 and 19)¹⁵².

¹⁴⁵ Save the Children, *Fare spazio alla crescita*, 2023.

¹⁴⁶ European Commission - Eurostat, *2013 EU-SILC Module on Wellbeing. Assessment of the implementation*, 2013.

¹⁴⁷ OECD, *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, 2013.

¹⁴⁸ European Commission, *Early school leaving*, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/school-education/early-school-leaving>

¹⁴⁹ Invalsiopen, *La dispersione implicita nelle Prove INVALSI 2022*, 15/07/2022, <https://www.invalsiopen.it/dispersione-implicita-prove-invalsi-2022/>

¹⁵⁰ Guio A.C., Gordon D., Marlier E., Najera H., Pomati, M., *Towards an EU measure of child deprivation*, *Child Ind Res*, 11, 835-860, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-017-9491-6>

¹⁵¹ Keith Kintrea K., St Clair R., and Houston H., *How poverty affects people's decision-making processes*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2011; Sheehy-Skeffington J. and Rea J., *The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017.

¹⁵² Istat, *Indagine su bambini e ragazzi: comportamenti, atteggiamenti e progetti futuri*, 2024

- **Future aspirations and expectations**

This section explores young people's aspirations and expectations for the future, including educational and professional, family and relational goals, through questions inspired by reports published by European and international institutions, in particular the European Commission¹⁵³, ILO¹⁵⁴, OECD¹⁵⁵, as well as by the new Istat survey¹⁵⁶ carried out with adolescents.

- **Challenges for the future and proposals to the institutions**

Finally, the opinions of boys and girls were collected on the main challenges their generation will face and how public institutions could help those living in difficult economic situations, especially focusing on policies concerning school, work and economic support.

¹⁵³ Cassio L.G., Blasko Z. and Szczepanikova A., *Poverty and mindsets. How poverty and exclusion over generations affect aspirations, hopes and decisions and how to address it*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, doi:10.2760/472292

¹⁵⁴ Gardiner D. and Goedhuys M., *Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work. A Review of the Literature and Evidence*, ILO, 2020.

¹⁵⁵ OECD, *Youth Aspirations and the Reality of Jobs in Developing Countries*, 2017; OECD Programme for International Student Assessment.

¹⁵⁶ Istat, *Indagine su bambini e ragazzi: comportamenti, atteggiamenti e progetti futuri*, 2024

QUESTIONNAIRE

*For questions concerning parents, answer according to the information available to you. In the case of a single-parent household, answer "Don't know" for questions addressed to the second parent. In the case of a family with two mothers or two fathers, answer the questions considering mother/father as parent 1/parent 2.

CURRENT SITUATION

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Which region do you live in?

(List of all Italian regions)

2. Which province do you live in?

(List of all provinces by region)

3. Which municipality do you live in?

(List of all municipalities by province)

4. How would you define yourself?

- Male
- Female
- Other
- I don't know

5. How old are you?

(Insert number)

6. Where were you born?

- Italy
- Other Country (select from list)

7. Do you have Italian citizenship?

- Yes
- No

8. Where were your parents born?

MOTHER

- Italy
- Other Country (select from list)
- I don't know

FATHER

- Italy
- Other Country (select from list)
- I don't know

YOUR FAMILY**9. What is the highest educational qualification held by your parents?**

MOTHER

- No educational qualification
- Primary school leaving certificate
- Middle school diploma
- Secondary school diploma
- Degree
- I don't know

FATHER

- No educational qualification
- Primary school leaving certificate
- Middle school diploma
- Secondary school diploma
- Degree
- I don't know

10. What do your parents currently do?

MOTHER

- Works full-time (works all day)
- Works part-time (works half-day)
- She only works occasionally
- Unemployed
- Takes care of the house
- She's retired
- I don't know
- Other

FATHER

- Works full-time (works all day)
- Works part-time (works half-day)
- He only works occasionally
- Unemployed
- Takes care of the house
- He's retired
- I don't know
- Other

11. How many people live in your home?

- Two
- Three
- Four
- More than four

12. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

(Insert number)

13. Do both your parents live with you?

- Yes (go to question no. 15)
- No (go to question no. 14)

14. Who do you live with?

- I live with my mother
- I live with my father
- I sometimes live with my mother and sometimes with my father
- I live with my grandparents (one or both)
- I live with a relative
- I live with another responsible adult
- I live in a foster home

THE SCHOOL**15. Are you enrolled in school?**

- Yes (go to questions no. 16-17-18 and skip no. 19)
- No (go to question no. 19)

16. Which province is your school located in?

(List of provinces in the sample)

17. Which municipality is your school located in?

(List of municipalities in the sample)

18. Which is your school?

(List of schools in the sample)

19. If you don't attend school, what do you do?

- I work
- I look for a job
- I attend a training course
- I do nothing

20. Have you ever:

You can give more than one answer

- Failed once
- Failed several times
- Stopped going to school for more than a month
- Changed school
- None of the above

AT HOME**21. At home:**

Answer according to how much you agree with each statement

	TOTALLY AGREE	AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	TOTALLY DISAGREE
I have a quiet place where I can study/read	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a desk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a smartphone that I also use to study	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a tablet/PC that I can use when I need to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a fast Internet connection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I/my family have/has subscriptions to multimedia services and paid apps (e.g. Netflix)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. How many books (excluding schoolbooks) are there in your home approximately?

- 0-10
- 11-25
- 26-100
- 101-200
- More than 200

23. How would you define your household's current total income?

High income refers to a household that has a regular economic income (e.g. a good salary) sufficient to easily meet all necessary expenses (e.g. utility bills, groceries, etc.) and leisure time expenses (e.g. holidays, cinema, restaurant, etc.). Low income refers to a household that does not have sufficient regular economic income to easily meet at least all necessary expenses.

- Very high income
- Fairly high income
- Average income
- Fairly low income
- Very low income

THE PLACE YOU LIVE IN

24. Where do you live in?

- Large city (more than 250,000 inhabitants)
- Medium-sized city (between 5,000 and 250,000 inhabitants)
- Small municipality (less than 5,000 inhabitants)

25. In the place I live in:

Answer according to how much you agree with each statement

	TOTALLY AGREE	AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	TOTALLY DISAGREE	DON'T KNOW
I feel safe going out at night alone	<input type="radio"/>				
The pavements/streets are clean, well maintained	<input type="radio"/>				
There are green areas (parks, gardens, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>				
There are green areas but they are not maintained (high grass, few trees/plants, etc.).	<input type="radio"/>				
Shops are closing down due to the economic crisis	<input type="radio"/>				
There are job opportunities	<input type="radio"/>				
There are gyms or places equipped for sports and accessible to people living in the neighbourhood	<input type="radio"/>				
There is a shopping centre where we usually meet up with friends	<input type="radio"/>				
There are spaces where you can get together, make music, play sports, organise initiatives for free or at affordable prices	<input type="radio"/>				
There is a public library you can easily access	<input type="radio"/>				
There is a cinema	<input type="radio"/>				
It is easy to travel by public transport from the place I live in to other municipalities or areas of the city	<input type="radio"/>				

AMONG FRIENDS**26. In the group of friends:**

Answer according to how much you agree with each statement

	TOTALLY AGREE	AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	TOTALLY DISAGREE
It may happen to a friend of mine to come home hungry, but have nothing to eat in the fridge because his/her parents have no money for groceries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It may happen to a friend of mine to feel cold at home because there is no heating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It may happen to a friend of mine that he/she cannot buy new shoes even though he/she needs them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It may happen to a friend of mine that he/she does not go out with friends because he/she does not have money for a gift/movie/food	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It may happen that a friend of mine does not invite friends home because he/she can't offer them anything	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It may happen to a friend of mine to give up sports courses because they are too expensive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
One/some of my friends was/were excluded from the group because they did not have enough money and therefore could not afford to go out with us	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
One/some of my friends had to give up the school trip because their parents could not afford it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Among the teenagers I know, at least one dropped out of school to support his/her family economically	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

WITHIN THE FAMILY**27. Within the family:**

Answer according to how much you agree with each statement

	TOTALLY AGREE	AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	TOTALLY DISAGREE
My parents have no financial difficulties in letting me participate in school trips	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents have no financial difficulties in taking the family on holiday for several days	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents find it difficult to pay for food, clothes or utility bills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This year I started my school/training course having already purchased all the needed schoolbooks/material at the beginning of the year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It may happen that I come home hungry, but find nothing to eat in the fridge because my parents have no money for groceries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I may happen that I feel cold because there is no heating at home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It may happen that I can't buy new shoes even though I need them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It may happen that I don't go out because I don't have money for a gift/cinema/food	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It may happen that I do not invite friends home because I have nothing to offer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I may have to give up sports courses because they are too expensive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It may happen that I can't take language courses because they are too expensive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

28. It can happen that I see my parents worried about too many expenses

- Always
- Often
- Rarely
- Never

29. My parents had to ask relatives or friends for financial help or borrow money to cover our family's essential expenses (e.g. utility bills, groceries, etc.).

- Always
- Often
- Rarely
- Never

30. Do you try to help your parents cope with the expenses?

- Yes (go to question no. 31)
- No (go to question no. 32)

31. If so, how?

You can give more than one answer

- Doing some work to contribute to my family's expenses
- Doing some work to cover my own expenses without burdening my family
- Trying to save money and not asking my parents for money for non-essential expenses
- I borrow or I'm given what I need as a gift from friends/acquaintances

32. My parents give me some money

- Regularly (once a week or a month)
- When I need it
- Every time I ask for it
- Very rarely
- Never

MY FUTURE

33. When I think about the future, as an adult, the feeling I most often have is:

- Hope
- Mistrust
- Anxiety
- Happiness
- Fear
- Enthusiasm
- I don't think about it

34. In the future:

Answer according to how much you agree with each statement. If the question does not directly concern you, answer "totally disagree" (e.g.: if your country of origin is Italy, answer "totally disagree" to the statement "I wish to return to my home country").

	TOTALLY AGREE	AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	TOTALLY DISAGREE
I will be able to do what I desire	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will be able to do what I feel best suited to do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will definitely go to university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to go to university but I am not sure I can afford it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will follow vocational courses to get started in the job market	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will not finish school but will go straight to work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am afraid that even if I get a job, I will not be able to earn enough money	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am afraid I will not be able to find a decent job, where I am treated well and not exploited	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will do a job I like and will be able to financially support myself and my family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will do a job that will leave me enough free time to pursue my passions and interests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will work and spend my free time volunteering and in civic engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wish to return to my home country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

35. What level of education do you think you will reach?

- No educational qualification
- Primary school leaving certificate
- Middle school diploma
- Secondary school diploma
- Degree
- I don't know

36. What would you like for yourself as an adult?

Give a rating from 1 = less important to 5 = more important.

	1 (=less important)	2	3	4	5 (=more important)
Attending university and obtaining a degree	<input type="radio"/>				
Having a steady job	<input type="radio"/>				
Doing a job that does not endanger my physical or mental health	<input type="radio"/>				
Doing a job that allows me to have free time and spend quality time with my family or friends	<input type="radio"/>				
Doing a gratifying and enjoyable job	<input type="radio"/>				
Earning enough money to be able to provide for my (and my family's) material needs	<input type="radio"/>				
Having children and being a good parent	<input type="radio"/>				
Having a family where people love, talk to and understand each other	<input type="radio"/>				
Having good friends and the opportunity to spend time with them	<input type="radio"/>				
Having a comfortable home	<input type="radio"/>				
Living in another municipality/city in Italy	<input type="radio"/>				
Living in another country (outside Italy)	<input type="radio"/>				

37. Do you think that in the future your economic condition will be:

- Better than that of your parents
- The same as your parents'
- Worse than your parents'
- I do not ask myself this question

38. When you think about your future, what do you think are the main challenges your generation will have to face?

Answer according to how much you agree with each statement

TOTALLY AGREE - AGREE - SLIGHTLY AGREE - TOTALLY DISAGREE

	TOTALLY AGREE	AGREE	SLIGHTLY AGREE	TOTALLY DISAGREE
Falling birth rates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Climate crises	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Global conflicts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Economic inequalities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Migrations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Artificial Intelligence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discrimination and violence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Economic crisis and impoverishment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Loneliness and psychological distress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (<i>please specify</i>)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

INSTITUTIONS

39. In your opinion, a boy/girl living in a family in economic difficulties in Italy today:

- If he/she is determined, will have the same opportunities as everyone else and will be able to achieve his/her goals
- He/she will have to face many obstacles to keep up with other young people who are not in financial difficulties
- He/she will have to resign him/herself to the idea of doing what the economic conditions of his/her family permit

40. Are you confident that public institutions can help young people in economic difficulties to overcome this condition?

- Totally agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Totally disagree

41. In your opinion, how could public institutions help young people in economic difficulties to overcome this condition?

Give a rating from 1 = less important to 5 = more important.

	1 (=less important)	2	3	4	5 (=more important)
Securing a job once the boys/girls have finished their studies	<input type="radio"/>				
Ensuring schoolbooks, tablets and school/training courses materials free of charge to all minors	<input type="radio"/>				
Financially supporting young people so that they can continue their studies	<input type="radio"/>				
Financially supporting young people so that they can start a job	<input type="radio"/>				
Creating more opportunities for young people to attend professional training courses	<input type="radio"/>				
Ensuring that boys and girls can attend sport courses and arts/cultural activities for free	<input type="radio"/>				
Ensuring that all students can attend periods of study and/or apprenticeship abroad	<input type="radio"/>				
Ensuring free psychological support for all boys and girls	<input type="radio"/>				
Ensuring financial coverage of university expenses as well as accommodation costs for off-campus students and those who can't afford it	<input type="radio"/>				
Listening to the point of view of children and adolescents in all the political issues impacting them	<input type="radio"/>				
Financially supporting families who live in poverty	<input type="radio"/>				
Ensuring policies to support workers by guaranteeing an adequate pay and a stable contract.	<input type="radio"/>				

At Save the Children we want every child to have a future.

We work every day with devotion, determination and professionalism in Italy and the rest of the world to give children the opportunity to be born and grow up in good health, receive an education and be protected.

When an emergency strikes, we are among the first to arrive and among the last to leave. We collaborate with local service and partners to create a network that helps us to meet the needs of the minors, guarantee their rights and listen to their voices. We concretely improve the lives of millions of children, including those who are hardest to reach.

For over 100 years, Save the Children has been fighting to save children at risk and ensure their future.



Save the Children
RICERCA

Save the Children Italia - ETS
Piazza di San Francesco di Paola 9
00184 Roma - Italia
tel +39 06 480 70 01
fax +39 06 480 70 039
info.italia@savethechildren.org

www.savethechildren.it