

## Social Rights Monitor 2025 - Country Report - Italy



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## About SOLIDAR

SOLIDAR is a European network of progressive Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working to advance social justice through a just transition in Europe and worldwide. We represent over 50 member organisations based in 26 countries (19 of which are EU countries), among which national CSOs in Europe, as well as some non-EU and EU-wide organisations, working in one or more of our fields of activity.

The network is brought together by its shared values of solidarity, equality and participation.

SOLIDAR voices the concerns of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions by carrying out advocacy actions, project management and coordination, policy monitoring and awareness-raising across its different policy areas.

## What is the Social Rights Monitor (SRM)?

The Social Rights Monitor assesses the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) at national level from a civil society perspective. The EPSR – also known as the Social Pillar – is a set of 20 principles that guide the action of the European Union in the realm of social affairs and policies. In other words, it is intended to be a compass guiding the EU towards a more social Europe. For too many people, however, the implementation of these principles at national and EU level is not yet a reality.

Thanks to the contribution of our members and their networks on the ground (the National Strategy Groups), SOLIDAR monitors the extent to which social rights are respected, upheld and promoted for all people living in the EU. The Social Rights Monitor also investigates the health of civic space and social and civil dialogue in the EU, as well as the extent to which a just transition is being pursued. Therefore, the thematic areas covered by the Monitor are the following: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market; Fair working conditions; Social inclusion and protection; a Just transition; and Civic space. The first three correspond to the three chapters of the EPSR, while the last two have been added to give a fuller picture of social justice in Europe.

Thanks to first-hand data gathered by national civil society organisations, the Social Rights Monitor constitutes a direct channel of policy recommendations between the national level and EU policymakers. It thus amplifies the voices and needs of the most marginalised groups. The Monitor dedicates a section to “advocacy messages” which result from the national-level analyses in each thematic area and are addressed to EU policymakers.

Countries are assigned a score for each thematic area out of a maximum of 100 points. This makes immediately visible how each country is performing in each area and enables comparison with other countries. The numerical scores originate from the National Strategy Groups’ (NSGs) assessments of national developments related to social rights, civic space and just transition. Negative developments in an area result in lower scores. NSGs rate these developments for each country by replying to Linkert-scale questions. This means that the score of a country’s thematic area is given by adding up all the rates given to the questions concerning that thematic area and expressing the score out of 100. The overall score of a country is the average of the thematic areas scores. Further details on the questionnaire and data gathering are provided in the section “About: What is the process?”

Since the SRM score reflects the NSG’s assessment of changes—either improvements or deteriorations—in each of the five areas over the past 12 months, it does not represent the overall status of these dimensions in absolute terms. Instead, it highlights recent trends. For example, a country with a historically strong welfare state might receive a low score if recent reforms have significantly weakened social rights or pose a risk of doing so. This does not imply that the overall situation is poor, but rather that recent developments are cause for concern and may undermine social standards over time.

Therefore, the SRM should not be used to compare the overall situation of social rights across countries—official statistics are more appropriate for that purpose. Instead, it serves as a tool to track short-term national trends and to understand the perspectives of civil society organizations (CSOs) on these developments.

## What is the process?

The Social Rights Monitor is a tool that amplifies the voice of progressive civil society at national level. Its content is based on the inputs provided by the National Strategy Groups (NSGs) set up by SOLIDAR’s members and partners, which are active in the countries analysed. They consist of NGOs, associations, movements, trade unions, academia and thinktanks, ensuring that the perspective of civil society is mirrored in the Social Rights Monitor’s analysis. The Monitor reflects the experiences of these organisations, which are active on the ground, and the experiences are complemented by scientific data gathered through desk research.

The data elaborated in the Social Rights Monitor are gathered by SOLIDAR’s secretariat through a questionnaire distributed to the National Strategy Group Leaders (our national members) and completed with information produced by each group. From 2023, this questionnaire has been carried out online.

Based on the picture that emerges from the Monitor, SOLIDAR and the NSGs together devise policy recommendations for EU policymakers. These aim to make social rights, a healthy planet and an enabling, free, protected civic space a reality for all in Europe. The key recommendations stemming from the analysis are used as a basis for SOLIDAR's social affairs advocacy work.

The SRM is published every year, around the end of November/beginning of December and its findings cover the period going from June of the previous year to May of the year of the publication. This timeline is due to the fact that the NSGs submit their questionnaire by the end of May of the publication year.

## How do we use it?

SOLIDAR's main role as a European-level civil society network is as a bridge between EU institutions and their policies on the one hand and our progressive members working at the national level on the other. The Social Rights Monitor is a valuable tool to gather information from the ground and bring it to policymakers' attention. This ensures that the voices of the most neglected social groups are duly taken into account. For example, the SRM complements the European Semester, by providing a more-complete assessment of Member State policies. Regrettably, the Semester is still too focused on countries' economic and financial performances and does not provide sufficient guidance on upward social convergence in the European Union.

SOLIDAR disseminates the findings of the Social Rights Monitor in various ways, including through the Social Europe Conference, an annual event at which it is presented, and which also explores a topic of priority for social Europe. More generally, the Monitor is one of the main ways through which the SOLIDAR network presents its positions on social affairs, so its findings are mainstreamed throughout our advocacy work.

## Social Rights Monitor Overview

### SCORE: 34

Social rights in Italy have worsened overall, the National Strategy Group (NSG) reports. Gender inequality persists, with gender gaps in wages, employment and education and a significant increase in gender-based violence. The inclusion of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and ethnic minorities is a noticeably low priority for the far-right government. Instead, the government has adopted measures that actively hamper their integration as well as the work of CSOs and NGOs that aim to protect migrant rights. Youth unemployment remains high and is unlikely to decrease so long as crucial issues remain unaddressed. Regional differences are substantial in several areas: women's employment; the rate of youth not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET); precarious employment; and energy poverty. Lastly, Italy's civic space is in a worrying condition, as the right to protest is increasingly restricted and dissenting opinions are being criminalized.

The NSG for Italy was led by SOLIDAR's member **ARCI**.



## Equal Opportunities and Access to the Labour Market

### SCORE: 42

#### Gender equality

The NSG reports persistent gender equality in the labour market and education, as well as cases of gender-related violence. The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum indicates that Italy would need 123 years to achieve gender equality at current rates of progress.<sup>[1]</sup> Italy is ranked 85<sup>th</sup> out of 148 countries in the WEF global ranking, and sectors such as transport, logistics and finance are highlighted for especially pronounced gender gaps. This ranking is a slight improvement compared to 2024, when Italy was ranked 87<sup>th</sup> out of 148. Measures are needed to address the gender gap, as lower wages and harder career paths for women result in a lower quality of life. People with insufficient income often have to make hard choices, like giving up access to healthcare and essential goods. Low income can also lead to social exclusion, as it limits leisure activities and social relationships – or makes them impossible. Significant disparities persist between the North and the South of Italy. Over 28% of women live in regions where human rights have minimal protection.<sup>[2]</sup> Italy scored better than the WEF global ranking in the Global Gender Gap Report “Political Empowerment” category, ranking 64<sup>th</sup> out of 148, and women hold 48.7% of parliamentary seats and 33.3% of ministerial positions.<sup>[3]</sup> Yet the “Sex is Power” report points to significant, persistent barriers for women to attain decision-making positions.<sup>[4]</sup> Women represent 41.6% of elected officials on regional councils and 35% on municipal boards, with notable differences between regions.<sup>[5]</sup>

Slight improvements have been made in education, with studies showing that more women and girls are attaining higher educational qualifications.<sup>[6]</sup> Women often possess international experience and qualifications exceeding those of men. This is particularly the case for the 25-34 age group, where 38.5% of women have a tertiary degree compared to 25% of men.<sup>[7]</sup> The proportion of women graduating in scientific subjects in Italy is above the European average, but a gender gap persists in STEM fields and digital skills.<sup>[8]</sup>

The most critical gender gap concerns employment. Women represent over 40% of the workforce, yet less than 30% are in senior or managerial positions. Italy has Europe's highest gender gap in employment rates at 17.4 percentage points, nearly double the EU average (9.1).<sup>[9]</sup> This is confirmed by the 2024 Gender Equality Index by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).<sup>[10]</sup> Italy scored 65.5 out of 100 in the employment dimension, ranking last in the EU and significantly below the average of 74.<sup>[11]</sup> Italy also has the fourth widest gender pay gap, which has narrowed only slightly in recent years.<sup>[12]</sup> The pay gap persists in both the public and private sectors and has long-term implications such as significantly lower average pensions for women.<sup>[13]</sup> Another reason

women's pensions are lower is that the vast majority of part-time workers are women. Women are still largely expected to perform caregiving responsibilities: 56% of women with children younger than 12 spend at least five hours per day on childcare compared with only 26% of men. Many women therefore accept part-time jobs that they can combine work with care responsibilities. Women with children are far more likely not to be professionally active –the case with 48.2% of women with children in Southern Italy. The limited availability of childcare services impacts the relation between employment and fertility and has contributed to the continued decline in the birth rate, the NSG highlights.[14] Overall, the link between employment and fertility is a cause of discrimination against women. It leads to involuntary part-time contracts, occupational segregation and a motherhood penalty. Moreover, a lack of care services combines with societal and cultural expectations to force women into caregiving roles.

The gender gap persists in health and life expectancy. Though women in Italy have longer life expectancy than men, they often live in poorer health and are more likely to develop chronic illnesses. Female-centric healthcare, like sex-specific drug testing and research into female-specific diseases, receives little attention. Women's reproductive health is further jeopardised by attempts to weaken Law 194, which regulates access to abortion. This law also allows conscientious objection by medical professionals to carrying out abortions, which is still widely used in Italy. The Ministry of Health's reported that 63.4% of gynaecologists, 40.5% of anaesthesiologists, and 32.8% of non-medical staff invoked conscientious objection in 2024.[15] [16]

Women's needs and rights are also disregarded in the prison system. Women are a minority of the incarcerated population and find themselves in prisons mainly designed around male needs, characteristics and requirements.[17] Moreover, the Security Decree that entered into force in June 2025 allows for the incarceration of pregnant women and mothers of infants.[18] CSOs called for the removal of the relevant provision from the Bill and to maintain the mandatory deferral of sentences for these women until the child's first birthday.[19] See the Civic space chapter for further analysis.

Violence against women continued to increase. Out of 115 deaths related to gender-based violence in 2024, 98 were femicides. A further 53 attempted femicides were registered.[20] The majority of these femicides were committed by current or former partners and cohabitants. A total of 6 587 sexual violence crimes were reported in 2024, an increase of 6% from 2023, and reports increased 8%. Cases of intra-familial abuse and abuse among cohabitants rose 11% from 2023.[21] Stalking and domestic abuse against women by family members and cohabitants also rose: There was an 83.5% increase in valid calls to the national anti-violence and anti-stalking hotline.[22]

The ILGA's Rainbow Map ranks Italy 35th out of 49 countries in respect for LGBTQIA+ rights, the second successive drop in ranking.[23] One prominent issue is the lack of legal protection against discrimination and hate crimes, despite rising aggression against trans and non-binary people. A growing number of LGBTQIA+ students report bullying and discrimination at school.[24] Two deaths related to anti-trans violence were also registered, a suicide by a transgender man and a killing of a transgender person.[25] The Rainbow Report further indicates that LGBTQIA+-people do not feel safe or free to be themselves due to violence and discrimination. For example, 53% of homosexual couples report being afraid to hold hands in public, and 38% have experienced at least one incident of discrimination. This has led many members of the community to make plans to emigrate.

## **Inclusion of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and minorities**

Sea arrivals of migrants and refugees fell 58% in 2024, though there were still over 66,000 arrivals, the NSG reports.[26] However, the number of asylum applications increased 17% to 158 056.[27] Italy's migration policy continues to be influenced by the Italy-Albania protocol. In November, a civil court in Rome suspended the detention of seven Bangladeshi and Egyptian migrants who were being held in an Albanian return hub. As a consequence of this decision, the migrants in question have been returned to Italy. This case exemplifies the illegality of the Italy-Albania protocol, as upheld by the Italian courts themselves. The suspension follows from the court's decision to pose four preliminary questions to the Italy's Decree Law 158/2024, which classified Bangladesh and Egypt as "safe countries". The questions seek to verify the compatibility of the national protocol with EU law, as the latter takes precedent over national law.[28] In addition, the Decree Law 145/2024 came into effect in 2024. This law includes anti-exploitation measures, modifies entry procedures for foreign workers and strengthens quotas for categories including refugees. It also abolishes the tacit consent mechanism, under which an application was considered accepted by default if public authorities did not respond to it within the legal timeframe. This mechanism often worked to the benefit of applicants from high-risk countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The National Labor Inspectorate also reports that income checks on employers could not be carried out due to information not being uploaded to the SPI 2.0 information system.[29] The Security Bill, too, introduces stricter rules for migrants. It requires non-EU citizens to possess proof of legal residency to buy a SIM card.[30] This requirement has been criticized for its punitive nature and for potential violation of fundamental rights, as it restricts access to essential services.[31]

A positive development is the establishment of humanitarian corridors as part of the protocol signed at the end of 2023 by UNHCR Italy, several Ministries, ARCI (which leads the NSG) and others.[32] The protocol allows 1,500 refugees to be transferred to Italy over three years. In 2024, these corridors let 97 evacuees from Libya arrive in Italy.

## **Youth unemployment**

The youth unemployment rate remains high despite some improvements, the NSG reports. The general unemployment rate in 2024 fell by 3.4 percentage points to 6.5%, slightly above the European average of 5.9%. Youth (age 15-24) unemployment decreased markedly by 8.9 percentage points but remains very high at 20.3%.<sup>[33]</sup> The national NEET rate for the 15-29 age group is one of the highest in Europe at 15.2%. Factors such as gender cause notable differences, and the NEET rate for young women is 16.6%, compared to 13.8% for young men.<sup>[34]</sup> The largest and clearest differences are between the North of Italy, with a NEET rate of 9.8%, the Centre with 12.9% and the South with 23.3%. This geographical divide is reflected in the youth unemployment rate, which is 35% in the South (the Mezzogiorno), reaching over 40% in some Southern provinces.<sup>[35]</sup> The NSG pointed out several structural causes for the high unemployment rate, which need to be addressed to guarantee stable youth employment: fragmented school-to-work transitions, poor alignment between vocational education and regional labour needs, and the prevalence of short-term, low-quality jobs.<sup>[36]</sup>

The Italian government has adopted several measures to address youth unemployment. The “Decreto Coesione” supports economic and social development in less developed areas, focusing in particular on the South and inland areas.<sup>[37]</sup> Several national measures implement EU initiatives, such as those contained in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and DL 48/2023, which implements the Youth Guarantee.<sup>[38]</sup> However, these measures have only led to limited outcomes. Only 23% of public procurement procedures associated with the NRRP measures included binding clauses on the employment of young people.<sup>[39]</sup> In addition, many firms exploited derogations and undermined the measures.<sup>[40]</sup> The NSG emphasized that – to tackle youth marginalization and precarity, especially in the South – structural changes are needed to address the skills mismatch and fully enforce the youth quota.



## Fair Working Conditions

**SCORE: 31**

### Adequate wages

The NSG highlights two structural issues of the Italian labour market. The first is wage stagnation, especially amid ongoing inflation. Whilst incomes have risen, their increase has not been enough to make up for the loss in purchasing power due to inflation. For example, gross household income increased by 4.7% in 2023, yet inflation for all households rose by 5.9%.<sup>[41]</sup> Contractual wages rose by 4.7% between 2019 and 2024, yet inflation rose by 17.3%.<sup>[42]</sup> The NSG highlights that real wages in Italy kept decreasing and declined by 6 percentage points during the post-pandemic period due to the inflation shock.<sup>[43]</sup> Italy is the only advanced European economy in which real wages remain below 2013 levels. In the South, they have decreased 8%.<sup>[44]</sup>

The second structural issue is the large number of working poor and their high regional concentrations. In 2024, 10.2% of the Italian working population was at risk of poverty, 2% above the European average, according to the Eurostat in-work poverty (IWP) indicator.<sup>[45]</sup> Around 1.4 million, or 60%, of these working poor live in the South. An estimated 22% of workers in the South live in poverty, compared to just 6% in the North and Centre.<sup>[46]</sup> Despite narrowing, the gender pay gap remains substantial, the NSG reports. The gap was 22% in 2023, though there were important differences among sectors.<sup>[47]</sup> In manufacturing, women's daily wages are over 20% lower than those of men, while women in financial, insurance and business services earn up to 32.1% less than men. Causes of these gaps include economic and educational factors and cultural and social background, according to the NSG. Moreover, women in Italy are overrepresented in low-paid sectors such as care and underrepresented in high-paid, high-skill positions such as those requiring STEM competences.<sup>[48]</sup> The NSG highlights that both these structural issues require policy changes, including the introduction of a national or legal minimum wage. Currently, minimum wages are determined at sectoral level through collective bargaining, leading to socio-economic inequalities among workers in different sectors.<sup>[49]</sup>

### Job security

Job precariousness is both persistent and structural, especially in certain sectors and geographic regions, the NSG points out. The general employment rate improved by 2.1 percentage points from 2023. But one third of people aged 15 to 34 and one fourth of women report at least one form of job vulnerability, such as a fixed-term contract or involuntary part-time work. The under-35s have a

particularly high chance – 28.1% – and this part-time employment is involuntary for 5.9 of these women.[50] The percentage of women working involuntary part-time jobs is particularly high at 13.7%, and 4.3% of these women are on fixed-term contracts.[51]

The use of non-standard contracts is widespread. Most of the jobs created between 2020 and 2024 were in low-wage and low-productivity sectors like tourism, retail and personal services.[52] Workers in these sectors, especially young people and women, are prone to job instability and part-time arrangements, and they have limited access to training.[53] To remedy job precariousness, the Italian government introduced the Contratto di Espansione (expansion contract), which has been active since 2019. It allows companies with over 50 employees to offer early retirement packages to older employees in order to open up positions for younger workers.[54] Another government measure to increase labour adaptability was the reactivation of the “Fondo Nuove Competenze” (New Skills Fund), which subsidizes firm-led upskilling and reskilling programmes.[55]

While these developments are positive, the NSG stressed that structural issues require structural solutions. Employment protection mechanisms have been consistently undermined by fragmented policies and a lack of enforcement, in particular for platform workers and in the gig economy. In some sectors, precarious employment is a structural feature rather than a transitional measure, and young people and women are overrepresented in these sectors. As a consequence, both their labour and social protection suffer greatly.[56] The NSG calls for a more inclusive labour strategy that combines long-term reforms, stronger labour rights and regional investment.



## Social Inclusion and Protection

### SCORE: 27

#### Housing

Issues related to housing are a major problem in Italy, as it impacts 1.5 million families, or 6% of households. It mainly affects the lowest socio-economic strata who were not granted social housing (“edilizia residenziale pubblica”) and low-wage workers who cannot afford market rents. These workers are also particularly affected by the decrease in traditional lease contracts, by 7.2 percentage points to 10.5%, which shows landlords’ unwillingness to offer this type of contract.[57] This decrease substantially lowered the availability of affordable housing and resulted in a sharp increase in prices of 10.6% to a national average of €13.8 per square metre.[58] In addition, more households are in poverty, as both absolute and relative poverty have increased to levels that ISTAT (the national statistics institute) deems a poverty crisis.[59] The national average household expenditure on housing (including utilities) was 36% of net disposable income, according to ISTAT. However, 30% of disposable income is often indicated as the benchmark for housing costs to remain economically sustainable.[60] The International Union of Tenants identifies 25% as the proportion for housing to be considered affordable.[61] This situation is unsustainable: in 2023, there were over 30 000 evictions for non-payment, though this was a slight decrease from 2022.[62] The government reintroduced the Fund for Involuntary Non-Payment in the 2025 national budget.[63] However, the Fund’s €10 million allocation pales in comparison with the €50 million it had in 2021, and with the €330 million National Fund for Rental Housing support, which was financed only until 2022.

Housing is particularly problematic for some social groups. There are 900,000 students but just 46 193 beds available in dormitories, and this disparity heavily impacts the prices of private rooms.[64] Rents have risen in all student cities and now average €461 per month.[65] The Ministry of University and Research issued a decree (as a part of the NRRP measures mentioned earlier) aimed at financing the construction of 60 000 new beds, but the measure has had only limited impact, as applications for the financing covered only 11 623 beds. There is also a lack of adequate housing for the elderly. Over 2.7 million elderly people live in homes that would require infrastructure adaptation to make them suitable for reduced mobility, and 1.2 million of the elderly live in houses that are both inadequate and not possible to adapt. The NSG also stressed that housing for the elderly is not sufficiently addressed in public and does not receive adequate public funding.[66]

#### Poverty eradication

ISTAT officially confirmed the existence of a poverty crisis in Italy in a 2023 report, when more than 136 000 additional families were recorded living in poverty than in 2022.[67] Families with children are particularly vulnerable, and 1.3 million children lived in poverty in

2023. Data from 2022 already showed that a national average of 28.8% of children under 16 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with enormous regional differences: 46.6% in the South and Islands, 21.4% in the Centre and 18.3% in the North.[68] Furthermore, educational poverty among children remains a serious issue in Italy. Whilst data from the WeWorld Index shows that the child educational poverty rate has been decreasing since 2018, it also points out that this change was mainly due to a reduced drop-out rate and not structural interventions to tackle the education system's deeply rooted problems.[69] The poorest families have suffered particularly from inflation and the high cost of living, which have pushed many at-risk families into poverty or social exclusion. Once again, regional differences were notable: 23.1% of the national population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion but 39.8% of the population in the South.[70]

The economic circumstances of many families deteriorated for several reasons. The Reddito di Cittadinanza subsidy (citizenship income subsidy), which sought to combat poverty and covered around 5.3 million individuals over its four years of implementation was abolished in 2024. Only around 760 000 families reapplied for the Assegno di Inclusione (inclusion allowance), the replacement programme, which covers over 1.82 million people, since its launch in January 2024.[71] Italy continues to have a high number of working poor. (See the Adequate wages section above.) The inadequacy of pensions also risks pushing the elderly into poverty. More than half of the pension payments to the nearly 18 million pensioners are under €750 per month.[72]

The NSG stressed – again – that while positive initiatives such as specific bonuses for poor households are welcome, structural measures are needed to combat poverty. There is a need to address low wages, precarious employment and the lack of higher value-added production.

### Access to quality health care

The NSG reports two main issues affecting the Italian healthcare system. Firstly, spending on public healthcare has been insufficient, something that has persisted in the 2025-2027 budget. The allocation in absolute terms for 2024 amounts to a sizeable €137.9 billion in public spending.[73] However, when calculating the funding for the National Health Service (SSN) in 2024 in real terms at constant prices amounts to €83 billion.[74] Italy currently spends only 6.2% of GDP on the SSN, where the EU average is 7.3%, and this ratio will decrease in coming years, according to Structural Budget Plan forecasts.[75]

The second problem is the increasing privatization of healthcare services and the resulting increases in costs and in inequality of access.[76] The use of private healthcare is increasing: 23.9% of people use it without private insurance coverage.[77] At the same time, 3.4 million households report foregoing healthcare.[78] Nearly one in 10 people skipped specialist visits or exams in 2024, according to ISTAT.[79] The main reasons were difficulty in paying and the long waiting lists in the public system. These waiting lists push people towards private healthcare services, where waiting times are considerably shorter.

The NSG draws attention to two further developments. Firstly, the adoption of the “Legge sull'autonomia differenziata” (Differentiated Autonomy Law) through referendum triggered concern, as it would have granted greater autonomy to the regions and could have further exacerbated healthcare inequalities between North and South. However, the Italian Constitutional Court declared the referendum inadmissible, citing the unconstitutionality of several aspects of the law.[80] Secondly, the EU's ReArm Europe Plan requires member states to raise military spending to 5% of GDP, which would mean an additional €100 billion for Italy. Without change to the EU's financial sustainability rules, the increased military spending could lead to a reallocation of funds direly needed for social purposes.



## Civic Space

**SCORE: 17**

### Enabling space for civil society

The CIVICUS monitor classifies Italy as “Narrowed”.[81] This indicates that, while individuals and civil society organizations can exercise their rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression, these rights are often violated through harassment, arrests, or assaults against critics of those in power, as well as through excessive force during protests and political pressure on the

media. Civic space has worsened significantly in Italy, and there is a lack of respect for the rule of law, according to the NSG report.<sup>[82]</sup> I and organizations whose opinions differ from those of the government are criminalized, and opportunities to express such views are increasingly restricted.

The Security Decree, approved in April 2025, introduces several new tools for the government to crack down on resistance. Penalty amounts were increased, and there were expansions in protection for the police and in the powers of the intelligence services. In addition, the scope of offences related to civil disobedience and public demonstrations was enlarged. These measures have affected various forms of protest. Passive resistance is now subject to criminal prosecution.<sup>[83]</sup> The freedom of trade unions was further restricted, after it had already been undermined by Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini's back-to-work orders.<sup>[84]</sup> Youth movements have been suppressed, as have environmental movements and musical counterculture events (which had already been targeted by an "anti-rave" law).<sup>[85]</sup> The Security Decree also facilitates the use of preventive administrative measures against individuals who have been deemed "socially dangerous".<sup>[86]</sup> The movement of these individuals is restricted in newly established "Red Zones".<sup>[87]</sup> They can be ordered to leave one of these zones, even if they are exercising their right to peaceful assembly.<sup>[88]</sup> The Italian Court of Cassation has called into question the constitutionality of the Security Decree. A decree law bypasses parliamentary debate and is normally limited to urgent matters, so its use to limit fundamental rights has been highly contested.<sup>[89]</sup>

Another decree, the Caivano bis Decree, which extends the application of preventive measures to minors, has had several provisions declared unconstitutional by the Italian Constitutional Court.<sup>[90]</sup> Both Caivano-bis and Security Decree will further worsen conditions in Italian prisons, which are already highly problematic. Prisons are overcrowded, with an average occupancy rate of 136.6% of capacity, and the San Vittore prison in Milan had a peak rate of 225%.<sup>[91]</sup> The Security Decree has also criminalized passive resistance in prisons, greatly reducing the ability of inmates to bring attention to their living conditions. Both mental and physical health conditions are worsening, and 88 suicides were reported inside prisons in 2024, the highest number to date. In just the first trimester of 2025, 33 suicides were carried out.<sup>[92]</sup>

The NSG reports an increase in attempts to criminalize CSOs and their operations. *Ex ante* restriction of protest actions happens either through legislation – such as Law 6/2022, which targets civil disobedience by environmentalist movements – or through arbitrary searches and administrative measures such as expulsion orders and bans from accessing urban centres.<sup>[93]</sup> *Ex post* restrictions happen through legal proceedings and disproportionate use of force by the police, both during protests and inside police stations.<sup>[94]</sup>

CSOs also report an increase in other types of attacks. Funding – and thus operability – is threatened by the upcoming removal of the VAT exemption for non-profit entities, which risks undermining the economic sustainability of their activities – very often self-funded – and ultimately restrict freedom of association. <sup>[95]</sup> <sup>[96]</sup> NGOs that defend migrant rights have been the specific targets of government restrictions that seek to weaken their operational capacity.<sup>[97]</sup>



## Just Transition

**SCORE: 50**

### Access to energy and energy poverty

Energy poverty in Italy has worsened substantially, according to a 2024 preliminary report by the Italian Observatory for Energy Poverty.<sup>[98]</sup> The report stresses that energy poverty deeply affects the daily lives of Italian households who struggle to afford the rising costs. Around 2.36 million households experienced energy poverty in 2023, with families with dependent minors and families which include at least one foreign individual being most affected.<sup>[99]</sup> Important regional differences also exist, with the South of Italy increasingly affected by energy poverty.<sup>[100]</sup> Many households are opting to reduce the consumption of heating altogether, indicated by a decline in average household energy expenditure. Likely reasons include rising energy prices and the reduction in public support for household energy expenditure, following an increase in response to the 2022 energy crisis.<sup>[101]</sup> Public spending on energy support amounted to €27.3 billion in 2022, but only €10 billion of the state budget was allocated to such programmes in 2023.<sup>[102]</sup>

Italy lacks a clear framework to support renewable and solidarity energy communities (RESCs) to implement the EU Energy Communities Initiative, the NSG points out. RESCs are essential, the NSG stresses, as they address regulatory and financial challenges that affect the provision of inclusive and equitable access to energy. The publication of the Energy Efficiency Plan for social housing and homes of low-income families could be a positive development, according to the NSG. The plan, which forms part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, is expected to improve living conditions and housing quality for millions of poor people<sup>[103]</sup>

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