

Italy Report

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024

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Executive Summary

In early 2022, Italy was led by a national unity government under Mario Draghi, a former president of the European Central Bank. This coalition, comprising parties from across the political spectrum, aimed to tackle the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and implement the EU's Recovery Fund. Despite initial successes, the government collapsed in July 2022 due to internal conflicts and some coalition parties seeking greater political visibility. The subsequent elections in September 2022 saw a victory for the right-wing coalition, with Giorgia Meloni, leader of Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia, FDI), becoming prime minister. Her government, dominated by far-right, Euroskeptic, and populist parties, represents a significant shift in Italy's political landscape, impacting the quality of governance and progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Italy has performed relatively well in terms of democratic governance, particularly regarding free and fair elections. However, the country has faced increasing ideological polarization and a rise in populist parties, challenging democratic accountability. The Meloni government has further eroded democratic accountability, especially concerning the freedom of public service media. Its focus on ideological alignment in filling key RAI positions has led to the departure of experienced journalists and a shift in editorial direction favoring the government's political leanings, exacerbating the close relationship between RAI and politics.

Regarding horizontal accountability, the Meloni government's decisions have raised concerns about the rights of refugees and migrants. Additionally, despite strong legislative institutions, the government has consolidated executive power, as seen during the 2024 budget process. This trend toward greater executive dominance could further weaken checks and balances in the Italian political system.

While Italy's democratic government performance remains relatively strong, there are persistent concerns about the influence of populist parties, the erosion of public service media freedom, and the increasing dominance of the executive branch. Italy's performance in guiding society and the economy toward collective goals – known as the steering dimension – needs improvement in both foresight and sustainable policymaking. Although Italy

has a well-established system of coordination mechanisms at the central government level, shifting responsibility for the National Recovery and Resilience Program (NRRP) from the Treasury to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) could reduce the efficiency of the NRRP implementation process due to the PMO's limited technical and analytical capacities.

Additionally, coordination mechanisms between central and subnational levels of government could be strengthened, and Italy needs a clear policy on minimum standards for public services. This lack of clarity makes it more difficult to hold local governments accountable for service delivery, especially considering the Meloni government's proposed reform (*Autonomia differenziata*), which aims to increase the political power and autonomy of regions leveraging this institutional innovation.

The Meloni government's politicization of policy advice, limited involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in policymaking, and lack of units for strategic foresight and anticipatory innovation further undermine government efficiency, effectiveness, and long-term planning.

Italy's policy outcomes have changed under the Meloni government. Compared to the Draghi administration, Meloni's government has shown less commitment to sustainability challenges, including the circular economy and decarbonization. It has also made controversial changes to the Basic Income Law.

In an attempt to reduce taxes, the Meloni government has created an unequal tax system that favors the self-employed over employees, and it has not been successful in combating tax evasion. Regarding international cooperation, Italy has generally supported policies to improve financial market regulation and supervision. However, the Meloni government voted against the reform of the European Stability Mechanism in December 2023, which may have undermined Italy's credibility in Brussels.

The Meloni government has made efforts to adhere to the EU's fiscal rules, but its budget decisions have been criticized for potentially hindering economic growth and jeopardizing essential services like healthcare. Overall, the Meloni government's actions have raised concerns about its commitment to democratic accountability, sustainable policymaking, and effective governance. These concerns impact Italy's ability to address its challenges and achieve satisfactory levels in SDGs.

Key Challenges

Italy has recovered relatively well from the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to strong family ties, high household savings rates, the resilience of small and medium-sized enterprises, and dynamic manufacturing and export-oriented sectors. Additionally, the expansionary macroeconomic policies pursued by the Conte and Draghi governments contributed significantly to this recovery. However, the process has not addressed the country's persistent weaknesses, which remain a challenge in the current political climate marked by increased polarization and the new right-wing government that took office after the September 2023 general elections.

Italy faces two main types of challenges: policy and political.

Policy challenges:

Government and administrative reform: A comprehensive overhaul of government machinery and the relationship between central government and local authorities is necessary.

Economic and social reforms: Targeted economic reforms, sustainable social policies, and continued efforts to improve the quality of education and research are essential.

Policy Implementation: Designing policies that allow for effective implementation and using evaluation as a central pillar are crucial. This includes extensive use of ex ante, in itinere, and ex post evaluations.

Public administration: Improving recruitment procedures for senior civil servants and strengthening the analytical capacity of public administrations at all levels is vital. A strong achievement orientation should characterize public administration.

Policy advice: Emphasizing strategic and innovative approaches to policymaking is needed.

Economic Intervention: Addressing financial instability with policies that promote dynamic growth, enhance competition, increase enterprise size and innovation, boost productivity, and ensure skilled employment is critical.

Immigration: Reorienting public debate on immigration to focus on effective integration and protection of immigrants' rights is necessary.

Research and education: Increased funding and strategic reorientation of research and education are required.

North-South divide: Addressing the widening North-South divide concretely is imperative.

The enormous NRRP (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) that Italy aims to implement by 2026 focuses on these challenges and more. Successful and effective implementation of the NRRP is crucial for overcoming the country's structural socioeconomic weaknesses and achieving the SDGs. Monitoring the outcomes closely in the coming years is essential.

Political challenges:

The primary political challenge is to halt the trend toward polarization, which hinders commitment to sustainable policies. The current prime minister's ability and willingness to steer her party toward more moderate positions are crucial. Similar moderation is required from other parties like the Northern League and M5Stars.

Another significant challenge is the government's approach to two crucial institutional reforms: differentiated regionalism and the potential presidentialization of the political system, central to the prime minister's party's electoral manifesto. Poorly designed interventions could negatively impact Italy's ability to address its structural problems.

Without a shift toward a more centripetal political system, Italy will struggle to play a constructive role in the EU and meet the requirements of the new Stability and Growth Pact.

Democratic Government

I. Vertical Accountability

Elections

Free and Fair
Political
Competition
Score: 9

The Italian constitution and laws establish the conditions for free, fair, and competitive elections that adhere to the principles of a liberal democracy. According to the latest V-Dem data (2022), Italy scores relatively high on the Clean Elections index. This indicates that experts consider Italian elections free from registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation of the opposition, vote-buying, and electoral violence. Additionally, all parties, including the opposition, can operate freely and participate in elections. Indicators of freedom of expression suggest that the media are generally unbiased and that all parties have access to national broadcasts. Overall, Italy's data is comparable to other European liberal democracies.

The constitution specifies that active and passive electorates do not coincide. Membership in the Chamber of Deputies requires a minimum age of 25, while the Senate of the Republic requires a minimum age of 40 (Articles 56 and 58). These rules reflect the idea that members of the upper chamber should possess different competencies and skills than those of the lower chamber to help improve the quality of legislation. High civil servants, high-ranking military officers, magistrates, and mayors of municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants are ineligible for the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate (President of the Republic Decree 361/1957 and Legislative Decree 533/1993).

Moreover, the offices of deputy or senator are incompatible with positions in elected assemblies at the local or supranational level (European Parliament) (Law 60/1953 and subsequent amendments). Lastly, citizens convicted (after all levels of judgment) of certain crimes and sentenced to more than two years in prison cannot be candidates (Legislative Decree 235/2012).

Parties must submit their symbol to the Ministry of the Interior between 44 and 42 days before the election date (President of the Republic Decree 361/1957 and subsequent amendments), along with a copy of their statute, a declaration of transparency, and the party manifesto (Law 165/2017). Since the 2018 general election, these documents are published on a Ministry of the Interior website accessible to all citizens. Party lists may be excluded from the competition if the symbol does not meet legal standards. In such cases, they can appeal to the Supreme Court of Cassation, which decides on their admission. In the September 2022 general election, 101 symbols were presented, of which 75 were accepted (Ministry of Interior 2022).

After submitting their symbols, parties must submit their list of candidates. For both chambers, the list must be signed by at least 1,500 and no more than 2,000 voters for each multi-member district into which the territory is divided (President of the Republic Decree 361/1957 and subsequent amendments; see also ACE project data).

Following the 2020 constitutional revision, which reduced the number of members of the Chamber of Deputies from 630 to 400 and senators from 315 to 200, there are now 49 districts for the lower house and 26 for the upper house. Therefore, approximately 73,500 signatures are required to present lists nationwide in both houses. However, in early elections, such as those in September 2022, this figure is halved.

Starting in 2022, political parties established as a parliamentary group in at least one of the two chambers by December 31, 2021, are exempt from collecting signatures (Decree Law 41/2022). This rule poses an obstacle to new parties entering electoral competition, although they can circumvent it by allying with existing parties. Similar obstacles to curbing the proliferation of party lists are common in other democracies. Signatures must be authenticated by several institutional authorities (Law 21/1990). Occasionally, there have been disagreements about the legitimacy of signatures collected by the most prominent political parties, but not during the most recent elections, as most significant parties were exempted from collecting them.

Beginning with the 2022 elections, candidates must submit their CVs and a certificate certifying no pending criminal convictions. These documents are then posted on a Ministry of the Interior website, accessible to all citizens (Law 9/2019). Although this requirement provides voters with better tools to evaluate candidates' competencies and quality, it is ineffective. Voters cannot express a preference for individual candidates because lists are blocked. Additionally, the CV information is highly inconsistent, with some CVs being extraordinarily detailed and others relatively succinct. Selection methods vary

from party to party according to their statutes. Only the Five Stars Movement used online closed primaries to select candidates in multi-member districts for both chambers.

To guarantee female representation, Italian electoral law (Law 165/2017) mandates that candidate lists include at least 40% female candidates, following the so-called zipper system, which requires parties to alternate between women and men on their candidate lists. Despite this, women remain underrepresented in both chambers. On one hand, legal sanctions for noncompliance with this rule are relatively soft (see also the International IDEA Gender Quotas Database). On the other hand, parties can easily circumvent the norm by strategically using the possibility of nominating the same candidate in multiple multi-member districts (up to five, according to the electoral law). Female candidates are usually nominated in multiple districts; however, they often opt for only one district, freeing up seats for male candidates further down the list.

For the election campaign, candidates can spend a fixed amount of €52,000 plus a variable amount depending on the size (in terms of registered voters) of the multi-member constituency in which they compete. Parties may spend a maximum of €1 multiplied by the total number of registered voters in all districts where the party competes (Law 515/1993 and subsequent amendments). Candidate and party expenditures are monitored by the Court of Appeals and the Court of Auditors, respectively. For irregularities, there are mainly financial penalties. The 2014 reform eliminated all public funding for parties (Law 13/2014) (see also the IDEA International Political Finance Database). Transparency issues remain concerning the increasingly influential but less visible role of political foundations.

Social media played a significant role in political communication during the campaign leading up to the September 2022 elections, compared to traditional media such as television and newspapers. This trend can be understood in the context of the specific nature of the most recent general election.

First, these were early elections, giving parties little time to organize their campaigns. Second, the campaign took place during the summer, when citizens traditionally engage less in political matters and watch less television. Finally, all polls had long suggested a victory for the center-right coalition, particularly for Brothers of Italy.

These factors contributed to the campaign's low profile in both public and political debates..

Free and Fair
Elections
Score: 8

Until 2021, the minimum voting age for representatives in the Chamber of Deputies was 18, while for the Senate it was 25 (Art. 58 Constitution). Starting with the September 2022 elections, the minimum voting age for the Senate was lowered to 18, aligning it with the chamber. This reform equalizes the bases of representation in both chambers, contributing to greater congruence regarding the number and size of parties represented.

All Italian citizens, whether residing within national borders or abroad – temporarily or permanently – have the right to vote in general elections. For Italian citizens residing abroad, reserved seats are provided (in 2022, 8 in the Chamber of Deputies and four in the Senate) with specific candidate lists in four special districts for different areas of the world. After registering in a particular registry, these citizens can vote by mail. Voting by Italians living abroad has often been questioned for several reasons: these voters do not pay taxes in Italy, and elected representatives from the special districts often lack clear party affiliation, giving them fewer constraints in parliamentary activities.

Following the 2020 constitutional reform, the number of reserved seats was reduced from 12 to 8 in the Chamber of Deputies and from 6 to 4 in the Senate, decreasing their relevance. Additionally, parties have increasingly structured voting abroad by nominating candidates residing in Italy for special districts abroad. Italian citizens living abroad are not entitled to vote in local (regional and municipal) elections. However, foreign citizens from European Union (EU) member countries residing in Italy have the right to vote in municipal elections. Generally, those sentenced to prison are excluded from voting for the duration of their sentence (President of the Republic Decree 223/1967).

Since citizenship is the fundamental requirement for voting – Italian for all elections and EU for municipal elections – all non-EU foreign citizens permanently residing in Italy are automatically excluded. According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) data (October 17, 2023), about 3.7 million non-EU citizens with legal residence permits in Italy cannot vote in any Italian elections. This exclusion is difficult to justify, especially considering that EU citizens can vote in municipal elections and Italians living abroad, who often have fragile ties with Italy, can vote in general elections. However, similar exclusions are found in other European countries, and the issue remains highly debated.

There are no reserved seats for French- and German-speaking minorities. However, the national legal electoral threshold for parties representing these minorities does not apply. This provision, along with the concentration of

language groups in specific territories and districts, ensures safe representation in parliament.

Citizens are notified of their voting rights by mail and can appeal to independent judicial bodies if mistakenly excluded from the voter rolls. Many polling stations are located close to voters' residences, but in 2022 the number slightly decreased to reduce costs (see Ministry of Interior). Unlike regional elections, which are held over two consecutive days, general elections are held on a single day – Sunday. This choice could affect the participation of some voter categories. The September 2022 elections recorded the lowest turnout in the Republican era. (see International IDEA Voter Turnout Database).

Quality of Parties and Candidates

Socially Rooted
Party System
Score: 7

The Italian electoral system introduced by Law 165/2017 is a mixed system with two-thirds of representatives elected in multi-member districts (MMD) by a proportional formula (PR) and one-third in single-member districts (SMD) with plurality rule. Since the Italian bicameral system gives identical powers to both branches of parliament, the main elements that characterize the electoral rules have been harmonized between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate to avoid different outcomes and ensure governability.

Legal thresholds of representation are essential for both individual parties and coalitions. For individual parties, the threshold is 3% of valid votes at the national level. This threshold does not apply to parties representing linguistic and ethnic minorities. Coalitions are eligible for proportional representation seats only if they obtain at least 10% of the votes nationwide and include a party with at least 3%. If these conditions are met, the coalition can count on the votes of all member parties that get at least 1% of the votes nationwide. However, only parties in the coalition with at least 3% of the votes can get a proportional share of the PR seats allocated to the coalition.

The presence of SMDs and legal thresholds of representation can potentially lead to disproportionate results, thus hindering an adequate representation of all social groups. The results of the September 2022 elections confirm a high level of disproportionality, as the center-right coalition won almost all SMDs (121 out of 146 in the chamber; 56 out of 67 in the Senate) (Chiaramonte et al. 2023).

The territorial distribution of the vote reveals important links between parties or coalitions and local interests. Italy's electoral map has changed dramatically from its traditional layout for the third election in a row. Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), which has acquired the same territorial profile as the League – from which it

has drawn many voters – has become the most popular party in the Center-North. At the same time, the Five Star Movement (M5S) has remained by far the most popular party in southern Italy. More generally, center-right parties dominate Italy’s small municipalities, where most voters live. The center-left coalition prevails in large cities in Central and Northern Italy. Finally, in the South, the M5S is the dominant party (Chiaramonte et al. 2023).

The vote distribution between North and South Italy, as well as between rural and urban areas, partly reveals the cultural divide between GAL (Green, Alternative, Libertarian) and TAN (Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist) parties. It also shows the connection of some parties or coalitions with specific local interests: taxation, deregulation, and protectionism for artisans and small and medium enterprises in Northern Italy, and income support policies for southern Italy. The rapid growth of M5S support in southern Italy after introducing citizenship income when it was in government – whose recipients are mainly located in southern regions – is emblematic.

The electoral law requires that party manifestos be published in a special section of the election website maintained by the Ministry of the Interior. This allows them to be consulted by all citizens. Extensive publicity is also given to the manifestos through the main parties’ websites and social media. In the 2022 elections, the manifestos varied widely in length and detail, with those of the League and M5S among the longest. According to quantitative textual analyses (Trastulli and Mastroianni 2023), references to environmental and energy issues – two main topics of Italy’s National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) – are present in almost all manifestos. Alongside these high-valence issues, parties have continued to emphasize those that traditionally define their ideological profiles in terms of credibility. Specifically, center-left parties focus on labor policies and social issues, while right-wing parties emphasize nationalism, defense, and security. Overall, the manifestos are rather generalist and cover a broad range of themes.

Effective Cross-Party Cooperation
Score: 6

Italy was governed until July 2022 by a national unity government headed by Mario Draghi. Following the prime minister’s resignation, the president of the republic dissolved the parliament and called early elections for September 2022. The Draghi government took office at the beginning of the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic with a mandate to address two interconnected challenges: effectively managing the pandemic and utilizing the resources provided by the Recovery Fund.

Except for the Brothers of Italy (FdI), which opted to stay in opposition, all parties represented in parliament joined the government. In this new political landscape, parties that were competitors until recently faced the challenge of

working together as partners in government. This required them to put aside their differences and find common ground on several issues centered on the health crisis and its economic repercussions, temporarily freezing the competition on the ideological left-right dimension.

At the same time, the parties had to distinguish themselves from their competitors to avoid losing votes, marking their differences mainly on cultural issues or their stance toward the Ukrainian war. In the end, conflict prevailed, bringing down the government (Russo and Valbruzzi 2022).

With the end of the pandemic and the Draghi government, the competition has reconfigured along traditional dividing lines between opposing coalitions. This bipolar structure is characterized by two main parties on the left – the Democratic Party (PD) and the Five Star Movement (M5S) – failing to coordinate electorally by competing separately in the September 2022 elections. On the right side of the left-right divide, there is a rather ideologically compact coalition formed by FdI, the League, and Go Italy (FI). In this bipolar context, moderate-liberal actors are essentially excluded from competition. On paper, these divisions suggest a highly polarized political environment. However, since 2019, the FdI has moderated its stance on a number of issues, including its Euroscepticism. This moderate turn on the part of FdI calls into question the notion that the party's victory in the recent elections necessarily signifies an increase in the polarization of the Italian party system (Chiaramonte 2023). Despite Meloni's effort to move the party toward the center of the policy space, the positions of party members and grassroots voters remain rather extreme on many issues, thus contributing to an overall polarized environment.

The right-wing pre-electoral coalition won an absolute majority of seats after the September 2022 elections. A month later, Giorgia Meloni, the leader of FdI, was appointed prime minister. According to PopuList, the Meloni government is considered to be the first post-World War II radical right-wing government in Western Europe, consisting of two parties – FdI and the League – almost unanimously coded as far-right, Eurosceptic and populist, plus a relatively moderate partner like FI.

Despite similarities in their ideological profiles, the governing parties are divided on specific issues such as civil liberties, immigration, the economy, and their stance toward the European Union (EU). These differences have occasionally led to conflicts between the governing parties. However, the institutional context incentivizes parties to compromise in coalition policymaking.

On one hand, the electoral system forces parties to form pre-election coalitions to win elections, both at the national and local levels. On the other hand, the Italian parliament has strong internal institutions that make it easier for parties to control and change government policies. Therefore, to implement its program, the governing coalition must necessarily compromise.

Compromises and agreements between the majority coalition and the opposition have proven difficult on matters of constitutional reform, such as the proposed reform of the government formation process, which might have required a non-majoritarian approach.

In the most recent election (September 2022), left- and right-wing parties that can be categorized as populist collected more than 50% of the popular vote. Two populist parties – FdI and the League – are currently in power. According to most observers, these parties are characterized by a Manichean view of politics, anti-elitism, and people-centrism (see Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey data). Whether these attitudes represent a rhetorical strategy or may translate into specific policies to undermine the liberal-democratic order is still debatable. In the latter case, however, there may be consequences for the quality of democracy, as observed in countries such as Hungary or Poland.

Access to Official Information

Transparent
Government
Score: 6

In 2016, Italy introduced the right of generalized civic access to government information, often referred to as FOIA (Freedom of Information Act, Legislative Decree 97/2016). This amendment to Legislative Decree 33/2013 empowers citizens and civic associations to request existing data and documents from the public administration without demonstrating a specific or immediate interest or providing justification for their request.

The scope of this legislation encompasses national, regional, and local public administrations, as well as public economic entities, publicly controlled companies, publicly held companies, and associations and private law entities engaged in public service activities, though with certain limitations. The law only applies to existing data and information. Access requests must clearly specify the documents to be reviewed or provide sufficient details for their identification. Generic requests or those that attempt some form of control over the administration's actions are not allowed.

Access to information can be denied under specific circumstances, such as safeguarding national security or protecting privacy. FOIA complements the already existing right of documental access, which concerns documents valid

for the personal interest of the person making the request (Law 241/1990), and simple civic access, aimed at obtaining the publication of documents and information of public interest (Legislative Decree 33/2013).

Each administration's website typically features a dedicated "transparent administration" section that provides comprehensive information on the various access options and the procedures for submitting applications to the relevant offices. Additionally, all administrative bodies, both at the national and local levels, have established specialized units called Public Relations Offices explicitly tasked with handling information on access requests.

The administration is mandated to submit a decision on an access request within 30 days. If an access request is denied, the administration must provide a well-founded justification for its decision. In the event of denial, a request for reconsideration can be submitted to the relevant administration's Head of Prevention and Corruption and Transparency, who must respond within 20 days. If the request for access remains denied after reconsideration, an appeal can be filed to both judicial and non-judicial bodies.

Among non-judicial bodies, there is the Commission for Access to Public Documents under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, which functions as an appeals panel. The commission, composed of parliamentarians and technical experts, possesses limited coercive powers, relying primarily on moral persuasion to influence outcomes. The commission submits an annual report to parliament outlining its activities. The most recent report, covering 2021 data, highlighted a persistent rise in citizens' appeals and documented the body's responses.

An independent assessment conducted by the non-governmental organization OpenPolis indicates that not all administrative bodies have embraced the new legislation similarly. This resistance manifests in delayed responses and an overly broad interpretation of the legal limitations to access, particularly in international security and public order matters. In several instances, obtaining the requested documentation requires a formal ruling from an administrative judge. Overall, the implementation of FOIA legislation exhibits significant disparities across administrations, with substantial delays, inconsistencies in the type of data available, and discrepancies in response times.

II. Diagonal Accountability

Media Freedom and Pluralism

Free Media
Score: 7

Article 21 of the Italian constitution safeguards the fundamental right to freedom of expression, encompassing all forms of communication, including speech, writing, and other mediums. This right includes media freedom, as established by prevailing interpretations (see Media Pluralism Monitor 2022).

Beyond this constitutional safeguard, journalistic freedom of expression is regulated by a comprehensive network of legislative provisions and judicially produced rules. A significant recent development in this area is the Constitutional Court's ruling (Sentence 150/2021), which declared Article 13 of the Press Law (47/1948) unconstitutional. This article had imposed a prison sentence for defamation committed through the press. Now, imprisonment is limited to cases involving hate speech and the dissemination of fake news.

Legal limitations to freedom of expression exist but must be proportionate to the intended purpose and adhere to legal principles. Citizens have legal remedies in case of infringement. These rules formally extend to online information. The right to information is regulated by the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act, Legislative Decree 97/2016).

In practice, Italian journalists generally operate in a relatively open environment. However, they often self-censor to align with their news organization's editorial stance, protect themselves from lawsuits or other legal repercussions, or avoid potential retaliation from extremist groups or organized crime, as reported by Reporters sans Frontières in their 2023 press freedom dossier. Media Freedom Rapid Response (2022) notes that the main concerns about media freedom stem from strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs; known as "querela temeraria" in the Italian legal framework) and other legal threats, especially following the establishment of the center-right government led by Giorgia Meloni (October 2022), leader of Brothers of Italy, who between 2020 and 2023 filed lawsuits against two journalists.

The Coordination Center for the Permanent Monitoring, Analysis, and Exchange of Information on the phenomenon of intimidation acts against journalists, chaired by the Minister of the Interior, registered 111 acts of intimidation committed against journalists in 2022, 52% lower than in 2021,

and 46 in the first six months of 2023, 23% lower than in the first half of 2022 (see Ministry of Interior). Most of these incidents stem from social and political contexts or organized crime and result in verbal threats and physical assaults.

The most significant issue concerning media freedom relates to the political interdependence of public service media. Political parties and governments have historically wielded considerable influence over Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI), Italy's public broadcaster and largest media organization. Governing parties frequently intervened in RAI's personnel decisions, dictated its organizational structure, and controlled resources. While opposition parties were granted some representation, their influence was limited.

The Renzi government's Law 220/2015 reshaped RAI's governance structure to curb excessive political influence by concentrating power in the hands of the CEO, the company's senior executive. This shift of authority from the board – traditionally composed of representatives from major political parties – to the CEO diminished direct political control over RAI. However, it simultaneously increased government influence, as the government proposes the CEO to the board. While the Draghi government prioritized meritocracy in appointing the CEO and other senior RAI officials, the Meloni government has prioritized ideological alignment, seeking to fill critical positions with individuals close to the center-right bloc.

This shift led to the Draghi-appointed CEO's resignation, whose term was scheduled to end in 2024, to facilitate new appointments aligned with the government's political leanings. Consequently, the change in editorial direction has prompted several anchorwomen and anchormen to depart RAI for rival media outlets.

Further elements underscore the close relationship between RAI and politics. RAI is publicly funded, and a bicameral parliamentary committee, proportionately reflecting the strength of the parties in parliament but usually chaired by the opposition, oversees RAI's activities.

Pluralism of
Opinions
Score: 7

Media pluralism is legally guaranteed by Legislative Decree 208/2021. This decree incorporates the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive into the Italian legal framework. It replaced the previous Consolidated Act, TUSMAR (Legislative Decree 177/2005), with a new one named TUSMA (Testo unico sui servizi di media audiovisivi). TUSMA revised the media sector's anti-concentration rules to safeguard media pluralism and broadened the responsibilities of the media authority, Autorità per le Garanzie nelle Comunicazioni (AGCOM). It also expanded some regulations governing the

audiovisual sector and video-sharing platforms (see Media Pluralism Monitor 2022).

Established in 1997 by Law 249, AGCOM is an independent authority tasked with safeguarding fair competition among market operators and upholding user interests. It exercises regulatory and oversight duties across various sectors, including electronic communications, audiovisual media, publishing, postal services, and more recently, online platforms. AGCOM is accountable to the Italian parliament, which has defined its powers, outlined its statutes, and elected its members. The president and four members of the AGCOM Board are appointed through a joint process involving the government and parliament. This mechanism protects the media authority from being beholden to a parliamentary majority or aligned with the electoral cycle. However, it is only partially impervious to the risks of political bargaining (see Media Pluralism Monitor 2022).

A key responsibility of AGCOM is to establish election regulations that guarantee equitable media access for all candidates. This is complemented by monitoring and enforcing compliance with the “par condicio” principle, as Law 28/2000 mandates. AGCOM’s responsibilities also include maintaining the Register of Communication Operators (ROC). The purpose of the ROC is to ensure transparency and publicity of ownership structures and enable the application of rules concerning anti-concentration discipline. Public access to the information provided by AGCOM, however, has substantial limitations that undermine transparency.

AGCOM submits an annual report on its activities to the prime minister. It also publishes a quarterly monitoring of media markets on its website and verifies compliance with political pluralism monthly by monitoring radio and television broadcasts.

The recent introduction of the TUSMA has failed to undermine the concentration of the traditional media market, which has historically been high, particularly in the audiovisual sector. The development of the digital environment has not sufficiently balanced this concentration due to the dominating roles of a few platforms in facilitating access to news and in the online advertising market (see Media Pluralism Monitor 2022).

Despite persistent concerns over media concentration, encouraging signs of growing plurality are emerging. The long-standing duopoly between RAI, the public broadcaster, and MEDIASET, the private media group controlled by the Berlusconi family, has faced significant challenges from new players such as Comcast/Sky, La7, and Discovery (see AGCOM 2022). This helps to ensure a greater degree of pluralism. Additionally, streaming services have witnessed a

remarkable surge in market share in recent years, further diversifying the media landscape.

However, the radio and newspaper sectors have experienced a decline in plurality due to numerous mergers and acquisitions. This has led to a concentration of ownership and control, raising concerns about media diversity and the potential impact on editorial independence and the range of viewpoints available to the public (Media Pluralism Monitor 2022).

Civil Society

Free Civil
Society
Score: 8

The right to assembly is enshrined in the Italian constitution (Article 17), guaranteeing citizens the ability to gather and express their collective views. However, this right is not absolute and is subject to certain limitations imposed by the constitution and the law. All assemblies must be conducted peacefully and without weapons. For public assemblies, organizers must provide prior notice to the local police chief (questore) at least three days before the event. This notice allows the police to assess potential risks and determine whether preventive or supervisory measures are necessary to ensure public safety. If participant safety is deemed at risk, the police may prohibit the assembly. This approach balances the right to assembly with the need to protect public order and safety.

In December 2022, the Italian parliament introduced a new offense penalizing trespassing to organize a musical or entertainment gathering considered detrimental to public health and safety standards. This legislation aimed to address public health and safety concerns but has been criticized for potentially infringing on the fundamental rights of assembly and expression.

According to Amnesty International's 2023 report, police used excessive force against demonstrators on several occasions during the period under observation. These incidents are isolated cases widely condemned by the media and political leaders. The Meloni government has shown a tendency to be more severe with protest actions from ecologist or leftist groups.

Freedom of association is also enshrined in the Italian constitution (Article 18), guaranteeing citizens the right to freely associate without prior authorization for purposes not prohibited by criminal law. Secret associations and those pursuing political ends through military organizations are prohibited. The constitution explicitly upholds this right in politics (Article 49), labor unions (Article 39), and religion (Article 19). However, ongoing challenges related to freedom of worship persist, including issues such as accessing tax

exemptions for religious groups and constructing places of worship. These challenges have been more prevalent for Islamic groups, particularly regarding the construction of mosques in Italy.

According to the World Justice Project (2023), Italy ranks high in the freedom of association, religion, and expression indices.

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Capital and
Labor)
Score: 5

Italy boasts a wide variety of trade unions, with the CGIL, CISL, and UIL being the most prominent organizations. According to the most recent OECD estimate (2019), approximately 32.5% of wage and salary earners belong to a trade union. However, recent research suggests that this figure significantly overestimates union membership (Batut et al. 2023). This overestimation occurs because the data relies solely on self-reported information from the largest trade unions, lacking independent verification. A more realistic assessment suggests that only 25% or even 20% of workers are union members. The most influential employers' association is Confindustria.

In policy formulation, trade unions generally favor maintaining the status quo. They hold a relatively conservative stance and are hesitant to embrace innovative policies in labor relations or pensions. However, there are notable distinctions among the three major trade unions, with CISL and UIL demonstrating a greater willingness to negotiate with the government and employers' associations on measures to enhance labor market flexibility.

In contrast, employers' associations tend to lean toward policy change, typically adopting a more forward-thinking approach. Despite their continued importance as policy players, trade unions and employers' associations have seen their influence on the decision-making process gradually erode due to the strengthening of the executive branch in Italy and an ongoing process of political disintermediation. While their involvement remains a constant feature in the policymaking and policy implementation processes, their participation is informal and unregulated compared to other countries (Lizzi and Pritoni 2019).

The current Meloni government has shown little interest in promoting consultations with trade unions on labor and fiscal law reforms. This attitude has probably been encouraged by divisions between CGIL and UIL on one side and CISL on the other regarding the minimum wage proposal advanced by the opposition.

Both trade unions and employers' associations have established research departments that frequently collaborate with experts and draw on scholarly knowledge. Their policy proposals are often comprehensive and grounded in substantial policy expertise.

Effective Civil Society Organizations (Social Welfare) Score: 6

In May 2023, Istat released a comprehensive report on the Italian third sector, showcasing a dynamic landscape of over 360,000 organizations dedicated to social welfare. These organizations employ nearly 900,000 individuals and mobilize the voluntary efforts of nearly 5 million individuals. Notably, Northern Italy and the central regions, with their strong civic traditions, exhibit the highest concentration of these organizations and volunteers. This sector is pivotal in Italian society, contributing approximately €80 billion, or nearly 5% of GDP, annually. To support their endeavors, third-sector organizations increasingly rely on the 5x1000 of Irpef. This contribution allows taxpayers to allocate a portion of their income tax to these organizations. With over 15 million taxpayers participating in this initiative, the third sector garners significant support from the Italian public (Rapporto sulla sussidiarietà 2021/22).

Italian law (Legislative Decree 117/2017) mandates that public administrations, to uphold the principles of subsidiarity, must actively involve third-sector CSOs in planning and managing social programs and services. The engagement of social welfare CSOs is primarily concentrated at the regional and local levels, particularly in northern and central Italy. In contrast, their participation at the national level remains relatively limited.

The high level of fragmentation among CSOs reduces their capacity to shape national-level public policies, although their influence on regional and city-level policies is greater.

Effective Civil Society Organizations (Environment) Score: 6

By Law 8/1986, Italy boasts a network of 81 nationwide environmental CSOs officially recognized by the Ministry of Environment. These organizations are pivotal in safeguarding the environment and addressing pressing environmental challenges. Among these CSOs, several stand out for their significant contributions, including Legambiente, Greenpeace, WWF, and FAI. With their deep expertise, vast networks, and dedicated volunteers, these established environmental organizations play a relevant role in advocating for sustainable practices and environmental policies in Italy. They are recognized as stakeholders by the government and are regularly consulted during the policy process, albeit in a somewhat ritual manner. In addition to these established organizations, less structured environmental movements have emerged recently. Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion have gained significant prominence among these movements, particularly among young people.

III. Horizontal Accountability

Independent Supervisory Bodies

Effective Public
Auditing
Score: 7

The Italian Court of Audit (Corte dei Conti) is a constitutional body responsible for oversight and judicial functions in public accounting and related legal matters. It also offers expert advice to the government, parliament, and local authorities when requested.

Article 100 of the Italian constitution mandates that the Court of Audit conduct a preventive evaluation of the legality of government actions and assess subsequent state budget management. In jurisdictional matters, the Court has the authority to adjudicate cases involving accountants, administrators, and public officials for all aspects of public resource management.

The leadership of the Court of Audit consists of a board of presidency, which includes a president, four members selected by parliament, four members elected from among the Court's magistrates, and the Court's general prosecutor. The president is appointed by decree of the president of the republic on the recommendation of the president of the Council of Ministers. The board's elected members serve four-year terms and are ineligible for reelection for eight years after their term ends. The Court regularly reports its findings to parliament but is not accountable to it, as it stands as an independent judicial body.

Recently, the Court of Audit has been at the center of public debate due to its oversight responsibilities associated with the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). The Court's 2023 report on public finance coordination emphasized that Italy is significantly lagging in spending European funds. This finding prompted a strong response from the Meloni government, which deemed the Court's attitude counterproductive. These remarks were followed by the approval of Decree Law 44/2023, which reduces the Court's concurrent control function. The role of the Court in implementing the NRRP, as clarified in a government declaration, is thus successive.

Effective Data
Protection
Score: 7

The Italian Data Protection Authority (Garante per la Protezione dei Dati Personali, or GPDP) was established in 1996 by Law 675 and further regulated by Legislative Decree 196/2003, which provided a comprehensive data protection framework. In 2018, the GPDP underwent significant changes

following Legislative Decree 101/2018, which implemented the GDPR in Italy.

The GPDP is responsible for protecting the privacy of individuals in Italy. It monitors compliance with data protection laws, examines complaints, provides feedback to the government, and issues opinions on new legislation. Additionally, the GPDP offers advice to institutions on applying data protection laws.

The GPDP has a wide range of powers, including adopting guidelines and codes of conduct, conducting on-site inspections, imposing administrative sanctions, and ordering the rectification or deletion of personal data. A four-member board governs the GPDP. The members are elected by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate from a pool of candidates who submit their applications through a public selection process. The board's term is seven years and cannot be renewed.

Although the GPDP is intended to operate independently of political influence, the appointment of its board members often reflects political considerations rather than professional expertise. This, along with the GPDP's limited financial resources and staffing, can hinder its effectiveness. However, the relatively short tenure of Italian governments compared to the board's term of office and the increasing influence of European data protection regulations provide the GPDP with some degree of autonomy and influence.

Rule of Law

Effective Judicial
Oversight
Score: 7

The Italian government and administration operate within a robust legal framework that establishes the rule of law. This framework is upheld by a multilayered system of oversight, including the Constitutional Court and a network of local, regional, and national courts. The government's meticulous adherence to legal principles ensures highly predictable and impartial actions. This commitment to the rule of law is further validated by the V-Dem project's expert assessment (2023), which assigns Italy a high score on the Rule of Law Index, measuring transparency, independence, predictability, impartiality, and equality of law enforcement, as well as the adherence of government officials to the law.

Italian courts play a pivotal role in the country's political landscape, exercising significant influence over various aspects of democratic governance. The judicial system enjoys robust autonomy from the executive branch, ensuring independence from political interference. Judges' and prosecutors'

recruitment, appointment, and career progression are managed by the Superior Council of the Judiciary (CSM), a representative body elected by the judiciary and partially by parliament, safeguarding impartiality and preventing undue influence from the executive.

While these institutional arrangements protect the overall independence of the judiciary as a collective entity, concerns persist regarding the internal independence and impartiality of individual magistrates. This is because the professional advancement of each magistrate is controlled by the CSM, which is internally divided into factions representing competing political ideologies (Dallara and Pederzoli 2022).

The 2023 EU Justice Scoreboard highlights these concerns, revealing a relatively low perception of judicial independence among citizens and businesses. Combined with recent scandals within the CSM, these issues prompted the Draghi government to undertake a comprehensive reform of the CSM, including changes to its composition, election procedures, and rules governing factions within the body (Law 71/2022).

As part of a broader legal system reform within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) sponsored by the Draghi government, legislative decrees 149 and 150 (2022) aim to address a long-standing issue within the Italian justice system – the protracted nature of civil and criminal proceedings, particularly in civil and commercial disputes. This persistent issue has significantly hampered the effectiveness of judicial action and oversight, as highlighted in the 2022 Committee for the Evaluation of the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) report.

The newly formed Meloni government has embarked on a new judicial reform initiative that could significantly impact the careers of judges and magistrates, though this reform is still under discussion.

At the apex of the Italian judicial system, the Constitutional Court ensures that laws conform to the Constitution. Its unique appointment process involves three independent sources – the Head of State, the parliament (with special majority requirements), and the highest judiciary ranks (via election) – effectively safeguarding the Court's political autonomy and elevating its stature. Comprising eminent legal scholars, experienced judges, and distinguished lawyers, the Constitutional Court has consistently rendered rulings that challenge and sometimes overturn legislation championed by the government and approved by the legislature. However, when the rulings of the Constitutional Court require new legislative norms, their full implementation may be delayed by government and parliamentary inaction.

Universal Civil
Rights
Score: 6

The Italian legal system encompasses a comprehensive set of constitutional provisions and ordinary laws that protect a wide range of civil rights. The judiciary's robust independence ensures the proper enforcement of these rights, at least theoretically. However, in practice, inefficiencies in judicial administration and an excessive backlog of cases lead to lengthy court proceedings. This delays the resolution of penal trials and civil disputes, undermining the effectiveness of personal and property rights protection. The Civil Justice Index by the World Justice Project (2023) ranks Italy 51st out of 141 nations, far below other EU and North American countries.

Overcrowded penitentiaries and the resulting poor living conditions for prisoners, along with their treatment by police officers, frequently draw attention from the Italian media, parliament, and the European Court of Human Rights. The Court has repeatedly condemned the Italian state for failing to adequately protect prisoners' lives (see, for instance, the ECHR judgment of 14 September 2023).

Amnesty International's 2023 report raises humanitarian concerns regarding the rights of refugees and migrants. In February 2023, the Italian parliament passed a decree imposing stricter regulations on NGO rescue ships operating in the Mediterranean Sea. Additionally, the Meloni government has strengthened its cooperation with Libyan authorities to control irregular migration flows from Libya, despite documented human rights abuses in Libyan detention centers.

In a further development, Meloni signed an agreement with Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama in December 2023 to transfer some migrants rescued in the Mediterranean by Italian military ships to Albania. While the implementation of this agreement remains uncertain, concerns have been raised that it could violate the principles of non-discrimination and the right to asylum enshrined in national, EU, and international laws.

While Italy has established a comprehensive legal framework to address discrimination, its implementation remains uneven, particularly in areas of gender, physical and mental abilities, and ethnic minorities. The country's ranking of 13th on the Gender Equality Index falls below the EU average, highlighting persistent gender disparities. These inequalities are especially pronounced in the labor market, where Italy has consistently ranked last among EU member states since 2010 (Gender Equality Index 2023). Discrimination against immigrants is also prevalent. While immigrants have access to healthcare services, their rights in other spheres, particularly the labor market, are often inadequately protected. The Italian parliament failed to

pass a bill that would have ensured effective access to citizenship for children of foreign nationals born or raised in Italy.

In response to the alarming surge in femicides, the Italian parliament swiftly enacted legislation to combat violence against women in November 2023, with notable support from opposition parties. However, parliament was unable to pass legislation to protect LGBTQ+ individuals from hate crimes.

Effective
Corruption
Prevention
Score: 6

Corruption remains a pervasive problem within the Italian administration, as evidenced by numerous cases brought to light by the judiciary and the media and by Italy’s relatively low ranking compared to other European countries on the main indices of perceived (Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, CPI 2022; World Bank Control of Corruption Index, Kaufmann and Aart Kraay 2023) and objective corruption (Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer; University of Goteborg Quality of Government Indicators, Charron et al. 2022).

Given the detrimental impact of corruption on public trust, the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration, and the nation’s ability to deliver essential public goods, the Draghi government (February 2021 – July 2022) made combating this pervasive phenomenon a central pillar of its agenda. This commitment was particularly evident in the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), which presented a unique opportunity to streamline governance processes and enhance transparency. In line with this commitment, the Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC) was granted significant enhancements, especially regarding its oversight role in public contracts.

The regulations governing public procurement were amended in accordance with the objectives of PNRR. First, Delegated Law 78/2022 (under the Draghi government) instituted changes, followed by Legislative Decree 26/2023 (under the Meloni government), which introduced further modifications to the Public Procurement Code. These changes have strengthened the oversight functions of the ANAC (ANAC, Annual Report 2023).

These revised regulations mark the latest advancement in Italy’s ongoing anti-corruption efforts, which have resulted in a noticeable improvement in the country’s standing on various corruption indices. From 2014 to 2023, Italy’s ranking in Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index has risen from 69th to 53rd, demonstrating the nation’s progress in combating corruption. However, problems remain, particularly in the regulation of interest groups and party financing.

The Meloni government has implemented a series of measures aimed at streamlining the operations of public administrations in the execution of the PNRR. While these measures aim to expedite the process and reduce bureaucratic hurdles, they also raise concerns about potential ambiguities that could be exploited for corrupt practices.

Legislature

Sufficient
Legislative
Resources
Score: 9

The Italian parliament has a symmetrical structure with two houses, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, both elected by the people. Both houses have the same powers in terms of lawmaking and control over the executive branch. Each house of the Italian parliament enjoys considerable independence, with its own internal rules governing its operations, including administrative, financial, and even judicial matters (known as *autodichia*). This autonomy is established in the Italian constitution (Article 64).

In line with these principles, two distinct bureaucratic bodies, fully autonomous from the executive branch's bureaucracy and from each other (except for recently expanded collaborative efforts), currently serve the two houses. Gianniti and Lupo (2023) report 1,042 employees in the Chamber of Deputies and 585 in the Senate, divided between senior officials, stenographers, documentalists, secretaries and assistants. These figures encompass all full-time, permanent employees recruited through public competition and directly hired by the administration. The number of permanent staff is significantly reduced compared to the past due to the empowerment of the executive following attempts to shift the Italian political system toward majoritarianism.

In addition to the permanent staff, which is generally characterized by a high qualitative level, there are also employees hired directly by parliamentary groups – whose funds have been increased to compensate for the end of parties' public funding – and individual members of parliament. The recruitment processes for these positions are less transparent and regulated, often relying on informal arrangements.

The two parliamentary administrations play a crucial role in supporting the legislative and oversight functions of the Italian parliament. They provide technical, legal, procedural, documentary, and administrative assistance to both houses of parliament. These administrations operate independently and impartially, adhering to the principles of autonomy and fairness.

Both chambers of the Italian parliament are equipped with specialized units dedicated to providing parliamentarians with the necessary documentation to carry out their duties effectively. Alongside the resources offered by the two parliamentary libraries and historical archives, parliamentarians can access the House and Senate Research Departments. These departments compile comprehensive documentation that accompanies and explains the contents of each bill under consideration in parliament. These resources empower members of parliament, particularly those from opposition parties, to scrutinize the information presented by the executive. Research departments periodically produce reports on legislation.

For in-depth technical assessments of the budgetary implications of proposed legislation, the Italian parliament relies on the expertise of the State Budget Departments in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. These departments evaluate the financial impact of bills, amendments, and other laws. Additionally, the Parliamentary Budget Office, established in 2014 following the 2012 constitutional amendment introducing the principle of budget balance, provides specialized analysis and support to Parliament. Operating within parliament with a high degree of independence, the Parliamentary Budget Office maintains its administrative structure, distinct from the two parliamentary departments.

While parliamentarians have significant resources available for effectively monitoring the executive, members of parliament do not always fully utilize them, often opting for more politically visible disputes instead.

Since a 2020 constitutional amendment, the Italian Senate comprises a total of 200 elected (reduced from 315) and so-called life senators, who are appointed for life. The Chamber of Deputies has also been reduced, from 630 to 400 deputies, starting with the 19th legislative term in October 2022. Before this constitutional reform, members of parliament were members of only one committee; however, beginning with the 19th legislature, they may be required to serve on multiple committees. Consequently, the workload of members of parliament within committees is expected to increase, potentially reducing the effectiveness of legislative action and oversight.

Effective
Legislative
Oversight
Score: 9

Italian parliamentary committees, in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, are powerful bodies with significant influence over legislation and government oversight. They have the authority to request documents from the executive branch, compel ministerial appearances for hearings, and summon experts for specialized insights. These powers underscore the prominent role

of committees in the Italian legislative process, distinguishing it from other European parliamentary systems.

Standing committees, in particular, hold legislative, investigative, policy-setting, and control functions. During their legislative activities, committees may acquire data and information from the government and carry out fact-finding missions. While the government may not always respond to document requests immediately, there is no substantial evidence suggesting it consistently fails to comply.

In exercising their oversight functions, committees may summon ministers or undersecretaries for hearings and investigative inquiries. Hearings can be formal or informal, with formal hearings subject to a specific publicity regime and their verbatim records published. Summoning members of the executive branch for hearings is common practice, and they typically comply.

Committees also have the power to conduct investigative inquiries on matters within their respective competencies to gather useful information for their work and for the work of the Chamber or the Senate. The verbatim records of sessions held by committees during investigative inquiries are published.

Effective
Legislative
Investigations
Score: 8

In addition to the Standing Committees, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate may form special investigative committees, with membership reflecting the strength of parliamentary groups. Article 82 of the Italian constitution regulates these committees, which can be established ad hoc to conduct investigations and research on public interest matters, possessing the same powers and limitations as the judiciary. Their activities include missions and inspections, ministerial hearings, report approvals, conference organization, and thorough research and documentation.

Committees of inquiry can be unicameral or bicameral. Unicameral committees require a resolution from either the Chamber or the Senate for their establishment. Bicameral committees, composed of deputies and senators, must be established by law. In both cases, the opposition often finds it challenging to set up a committee of inquiry without agreement from the governing majority. The constitutive act outlines the purposes, composition, powers and limitations, secrecy regulations, internal organization, and budget ceiling for each committee of inquiry.

During the 18th legislature (2018–2022), 126 bills were introduced to establish bicameral commissions of inquiry, but only five were approved (OpenPolis).

Between the start of the 19th legislature (September 2022) and December 2023, 78 bills were introduced for bicameral investigative committees, with three approved.

A parliamentary committee of inquiry into the management of the health emergency caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the measures taken to address it is currently being approved. The bill has passed the Senate and awaits debate in the chamber. Some observers suggest this committee aims to serve as propaganda and retaliation against former prime ministers Conte and Draghi by the new center-right majority, which has criticized mandatory mass vaccinations and pandemic-related movement restrictions.

In general, the work of these committees could benefit from greater transparency, as monitoring their activities is often difficult.

Legislative
Capacity for
Guiding Policy
Score: 7

The Italian parliament possesses a robust committee system that effectively empowers the legislature to scrutinize, control, and amend government policies (Martin 2011; Martin and Vanberg 2020). Both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate have numerous standing committees that foster specialization and policy expertise among their members. Until the 18th legislature, both chambers had 14 committees. Following the 2022 constitutional reform, the Senate reduced the number of committees to 10, in line with the reduction of senators to 200. Conversely, the Chamber of Deputies retained 14 committees, even as the number of deputies was reduced to 400.

The organization of committees generally aligns with ministerial jurisdictions, with some minor exceptions, especially in the Senate following the reduction in committees. This structure further enhances policy expertise. Committees also hold the authority to propose amendments to draft bills and can substantially rewrite them. Additionally, committees convene frequently, and their members are supported by highly qualified technical personnel.

Although the Italian parliament retains a significant role in guiding policy, recent research suggests it has lost influence, particularly in the area of budget laws (Cavaliere 2023). The trend toward greater executive dominance, especially evident during the 2024 budget process, combined with Prime Minister Meloni's growing political clout, has raised concerns about parliament's ability to safeguard its institutional role.

The composition of parliamentary committees reflects the distribution of power among political parties in parliament. This is evident in the appointment of committee chairpersons, typically drawn from the governing majority

parties. However, this does not preclude the opposition from influencing committee proceedings. Enlarged majorities often emerge in committee decisions, driven by members' seniority, shared interest in specific issues, and common expertise acquired outside the parliamentary sphere (De Micheli and Verzichelli 2004).

Governing with Foresight

I. Coordination

Quality of Horizontal Coordination

Effective
Coordination
Mechanisms of
the GO/PMO
Score: 7

The administrative structure of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers is complex and intricate. As of 2024, it comprises 18 departments responsible for various functional areas, ranging from equal opportunity policies to civil protection coordination, and from European policy coordination to anti-drug policies. Additionally, 10 support offices provide coordination functions, general political direction, and technical-managerial support to the president. There are also seven ad hoc units established by the Premier through a special mission structure to perform specific tasks or implement specific programs. The duration of these structures, specified in the establishing act, does not exceed that of the government that established them. This organizational structure employs approximately 2,000 permanent employees as of 2018, according to the latest official data.

This organizational structure is further supported by the direct collaboration offices of ministers without portfolio, who coordinate the main PMO departments. The number of these offices varies depending on the president of the Council.

Over the past 30 years, since the crisis of the First Republic, two significant characteristics have emerged in decision-making coordination processes. Firstly, the role of the prime minister has become more influential, enhancing the political coordination capabilities of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Concurrently, the State General Accounting Office, part of the Ministry of the Treasury, has grown in importance and plays a crucial role in every decision with significant spending implications. The State General Accounting Office is considered one of the most competent administrations, with strong technical

and analytical capabilities. In contrast, the PMO is characterized by a more diverse range of technical and analytical capabilities that are primarily based on a legal background.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is regularly kept informed about policy proposals generated by line ministries. For proposals of particular political relevance to the government, the consultation process begins at the early stages of drafting and is more comprehensive, involving not only formal but also substantive issues. In fields less directly connected with the main missions of the government, exchanges are less intensive.

The process of co-drafting ministerial policies was strongly reinforced under the Draghi government due to the prime minister's individual leadership. However, the Draghi government assigned the responsibility for coordinating and governing the policies for implementing the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) to the Ministry of the Treasury, considering it more technically equipped for this task. The Meloni government followed a similar approach, emphasizing strong political coordination of ministerial policies but transferring responsibility for the NRRP from the Treasury to the PMO under the direct oversight of the prime minister. The effects of this decision are not yet evident; however, it is suggested that it may render the NRRP implementation process less efficient due to the PMO's limited technical and analytical capacities.

In summary, there is a trend toward vertical policy coordination, driven primarily by political factors. The bureaucratic aspect of coordination is less prominent. When there is no political focus on particular policies or programs, coordination tends to be weak, as the bureaucracy responds only reactively.

Effective
Coordination
Mechanisms
within the
Ministerial
Bureaucracy
Score: 7

The bureaucratic aspect of policy formulation at the centralized national level remains a concealed process, insufficiently examined by scholars. Here are the main features of the bureaucratic side of policy formulation from a formal point of view:

Interministerial committees: Various interministerial committees are responsible for exchanging information, evidence-based opinions, and ideas to advise the government on specific draft policy solutions. The most important committees deal with economic and financial matters, including the Interministerial Committee on Credit and Savings, the Committee for the Planning and Coordination of Financial Education Initiatives, the Committee on Accounting Principles, and the Interministerial Committee on Economic Planning.

Use of information technology: The use of IT in interministerial coordination has increased following COVID-19, though it remains insufficient for drafting policy texts.

Lack of organizational incentives: There is no significant organizational or structural incentive to coordinate.

Pre-consultation practices: Pre-consultation among ministerial offices is routinely conducted before cabinet meetings in the “Pre-consiglio” (Pre-cabinet) under the aegis of the DAGL (Department for Legal and Legislative Matters of the Presidency of the Council). The head of DAGL is a powerful figure in the administrative dimension of the cabinet and holds a political role due to a direct link with the president of the Council. The Ministry of the Treasury also serves as the central point of reference for any pre-consultation activity.

Overall, the use of information technology in drafting policy texts is insufficient, and positive coordination is less widespread than it should be. Effective coordination depends on the proactive roles of the Treasury or the PMO. It is important to note that many crucial issues are effectively handled through consultations between a few ministers and their ministerial cabinets before being brought to the Council of Ministers or deferred to this procedure after a preliminary discussion in the council. These consultations usually involve the treasury.

Complementary
Informal
Coordination
Score: 7

Informal meetings are common in the policymaking process. There are regular meetings between the heads of ministerial cabinets as well as between the political parties that make up the ruling majority. Due to the regionalized nature of the Italian political system, meetings between different levels of government – ministries, regions, and municipalities – are ongoing. Generally, most of these informal meetings are organized to help coordinate efforts at all levels. These meetings are also believed to eliminate many technical issues that could lead to political problems.

Quality of Vertical Coordination

Effectively
Setting and
Monitoring
National
(Minimum)
Standards
Score: 5

The issue of establishing a minimum standard for public services in Italy is highly complex. Law No. 42 of 2009 on fiscal federalism aimed to address this through several mechanisms: taxation of state transfers, estimation of standard expenditure requirements for territorial authorities, new equalization mechanisms to balance the differences between entities’ fiscal capacities and their needs, convergence toward minimum service standards for all entities,

and infrastructure equalization through special interventions. However, these measures have only been partially implemented and are not fully developed in terms of content. Italian policymakers have limited the scope of minimum standards to three main areas: health, welfare, and education (assigned to the Regions under current regulations), and local public transport concerning capital expenditure. The only system of minimum standards that has been clearly designed and somewhat implemented pertains to healthcare. A detailed list of minimum standards is created at the national level for the regions, which are responsible for providing healthcare. A national committee chaired by the Minister of Health conducts annual monitoring, which has revealed significant variations in regional capacity to meet these standards. In the latest monitoring (2021, published in 2023), seven regions did not meet the standards. Notably, these regions do not incur significant costs for failing to meet the standards. Although there was a provision to cut their public funds by 3%, it was never implemented.

Regarding education, the minimum standards set by the state are very general. Decree Law No. 226 of 2005 includes requirements such as meeting attendance demand, providing guidance and tutoring, supporting educational continuity, implementing training apprenticeships and alternate experiences related to professional figures, and acquiring IT and English skills. These standards are formal, not clearly defined, and difficult to monitor.

The 2022 budget law, approved in December 2021, established the first minimum social welfare standards. These include providing 30 nursery places per 100 children aged 3 to 36 months and employing one social worker per 6,500 inhabitants by 2026 in every Italian municipality.

For national standards in utilities (e.g., water, electricity, and telecoms), independent authorities are generally responsible for their definition and implementation. Implementation in this area has been fairly adequate.

Overall, there is no firm government policy on minimum standards for relevant policy fields. Utilities appear to have fair policies due to their distinct management characteristics. Where these standards exist, there is no central policy to correct or adjust local situations where they are not met.

On March 23, 2023, the center-right government presented its bill on differentiated autonomy to parliament. This legislation would allow regions to gain more power in 23 policy areas, provided they guarantee a specific minimum standard for each new policy competence they wish to acquire. The definition of these minimum standards is currently under discussion. The government has set up a committee of 61 experts to develop a proposal.

A significant issue with implementing differentiated autonomy is the allocation of financial resources. Without a robust central redistribution fund, the resources available to less affluent regions would be insufficient to meet minimum standards in critical areas.

Effective
Multilevel
Cooperation
Score: 7

Multilevel governance in Italy has facilitated the development of formal coordination and consultation mechanisms with regions and municipalities. The primary instruments for this purpose are the State-Regions Conference (Conferenza Permanente per i Rapporti tra lo Stato, le Regioni e le Province Autonome di Trento e Bolzano) and the State-Municipalities-Local Autonomies Conference (Conferenza Stato-Città ed Autonomie Locali), both of which meet at least monthly. Local authorities also use their associations, the Conference of Italian Regions and the National Association of Italian Municipalities, to exert influence on national authorities.

According to the Interactive Rule Index, Italy does not score highly in terms of interaction between different levels of government. However, during the Draghi government (February 2021 – October 2022), subnational governments were largely excluded from the process of formulating the National Resilience and Recovery Plan. This marked a departure from the long-standing cooperation between different levels of government. This decision seems deliberate, aimed at avoiding excessive compromises, and reflects the Draghi government's lack of trust in the regions' ability to be proactive and efficient in both the formulation and implementation of the plan.

Aside from this exception, the central government is in constant contact with the regions and municipalities. Consultation and negotiation are common tools in policy formulation and implementation. However, the dynamics of interaction are often influenced by the political alignment between the central government and subnational governments. For example, following the dramatic floods that hit the Emilia Romagna region in May 2023, significant contrasts emerged between the regional and national governments regarding the recovery process and the slowness with which public funds were delivered to the affected areas.

II. Consensus-Building

Recourse to Scientific Knowledge

Harnessing
Scientific
Knowledge
Effectively
Score: 5

As in every advanced country, governments in Italy have access to a vast stock of scientific knowledge that can be utilized in the decision-making process. However, the way this knowledge is accessed and processed by policymakers determines its potential impact. In Italy, the recurrent politicization of advice, ad hoc searches for scientific knowledge, and the use of such knowledge mainly to legitimize political choices rather than to design them are common issues.

Firstly, there is no strong tradition of regular government consultation with non-governmental scientists in Italy. Typically, a small group of partisan experts, selected by the prime minister and other ministers, provides frequent strategic and technical advice. Independent experts are rarely consulted transparently, and there has been no institutionalization of an open and transparent consultation process for major legislative proposals. In the ministries of finance, culture, and labor, the role of external experts is more firmly established, but even here, independent academic experts are involved only on a short-term basis for specific tasks like spending reviews.

Against this traditional practice, the Draghi government gave impartial experts a prominent role by assigning them to four key ministries: environmental transition, infrastructure, technological innovation and digital transition, and universities and research. However, the Meloni government has revived the pre-Draghi model, returning to the practice of partisan appointments. Furthermore, the Meloni government developed some of its most important policy proposals – such as the bill on differentiated autonomy and the proposal for constitutional reform – without appointing a committee of experts, instead interacting only with those experts who share the government’s policy objectives.

Interaction with public research institutes is highly contingent and based on ad hoc requests, as shown by a recent study. There are no established projects for systematic cooperation between the government and academic institutions.

Overall, the system of policy advice in Italy, with the exception of the Draghi government, is still not very inclusive and relies primarily on bureaucratic expertise combined with partisan advisers. The academic community has

consistently provided strong and detailed criticism. This was evident in the response to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) designed by the Draghi government, with many scholars highlighting that it was too ambitious, too centralized, and ill-equipped to address implementation problems. Similarly, during the first year of the Meloni government, the most important policy decisions faced strong criticism based on the existing body of scientific knowledge.

Involvement of Civil Society in Policy Development

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Capital and
Labor)
Score: 4

As in other European countries, and perhaps more so in Italy, the relationship between the government and the representatives of capital and labor has deteriorated over time. Italy has experienced significant political disintermediation, meaning the government has only sporadically involved the main trade unions and the associations representing the primary manufacturers in the policymaking process. This trend has been evident under both the Draghi and Meloni governments.

The Draghi government held some consultations with major unions on tax and pension policies, but their impact on final policy decisions in these areas was minimal. Similarly, Meloni has consulted both sides in a very ritualistic manner. Notably, both the main unions and the primary manufacturers’ association were highly critical of the budget law passed under the Draghi government for 2022, as well as the two budget laws passed under the Meloni government for 2023 and 2024.

In recent years, a trend has emerged characterized by a significant lack of consideration for the main demands of capital and labor. The Meloni government has focused more on approving segmented policies with clear beneficiaries, such as pensioners, employees, the self-employed, and other micro-interests.

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Social Welfare)
Score: 5

Italian legislation (Legislative Decree 117/2017) mandates that public administrations ensure the active involvement of third-sector entities to uphold the principles of subsidiarity, cooperation, effectiveness, efficiency, economy, homogeneity, and financial and asset coverage. This involvement should be incorporated through co-programming, co-planning, and co-signing as public administrations exercise their planning and organizational functions at the territorial level.

The third sector in Italy comprises 375,000 institutions, including associations, foundations, and social cooperatives – an increase of 25% compared to 10

years ago. The production value of the third sector is estimated at €80 billion, representing almost 5% of the gross domestic product. There are more than 900,000 employees, 70% of whom are women, and 4 million volunteers.

Eighty-five percent of third-sector institutions are associations; the remaining 15% are social cooperatives, foundations, trade unions, or organizations. Two-thirds of nonprofit organizations (65%) are active in culture, sport, and recreation, followed by social welfare and civil protection (9%), trade unions and business (6%), religion (5%), education and research (4%), and health (4%).

The involvement of social welfare CSOs takes place mainly at the regional and local levels, as welfare services are attributed to the regions and municipalities. The national level is less involved. Available data show that at the regional and local levels, especially in North-Central Italy, the involvement of CSOs in the provision of social services is significant and extensive.

Thus, interactions between governments and CSOs are deep and stable at the subnational level. At the central level, however, they are weak, except for the role the Ministry of Labor plays in addressing and promoting third-sector activities and in planning, developing, and implementing initiatives related to EU Structural Funds for integrating social and active labor policies.

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Environment)
Score: 4

In Italy, 81 CSOs are legally recognized in the environmental field, many of which receive public funding. These organizations are recognized as political actors and should be consulted at both national and regional levels when decisions on environmental issues are made. However, consultation at the national level is often primarily ritualistic, and their political positions are not systematically incorporated into government policies. This is evident from the strong disagreement expressed by the three most important CSOs – Legambiente, WWF Italia, and Greenpeace Italia – with the environmental policies of both the Draghi and Meloni governments. The capacity of environmental CSOs to influence policies and decisions is generally greater at the regional and local levels, though this depends significantly on the political alignment of the local government.

Openness of Government

Open
Government
Score: 5

The government lacks a systematic and comprehensive policy for making information easily accessible to citizens in a way that enables them to hold the government accountable. While the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and various ministries maintain websites that publish information about

government activities, this information often consists of sequences of events, such as ministerial meetings and press conferences, rather than data-rich documentation. Consequently, there is no comprehensive data governance framework, and the data portals are not designed as interactive feedback and communication tools.

Italy is a member of the Open Government Partnership, which implements two-year action plans aimed at increasing government openness at all institutional levels. However, at the central level, only a few ministries provide reliable data on certain policy dimensions. For example, comprehensive data on health policy is available on the Ministry of Health and Agenas websites (a national advisory and monitoring body). Good statistics are also available on education, higher education, and public employment. The National Institute of Statistics provides the most relevant data on socioeconomic and political dimensions.

Despite these efforts, there is no systematic strategy, and there is a clear lack of integration between institutional data sets. Integrating databases requires a certain quality of the data, but the databases managed by public authorities over the years do not always meet the desired quality standards. Reasons for this include a lack of control over the data and inadequate application tools, leading to a situation that now requires significant time and resources to recover and enhance the data to the required quality level.

Overall, Italy's open government strategy remains weak. Even the biennial action plans – formal tools for implementing government openness – are designed in a way that, according to independent evaluators like the Independent Report Mechanism of the Open Government Partnership, can only produce modest results even if fully implemented (see the evaluation of the 2021–2023 action plan cited in the references).

III. Sensemaking

Preparedness

At the central level, Italy lacks dedicated units for strategic foresight and anticipatory innovation, although specific units like Open Government and Digital Transformation do exist. As a result, no behavioral experimentation is developed by the central government, and no experimental strategies are in place. Additionally, there is no policy for seeking new ideas, apart from funds

allocated to basic and applied research in universities and public research centers.

In the recruitment process for senior civil servants, strategic foresight and anticipatory innovation are not yet included as essential skills for candidates. Although some training is available for those already working in central administration, it is not mandatory and is provided by the National School of Administration.

While there is minimal use of the behavioral social science perspective, there are official plans to enhance open government and digital transformation. The NRRP is investing around €6 billion in the country’s digital transformation. However, it remains unclear how far the funded projects have progressed.

Overall, central government plans do not account for multiple scenarios and potential related strategies, resulting in a lack of real preparation for future strategic challenges. For example, there is no activity addressing the socioeconomic effects of the dramatic decrease in population projected for the next 30 years. It is important to note that none of the significant funds to be invested over the six years of the NRRP have been allocated to developing strategic preparedness activities.

Analytical Competence

Effective
Regulatory
Impact
Assessment
Score: 5

In principle, RIAs are required for all ministries and local authorities under Laws 50/1999 and 246/2005. At the national level, ministries are responsible for conducting RIAs, while the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) oversees the review and quality control of the entire RIA process and coordinates related activities. The Department of Legal and Legislative Affairs of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (DAGL) develops the RIA methodology and presents annual reports to parliament.

Following reforms by previous governments, including a new RIA regulation effective December 15, 2017, the current RIA framework prohibits the Council of Ministers from discussing any proposal without an accompanying RIA. Although these rules were not always applied in the past, compliance has gradually improved, and most normative acts now include a RIA unless an exemption is granted due to the limited relevance of a proposal.

However, the quality of RIAs is still inconsistent. Observers have noted that while RIAs conducted by independent authorities are generally sound, those carried out by ministerial departments tend to be rather formalistic

(Osservatorio Air 2022). The government's 2022 report to parliament highlights two main issues:

Lack of sufficient technical and analytical skills: This limits the ability to conduct comprehensive analyses, including significant quantitative impact estimates.

Lack of coordination: Implementing RIAs for policies involving different administrations is often uncoordinated.

Overall, there are three persistent problems with RIAs:

Justification of political choices: RIAs are often used to justify political decisions rather than inform them.

Limited quantitative analysis: Comprehensive quantitative technical analysis is largely absent.

Failure to assess real impact: There is often no assessment of the actual impact of regulations after they are implemented.

In practice, RIAs are still viewed as a formal compliance effort within Italy's central administrations. Policy changes are rarely based on the assessment of regulatory impact, and RIAs are not easily accessible; they are attached to the bill materials presented in parliament, making them difficult to find for those not familiar with the parliament's website.

Effective
Sustainability
Checks
Score: 5

Italy formally adopted a Sustainable Development Strategy based on the SDGs, approving a detailed implementation plan in 2017, revised in 2022. The strategy encompasses five major programs aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, built around five fundamental pillars of the 2030 Agenda: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership. These pillars unfold into fifteen strategic choices covering various areas, from responsible management of natural resources to addressing social inequalities. The renewed NSSD introduces annual monitoring targets against 55 headline indicators.

The strategy also highlights "sustainability vectors" and proposes Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD), with an annexed National Action Program for PCSD, and multilevel governance as cross-cutting implementation mechanisms. Additionally, it emphasizes the role of culture in sustainability, focusing on education, training, and communication.

Active participation, reinforced by the Rules of Procedure of the Forum for Sustainable Development, is essential for a well-structured and inclusive development path. Despite gradual improvements, sustainability reviews remain underdeveloped. Reports from the Prime Minister's Office to parliament indicate that sustainability reviews are not yet systematically

integrated into the RIA and often prioritize economic indicators over social and environmental ones.

A 2017 decision mandated stricter control over adopting sustainability criteria in regulation by the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of the Environment. However, the attention to this aspect in RIA reports has not improved significantly. The monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is not based on the RIA procedure, and the government is slow in responding to emerging problems, though regional applications, such as in Emilia Romagna and Trentino-Alto Adige, are more coherent.

Currently, the RIA procedure and the assessment of SDG achievement levels are two separate streams of activity at the national government level.

Effective Ex Post
Evaluation
Score: 5

The legislation mandating Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) also requires ex post evaluations. However, as highlighted in the most recent annual government report to parliament, this legal provision is not regularly implemented by public administration. Each new draft law is accompanied by a technical report discussing existing policies and explaining the benefits of the new policy. However, this process rarely results from thorough evaluations or public debates. Often, the assessment of existing policies altered by new bills is based on partisan evaluations aimed at justifying the proposed policy.

Despite these shortcomings, some public bodies produce high-quality ex post evaluations. For example, the Court of Auditors often presents ex post evaluations of existing policies in its reports. The Senate recently established an impact assessment unit. The National Institute for Public Policy Analysis produces strong evaluation reports on social policy, education, and labor policy. However, these evaluations are not intrinsically linked to the government's policymaking process, and policymakers often disregard the empirical evidence provided.

Overall, ex post evaluation has not yet become a regular tool. It is carried out in a non-systematic and usually partisan manner. The adoption of a policy cycle perspective is missing in government policymaking, resulting in evaluations that are viewed as one-off activities rather than essential components of the decision-making process.

Sustainable Policymaking

I. Economic Sustainability

Circular Economy

Circular
Economy Policy
Efforts and
Commitment
Score: 8

Italy is one of the leading EU countries in the circular economy. However, the national average conceals a significant gap between Central-Northern Italy, which performs very well, and southern Italy, which has improved but still lags behind.

In 2022, following a public consultation under the Draghi government, the new National Strategy for the Circular Economy was published. This detailed document outlines sector-specific action plans, including consumer roles, green public procurement models, waste management, job creation, the establishment of new material supply chains, the circular use of natural resources, the role of digitalization, and environmental finance and taxation. The macro-objectives are well-defined and slated for achievement by 2035, with clear indicators and data sources monitored annually.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) includes the “Green Revolution and Eco-transition” mission and the “Circular Economy and Sustainable Agriculture” mission. The latter allocates 1.5 billion euros to municipalities and local governments for constructing new treatment and recycling plants, upgrading existing ones, expanding separate waste collection, and innovatively treating and recycling absorbent materials, sewage sludge, and leather and textile waste. Additionally, 600 million euros are allocated to companies for innovative circular economy projects in strategic supply chains such as WEEE, paper, plastics, and textiles.

The governance of the strategy is based on the “Observatory on the Implementation of the National Strategy for Circular Economy,” chaired and coordinated by the Ministry of Environment with support from ISPRA and ENEA (two public research institutes). The observatory includes

representatives from the Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Infrastructure, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Regions and Autonomous Provinces, and the Association of Municipalities.

Italy’s performance in the circular economy strategy is among the best in the EU, though it ranks poorly in transitioning to fossil-free energy. The Draghi government demonstrated strong commitment by renaming the ministry to the “Ministry for Ecological Transition” and appointing a highly respected scientist to lead it. Conversely, the Meloni government reverted the name to the “Ministry for the Environment” and added “Energy Security,” reflecting a shift in policy objectives and potentially lower commitment to the circular economy strategy.

Viable Critical Infrastructure

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to a Resilient
Critical
Infrastructure
Score: 6

Italy’s system for ensuring the viability of critical infrastructure is designed with a multilevel accountability structure. The national coordinator is the president of the Council, supported by the Office of the Military Adviser within the PMO. Additionally, there is the Interministerial Commission for National Defense. Legislation clearly outlines what critical infrastructure operators must do to maintain functionality during critical moments, with specific legal provisions for transport, energy, health, and banking. Each ministry is responsible for monitoring and controlling the implementation of these policies within their respective sectors.

Despite strong and consistent regulations, significant problems persist with the quality of some infrastructure, particularly railways, motorways, and water distribution networks. Cybersecurity has received particular attention, with the establishment of the national cybersecurity agency in 2021 and the launch of the national cybersecurity strategy for 2022–2026 under the Draghi government.

All governments, especially recent ones, have shown reasonable efforts in ensuring the viability of critical infrastructure. However, by the end of 2023, Italy had not yet adopted the EU directive on critical infrastructure protection (DIRECTIVE (EU) 2022/2557).

Policy Efforts and Commitment to Achieving a Decarbonized Energy System by 2050
Score: 5

Decarbonized Energy System

Decarbonization is a primary objective of the National Plan for the Ecological Transition, aiming to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. By 2030, the goal is to reduce emissions by 55%, aligning with the European “Fit for 55” target. The NRRP allocates substantial financial resources for environmental transition, including the decarbonization of industrial production and the shift to renewable energy sources.

However, critics argue that financial investment is overly focused on securing bonuses and incentives, even when they are not necessary. The “Zero Carbon Policy Agenda” report by the Politecnico di Milano indicates that Italy is progressing slowly toward decarbonization, with no chance of reaching the 2030 target. Implementation challenges have increased under the Meloni administration, with significant resistance from stakeholders and difficulty in government management. The National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan (Pniec) proposed by the Meloni government was unanimously rejected by all major environmental groups for setting lower emission reduction and renewable energy targets than those required by the EU and proposed by national energy producers.

Policies Targeting an Adaptive Labor Market
Score: 5

Adaptive Labor Markets

The first Conte government approved the Reddito di Cittadinanza law, guaranteeing a basic income to approximately two million people and providing procedures to help these individuals find jobs. The Draghi government slightly redesigned the minimum requirements for receiving this basic income, reducing the number of beneficiaries. However, the law’s effectiveness in retraining the unemployed and helping them find jobs has been minimal.

The new Meloni government has drastically changed the Basic Income Law, making a key distinction between employable and unemployable individuals for entitlement to what is now called “income for inclusion.” The law also provides for retraining programs and imposes more restrictive rules regarding job offers. Additionally, Meloni’s reform offers financial incentives for those who employ recipients of the income for inclusion as well as NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). The effects of this reform can only be assessed in the coming years, but many observers doubt it will have the expected positive impact on worker activation.

The system of employment agencies in Italy, both public and private, remains inefficient in facilitating worker mobility.

Policies
Targeting an
Inclusive Labor
Market
Score: 5

Italian active labor market policies are weak. Despite having the highest number of NEETs among young people in the EU, second only to Romania, the policies to address this issue remain ineffective. National policies to incentivize hiring appear only partially effective, hindered by a structural mismatch between labor supply and demand that current government policies cannot address.

The NRRP aims to tackle this problem with approximately 124,000 projects expected to contribute to the social and economic development of younger generations. However, the impact of these projects is not yet measurable. As noted in the previous section, institutional arrangements in the labor market in Italy remain weak in improving job-finding opportunities.

Policies
Targeting Labor
Market Risks
Score: 6

The traditional Italian system for protecting against unemployment risks (Cassa Integrazione Guadagni) was significantly improved and extended in 2015 and 2022 (Law decree of 18 August 2015 n.148 and Budgetary Law of 2022). Consequently, Italy has a well-structured system of unemployment benefits that covers all types of workers who lose their jobs: employees with and without permanent contracts, associates, and agricultural workers.

However, approximately 3 million irregular workers in Italy lack regular employment contracts and, therefore, insurance coverage and protection in the event of dismissal. For these workers, the only protection available is provided by social support programs against poverty (Reddito di Cittadinanza until 2023 and the new Inclusion Income or the Formation and Labor Support program since 2023) (Law 3 July 2023 n.85).

The portability of pensions is guaranteed by law, but the real problem for the future is that the fragmented careers of the younger generation will result in lower pensions compared to those of current pensioners.

Sustainable Taxation

Policies
Targeting
Adequate Tax
Revenue
Score: 5

The Italian tax system is strained by the need to finance high public spending and interest on significant public debt. It also struggles to significantly reduce high levels of tax evasion and the size of the informal economy. Consequently, the level of fiscal pressure remains high (42.9% in 2022 according to the OECD), and the tax burden is unevenly distributed. Tax pressure is very high for households and companies that regularly pay taxes, while it is low for those who evade taxes (e.g., many companies and a large number of

independent contractors and self-employed individuals). Families with children have limited exemptions, and labor and business are heavily taxed, resulting in fewer new businesses and employment opportunities.

The capacity of the tax administration has improved over the past year. One significant measure introduced by recent governments is the online system for filing income tax returns, the “730 precompilato,” which has seen increasing use each year. This system simplifies the tax filing process, replacing paper forms for most taxpayers. The general shift to electronic invoicing and the new VAT payment method have also enhanced tax control effectiveness.

The NRRP aims to reduce Italy’s tax evasion rate from 18.5% in 2019 to 15.8% in 2024, a challenging target given the current executive’s approach. Notably, the Meloni government has raised the threshold for the flat tax (15%) for the self-employed from €65,000 to €85,000 and plans to reduce the number of personal income tax rates from four to three in 2024, financed two-thirds by deficit spending.

Policies
Targeting Tax
Equity
Score: 5

Italy’s tax system contains several distortions. There is a significant asymmetry between employees and the self-employed, with the latter being treated more favorably and responsible for a high proportion of tax evasion. Due to high evasion levels, revenues from value-added tax fall short of targets. Property and corporate profits are generally treated more favorably than personal income, with greater opportunities for tax evasion. Revenues from corporate profits taxation as a percentage of GDP are similar to those of other large European countries (Italy 2.1%; France 2.3%; Spain 1.97%; Germany 1.65% in 2020) (Openpolis).

Policies Aimed at
Minimizing
Compliance
Costs
Score: 5

According to the World Bank’s Doing Business indicator on the “ease of paying taxes,” Italy has a very complex tax system. There is approximately one accountant for every 510 people in the country. The system has improved with the introduction of the pre-completed personal income tax return, which works well for those with only salaries and little property to declare. Otherwise, the procedure and rules are so complex that people need to seek external advice.

Policies Aimed at
Internalizing
Negative and
Positive
Externalities
Score: 5

Italy provides some subsidies for basic research, but aside from programs to attract foreign researchers or Italians conducting research abroad (e.g., individual tax credits), there are no significant subsidies or tax credits for research institutions or universities. Regarding taxes and subsidies to address environmentally harmful behavior, Italy is among the most demanding countries in the EU, although most revenues are not invested in environmental policy.

Sustainable
Budgeting
Policies
Score: 6

Sustainable Budgeting

Italian governments have struggled in recent years to achieve fiscal stability and consolidate their budgets during a period of prolonged economic stagnation. Although fiscal policies have gradually reduced annual deficits and achieved a strong primary surplus, slow economic growth has hampered attempts to reduce the significant public debt. Efforts such as selling off public property or shares in state-owned companies have seen little success or have been postponed. Improved conditions in international markets and the European Central Bank's policies led to a sharp fall in interest rates on long-term Italian government bonds, easing budgetary pressure before the pandemic crisis.

The acceleration of economic growth in 2017 and 2018 slowed the rise of public debt, but the need to support economic activity during the pandemic required a significant increase in deficit spending. The Draghi government, leveraging EU funds and the ECB's supportive monetary policy, continued this public spending policy, redirecting spending toward infrastructure and digital investment to promote faster growth (though implementation is still in progress).

The Meloni government has tried to follow a similar approach to public debt control, though most budgetary interventions for both 2023 and 2024 were made in deficit. These decisions are temporary and subject to future confirmation.

The budgetary process in Italy is highly transparent and adheres to strict procedures, though the ability to use the budget in a counter-cyclical manner is limited. While targets are clearly linked to the country's socioeconomic development, there are few references to the SDGs, sustainable development, and environmental sustainability. The Ministry of Treasury defends the long-term sustainability of the budget, while the government and other ministries focus on short-term expenditures. The Meloni government has attempted to respect financial limits according to EU regulations, but the content of the budget laws for 2023 and 2024 has been controversial regarding their effectiveness in stimulating the economy and ensuring the financing of key policies like healthcare.

Research and
Innovation Policy
Score: 6

Sustainability-oriented Research and Innovation

Italy has struggled with research and innovation policy due to low public funding and an economic structure based on small and medium-sized enterprises with a lower propensity to invest in research and innovation. Italy is a moderate innovator according to the latest European Innovation Scoreboard, which shows a decline in public and private funding indicators between 2022 and 2023, as well as a decrease in product innovators and innovative enterprises.

The governance of R&I in Italy is complex, involving multiple ministries, including the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of University and Research, the Ministry of Economic Development (referred to by the Meloni government as the “Ministry of Made in Italy”), the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure. Coordination of R&I has been poor, particularly regarding its links with other policy areas like industrial policy, development policy, and digitalization.

This logic posits that public research serves as a catalyst for private investment in research and innovation. By fostering conducive ecosystems, public research helps transform ideas into new products, processes, and services. The ultimate goal is to create high value-added jobs and engage the most dynamic and productive sectors in international markets.

The NRRP seeks to change this perspective by placing research policy within a broader transformation of the Italian economic system. It integrates public expenditure on research with experimental development, technology transfer, and private spending on research, aiming to create favorable ecosystems for innovation. The NRRP plans to invest over €16 billion in R&I activities, including direct transfers to companies, partnerships between companies and universities, “innovation ecosystems,” “territorial R&D leaders,” national R&I champions, and doctoral programs for innovation and industry.

This effort is part of a complex plan linking to the national research plan (2021–2027), the strategic plan for AI (2022–2024), and the plan for the ecological transition. Despite efforts to improve the quality and impact of R&D policy, there appears to be no significant and effective government monitoring of these policies’ results.

Global Financial
Policies
Score: 5

Stable Global Financial System

The Italian government and public financial institutions, such as the Bank of Italy, generally support international and European policies aimed at improving financial market regulation and supervision. The Italian government and the Bank of Italy typically favor a collective approach within the framework of EU and G7 institutions.

The Draghi government reinforced this position, leveraging the prime minister’s international prestige to play a more active role in this arena, exemplified by the adoption of the global minimum tax at the G-20 meeting in Rome under the Italian presidency. All in all, the high international profile of the Italian prime minister and his background have been a catalyst for international negotiations.

The Meloni government has attempted to follow this path but faced serious problems within its coalition regarding the approval of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) reform. The Northern League and Brothers of Italy have always opposed the ESM reform, and in December 2023, the Italian parliament voted against it, making Italy the only eurozone country to do so. Internal tensions between the more internationally open and nationalist factions have heightened, particularly with the upcoming European elections.

This decision may have undermined the Italian government’s credibility. During negotiations on the new Stability and Growth Pact approved in December 2023, the Meloni government managed to dilute corrective measures until 2027. However, from 2027, Italy must respect the new deficit-to-GDP threshold of 1.5%.

II. Social Sustainability

Sustainable Education System

Policies
Targeting Quality
Education
Score: 6

The Italian education system is predominantly public, administered nationally by the Ministry of Education (MIUR) and the Ministry of Universities and Research (MUR). MIUR oversees school policy, including recruitment and funding, while regional and municipal school authorities control curricula, infrastructure, and resource management. Private education in Italy is limited and primarily consists of religious schools, with a few reputable private

universities like Bocconi, LUISS, and Cattolica. MUR coordinates the university system.

In principle, the education system is open to everyone without discrimination, with tuition fees charged only at the tertiary level. Although fees are low compared to Anglo-Saxon systems, they are the second highest in the EU, after the Netherlands. Access to upper secondary and tertiary education has long been socially discriminatory due to limited resources for scholarships and support mechanisms for financially needy students. However, significant funds have been invested in this area since the COVID crisis and thanks to the NRRP, doubling state funding for university scholarships.

Italy falls below the EU average in early school leavers, tertiary attainment, and adult education. Expenditure per pupil at all education levels is below the OECD and EU averages and has remained almost unchanged over the past decade. The education system's ability to provide skilled workers, especially in specialized fields, is insufficient, often criticized by the private sector.

After a decade of cuts, spending on tertiary education was restored from 2019. The share of education expenditure devoted to salaries of teachers, professors, and technical staff is above average compared to research expenditure, not because salaries are high but due to limited capital and research funds. The selection of school staff is not sufficiently meritocratic. Although there are high-quality education areas at secondary and tertiary levels, overall quality could improve.

The allocation of public resources to universities increasingly includes a mechanism linking funding to research and teaching outcomes, promoting a more competitive and quality-driven higher education system. During the pandemic, the education system was under pressure, with regional differences in handling it. Southern regions were less effective in providing distance learning and had higher school dropout rates (Openpolis).

The Draghi government injected more resources into education with EU Next Generation funding, pledging €1.9 billion to improve all education sectors. The NRPP also provided for various reforms approved for 2022 and 2023, including teacher recruitment, vocational high schools, vocational training institutes, and national guidelines for university degrees. However, a significant divide remains between northern and southern Italy in student preparation and university attractiveness. Although policymakers are aware of this gap, it has widened in recent years, with little action being taken to address it.

Policies Targeting Equitable Access to Education
Score: 6

Equity in education in Italy is a double-edged sword. While the system ranks highly in ensuring access to all education levels, except for pre-primary where there is a shortage of places, it is much less equitable in learning outcomes. Annual national tests reveal significant differences in learning outcomes between northern-central and southern Italy. Contributing factors may include the less common presence of full-time school programs and school meals in southern Italy, as recently documented by the SVIMEZ report.

Additionally, adult education participation is low, indicating underdeveloped second-chance education. Policies are designed to ensure equal access but not sufficiently to ensure equal results, with political attention often focusing on access and neglecting outcomes.

Sustainable Institutions Supporting Basic Human Needs

Policies Targeting Equal Access to Essential Services and Basic Income Support
Score: 6

Italy did not have an extensive minimum income scheme until 2019, when the first Conte government introduced the “Reddito di Cittadinanza” (RdC). This policy replaced several previously uncoordinated measures with a variable income supplement for individuals below a certain economic threshold. For those able to work, this allowance was conditional on accepting job offers proposed by employment centers. However, official data show that very few beneficiaries found employment.

By the end of 2022, 1.1 million families and 2.5 million individuals had received this allowance. While the RdC was a positive step toward a more inclusive social policy, it was insufficient to cover all people in poverty, especially families with children and foreigners. The “assegno unico per i figli” (children’s allowance), approved under the Draghi administration, partially addressed these shortcomings.

The Meloni government modified the RdC at the end of 2022, in line with the center-right coalition’s electoral promises. The RdC was replaced by the more stringent “Assegno di Inclusione” and the Subsidy for Training and Work for employable individuals. The “Assegno di Inclusione” has stricter minimum requirements and mandates active job seeking where possible.

Families eligible for the new “Assegno di Inclusione” receive approximately €740 per month. According to the National Institute for Pensions and Welfare (INPS), there has been a one-third decrease in the number of families involved compared to the previous scheme. With this reform, the Meloni government aims to encourage employable recipients to actively seek employment.

The landscape of low-income benefits in Italy remains complex and fragmented across areas like housing, water and sanitation, energy, public transport, digital infrastructure, and financial services. Housing benefits are highly decentralized, with regions as the main actors. Local-level preferential tariffs benefit the poorest in transport, and specific bonuses are provided for low-income citizens in water, sanitation, and digital infrastructure. Similarly, in energy, tariffs are protected for the weakest and poorest.

Policies
Targeting Quality
of Essential
Services and
Basic Income
Support
Score: 5

Family networks remain the most important, albeit informal, instrument of social protection in Italy. For example, the high percentage of owner-occupied homes helps many Italians avoid absolute poverty. Housing problems, which would be insurmountable for many young people, are often mitigated by family support rather than public assistance.

However, the poverty rate in Italy is rising. According to ISTAT, the share of people living in absolute poverty increased from 9.1% in 2021 to 9.7% in 2022, with the rate for households rising from 7.7% to 8.3%. These figures represent 5.6 million people living in 2.2 million households.

Minors are disproportionately affected by these poverty conditions, indicating that the system of subsidies and benefits for low-income families is inadequate in addressing the process of impoverishment. This inadequacy stems from structural developments in the economic system, not just high inflation. Despite numerous policy instruments to combat poverty, they are not effective enough to meet the basic needs of the growing number of citizens living in poverty.

Sustainable Health System

Policies
Targeting Health
System
Resilience
Score: 6

Italy’s national health system provides universal, comprehensive coverage for the entire population. The system is mainly financed by the central government, though healthcare is provided and managed by regional authorities, which have considerable autonomy in designing their organizational systems. Services provided are generally of medium to high quality across the country, although significant differences exist between regions.

Public spending on health was 6.8% of GDP in 2022, slightly below the OECD and EU averages. Private expenditure corresponded to 25% of public funding. After a peak in public spending in 2020 and 2021, the level returned to pre-2019 levels in 2022, despite high inflation around 12% that year. This indicates that both the Draghi and Meloni governments preferred to invest additional public funds in health at the expense of other policy objectives.

The system's resilience is influenced by its regionalization, resulting in 20 different healthcare systems within Italy. This means national guidelines and programs are implemented differently across regions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the best-performing regions had integrated health systems, such as Veneto, Toscana, and Emilia Romagna, compared to those with hospital-centered organizations.

The system is closely monitored at the central level, but this does not improve the quality of differentiated implementation. Digitalization and medical technology are well developed in the central and northern regions, while lagging in southern regions. Consequently, resilience is expected to vary significantly during crises. Concerns exist about the future capacity of the health system to maintain current standards, given insufficient public funding to guarantee technological equipment quality, recruit the required number of doctors, and address the chronic shortage of nurses.

Policies
Targeting High-
Quality
Healthcare
Score: 7

A 2000 World Health Organization (WHO) report ranked the Italian healthcare system second in the world. A recent Bloomberg analysis also placed the Italian system among the most efficient globally. A 2017 Lancet study ranked the Italian system highly for access and infrastructure, cultural factors, and the political and managerial capacities of local administrations, but noted regional disparities in public healthcare quality.

Despite similar levels of per capita expenditure, services are generally better in northern and central Italy than in southern Italy, where corruption, patronage, and administrative inefficiency have driven up healthcare costs. In these regions, lower quality and longer waiting lists mean wealthier individuals often turn to the private sector for medical care.

Regional disparities lead to significant health tourism to the north. The existing system of national quality standards, correlated with resources and intended to be implemented across regions, has not yet reduced the quality gap between the North and South.

To improve the quality of the healthcare system, the NRPP plans to invest around 16 billion euros. This investment aims to disseminate new healthcare models through various organizational innovations. On one hand, it focuses on developing proximity networks, intermediate structures, and telemedicine for territorial healthcare. On the other hand, it promotes innovation, research, and the digitalization of the National Health Service.

The interventions are specifically targeted at significantly improving territorial services by:

- Strengthening and creating territorial structures and services, such as community homes and hospitals
- Enhancing home care
- Developing telemedicine
- More effectively integrating all social health services

However, the risk remains that the implementation of these innovations will vary widely across the country, and the results are not yet clear. Additionally, the Meloni government has expressed doubts regarding the future financial sustainability of these territorial services.

Policies Targeting Equitable Access To Healthcare
Score: 7

Universal access to healthcare is a constitutional guarantee in Italy. However, significant differences exist in the quality of services provided. Even at the essential national level, disparities result in a pronounced gap between northern and southern Italy. Each year, about 1 million southern Italians travel to northern and central Italy to address their health needs. Long queues in public facilities for free access to more expensive medical tests and analyses often push people to seek private facilities, which come at a cost, disproportionately affecting lower-income individuals.

In 2021, a national plan for equity in health was launched (Plan 2021–2027) with investments from the European Regional Development Fund. The results of this plan are not yet available.

Gender Equality

Policy Efforts and Commitment to Achieving Gender Equality
Score: 6

Gender policy in Italy has seen improvements in legislation and some outcomes, but significant issues remain, particularly regarding the number of women in the workforce. In 2023, the employment rate for women aged 15-64 was 52.6%, the lowest among EU countries. There is a substantial regional divide: Northern Italian regions have rates around 60% and above, while southern regions fall below 50%, with three regions below 30%. Italy dropped from 66th to 79th out of 146 countries in the 2023 Global Gender Gap report.

Italy has a very low gender pay gap, according to Eurostat. In 2020, the country had approximately 149,000 public managers with near-equal gender distribution: 52% were women and 48% men. However, there was a notable decrease in the number of top positions in ministries from 41% in 2019 to 30% in 2022. These top positions, totaling 120, are filled by government

appointments, meaning that both the Draghi and Meloni governments contributed to this decline. This reduction in high-level positions may influence the gender gap in leadership, as fewer women hold top roles despite the overall gender balance in public management.

The National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2026, adopted in 2012 and inspired by the European Union's Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025, outlines values, policy directions, and goals to achieve gender equality. It serves as a cross-cutting priority of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and as a reference for implementing the Family Code reform. It outlines five priorities: Work, Earnings, Qualifications, Time, and Power, with detailed, measurable objectives and targets to be achieved by 2026.

A national governance level for gender equality policies, to be approved by 2021, is composed of an Intragovernmental Steering Committee with the technical support of a National Observatory for Gender Integration Policies. The NRRP includes several tools for women's empowerment, such as developing a system to certify gender parity in small and medium enterprises. However, the most significant efforts for gender parity in the NRRP involve family policies.

Strong Families

Family Policies
Score: 5

The family, often in its extended form, remains one of the most important institutions providing financial support for members with precarious and low-paid jobs and ensuring assistance to the elderly. Within the family, significant work and income redistribution occur, with services such as preschool childcare often provided by grandparents. Partly because of this reliance, state support for families has generally been weak in Italy. Apart from relatively generous provisions for maternity leave, including social security payments and limited tax deductions for children, the state has not offered much assistance. Public daycare facilities for preschool children are limited and vary considerably between regions. Families often must use more expensive private services, which receive only some state support.

The lack of significant policy measures has contributed to limited (although slowly increasing) participation of women in the labor force and a low overall employment rate. This, in turn, has also led to a very low birth rate, which continues to decline. Women in Italy are entitled to five months' pay at 80% of their last salary for maternity leave. There is also an optional parental leave, which can be taken by both parents, for up to 12 months, paid at 80% of the last salary for the first month and 30% for the subsequent months. Self-employed workers are excluded from this provision.

The “Assegno Unico per i figli” project, launched under the second Conte government and completed under the Draghi government, provides an allowance for every child from birth to age 21. The NRPP also allocates resources to strengthen families, including increasing the number of nursery schools. A significant reform, Law 32/2002 “Family Law,” approved in 2022, requires the approval of several government decrees. The most important decrees, concerning the reorganization and strengthening of financial measures to support children’s education and the support and promotion of family responsibilities, have not yet been approved. The deadline is May 2024. The 2024 budget law, approved by the Meloni government, has allocated additional funds for nursery school bonuses and promoting women’s employment in private companies.

Sustainable Pension System

Policies Aimed at
Old-Age Poverty
Prevention
Score: 5

According to the latest INPS annual report (2023), the proportion of “poor pensioners” is high, even when considering multiple benefits (old-age, invalidity, survivors’, and social allowances). Additionally, pension income heterogeneity is significant. In 2021, excluding those who retired before age 50, 20% of pensioners had a gross pension income of less than €10,000 per year. This proportion remains substantial at 7.3% even when considering former private employees with occupational pensions who retired from 2017 onward. One-third of pensioners (32.8%) receive a pension of no more than €1,000 gross per month.

The report also shows that inequality in pension income is increasing, similar to labor income. The Gini index of gross annual pension income has steadily risen from approximately 0.30 in 1995 to around 0.35 in 2021. The increase in pension income inequality reflects trends in the labor market, where evidence shows growing inequality and low mobility, perpetuating income disparities. Variable redistributive mechanisms implicit in the pension calculation formula exacerbate this issue, particularly for pensioners under the retributive formula. For instance, salary increases at the end of one’s career and different parameters applied in various administrations can significantly affect the pension amount.

Policies
Targeting
Intergenerational
Equity
Score: 5

The 2011 Fornero reform of Italian pension policy raised the retirement age to 67, reduced benefit levels for higher-income groups, and linked retirement age to rising life expectancies, achieving a satisfactory level of sustainability. Thanks to this reform, no major changes to the retirement system would have

been needed for the next few years, despite the demographic imbalance between the aged and the young.

The current situation is less positive in terms of intergenerational fairness, as younger generations will receive significantly smaller amounts upon retirement. Furthermore, the real average retirement age in 2022 was still 63.8 years due to various regulations allowing early retirement. The problem is exacerbated by the delayed or uncertain entry of younger cohorts into the labor market, a structural issue in the Italian labor market. Additionally, many unemployed individuals, especially women, face the challenge of receiving little or no pension. The issue of poverty prevention, already significant for a considerable portion of the population, will become even more relevant for today's younger cohorts when they reach retirement age.

Supplementary pension schemes have been growing, with more than 9 million workers enrolled in a collective or individual supplementary pension scheme in 2022. However, this solution does not help younger workers in unstable and precarious jobs, as most enrollees have stable employment. An early retirement incentive scheme approved during the first Conte government, under pressure from the Northern League, added a burden on general taxation. The Draghi government limited this law's impact, while the Meloni government has approved many small regulations in the 2023 and 2024 budget laws, which do not seem appropriate to strengthen the pension system's coherence.

Structural conditions affecting the future performance of the Italian pension system include a decreasing birth rate, lack of planning for immigration, and low economic system productivity. These challenges are still not adequately addressed on the political agenda. Without policy intervention, those with interrupted careers and periods of precariousness risk receiving very low pensions. Although establishing a guaranteed pension system for younger generations has been a frequent topic of discussion, no decision has been made.

Sustainable Inclusion of Migrants

Large-scale immigration is a relatively new phenomenon in Italy compared to other European countries. In recent years, the number of legal immigrants – mainly from new EU member states – and illegal immigrants has increased significantly, making immigration one of the most contentious political issues. Some parties, notably the Northern League and the Brothers of Italy, have used negative or even xenophobic rhetoric during election campaigns, portraying immigrants as dangerous social elements.

There are around 5 million legal immigrants in Italy, of which 3.6 million are from non-EU countries. The number of illegal immigrants is estimated at around half a million. Historically, policies addressing immigration have focused on controlling illegal entry and temporarily hosting refugees rather than on integration. Provisions for large-scale regularization of immigrants, particularly those employed within families, had not been repeated until recently. The 2023 “Decreto flussi” theoretically aims to facilitate legal immigration from abroad but can also be used to regularize undocumented immigrants already in the country. This measure introduced a new, small-scale program to address the issue under the Meloni government.

As a result of the current situation, many immigrants remain involved in the informal economy and are thus exposed to economic exploitation, dangerous working conditions, and a lack of respect for their rights. Certain sectors rely heavily on migrant labor, including agriculture, construction, private elderly care, childcare services, and private cleaning services.

Access to citizenship for immigrants remains problematic. Discussions on “*ius soli*” (granting Italian citizenship to migrant children born in Italy) have been tense, and legislative proposals on this issue have failed to gain parliamentary approval. The school system has proved to be a positive factor in the integration process for young immigrants; however, there is a serious lack of courses for adult immigrants, and schools have not received sufficient resources to achieve the best results. Public housing policy has been weakened by budgetary constraints, resulting in many cities having ghetto-like areas where immigrants live in extremely poor housing conditions.

The universal healthcare system has generally been effective in providing medical treatment for immigrants. Charitable organizations, particularly those linked to the Catholic Church (e.g., Caritas), have made significant contributions to the support and integration of migrants. The Draghi government adopted a more flexible attitude toward illegal immigrants entering Italy, significantly increasing the quota of legal immigrants allowed into the country to meet labor needs in key economic sectors.

The Meloni government has adopted a two-pronged approach to immigration. On one hand, it has planned the legal entry of around 450,000 immigrants for work purposes, despite the higher demand for economic workers from companies, which was about 850,000. On the other hand, it has introduced further restrictions on illegal immigrants.

Overall, there is still a lack of a coherent national policy on the integration of migrants. Most efforts are largely in the hands of local governments and charities. National rules for obtaining Italian citizenship are very demanding, and political participation remains low. Approximately 1.6 million resident foreigners, representing more than 614,000 households, live in absolute poverty.

Effective Capacity-Building for Global Poverty Reduction

Management of
Development
Cooperation by
Partner Country
Score: 6

The Italian government's commitment to promoting socioeconomic development has generally been limited. Over the years, Italy has provided less international aid than most other European countries. The amount of aid to developing countries was expected to increase in 2021 after three years of decline but remained at 0.32% in 2022 (OECD and Donor Tracker 2023). Notably, 23% of these funds remain in Italy for managing refugees.

Italy has emphasized combating hunger, hosting three major UN food agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP). For 2024, the budget law of the Meloni government will invest half a billion more than the previous year, primarily in Libya and on infrastructure.

Development cooperation policy is directed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by the National Agency for Cooperation and Development, which has offices in 19 countries. However, the policy is not regularly monitored, and results are often not evaluated. Most funds are allocated directly to multilateral institutions and not managed by Italian institutions.

The newly launched "Piano Mattei" by the Meloni government aims to provide stronger aid and cooperation with African countries, indicating a willingness to increase Italy's support for less-developed nations. However, the significance of the new funds remains unclear.

III. Environmental Sustainability

Effective Climate Action

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Achieving
Climate
Neutrality by
2050
Score: 7

Italy has a complex and detailed strategy for addressing climate change, outlined in the National Plan for Ecological Transition, the National Adaptation Strategy (SNAC), the National Adaptation Plan (PNACC), and the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP).

It should be noted that the Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale (ISPRA), an autonomous public research institute attached to the Ministry of the Environment, constantly monitors the development of this complex strategy. ISPRA has established a platform to facilitate access to and the sharing of data and information on observed and future climate changes, impacts, institutional agencies working on the issue, adaptation strategies and plans at different administrative levels, possible adaptation actions, and good practices. Furthermore, the procedure for monitoring greenhouse gas emissions is clear and effectively in place.

Italy is legally required to implement green public procurement, and while data shows adequate implementation, significant differences exist across local and regional administrations.

With regard to Italy's ability to reach the zero emissions target by 2050, it is important to recall that in December 2023, the EU Commission noted problems with the Italian NECP. The National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan presented to Brussels by the Meloni government, after having been rejected by major Italian environmental associations in the summer of 2023, was also criticized by the EU Commission. The commission highlighted that the Italian NECP does not meet the continent-wide greenhouse gas emission reduction targets of -55% by 2030 compared to 1990. Specifically, greenhouse gas emissions in the ETS sectors would be reduced by 35 – 37% compared to 2005 levels, falling short of the -43.7% target set by EU legislation. The plan also falls short in reducing emissions in the ETS sectors and the target for greenhouse gas absorption related to land use and forests (LULUCF). Thus, the Italian NECP would not be able to reverse the already poor trend in emission reductions: by the end of 2022, Italy will have reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 25% compared to 1990, while the EU average is already at -32%.

The NECP anticipates an energy efficiency target aligning with European regulations and a goal for renewable energy sources to account for 40.5% of total energy consumption by 2030, slightly above the 39% minimum requirement. However, the RED III directive stipulates a minimum EU average of 42.5% renewables by 2030, with a target of 45%. Achieving this will require doubling the current share of renewables in the European energy mix.

Several European countries, such as Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Latvia, are already significantly ahead in renewable energy use (85.8%, 74.1%, 62.6%, 43.1%42.1%, respectively). The Meloni government is concerned about the socioeconomic impact of the climate change strategy, particularly the 2050 target. Prime Minister Meloni emphasized at COP28 that Italy supports an “ecological and not ideological transition.” The 2024 budget law includes many subsidies or incentives for fossil fuels, despite allocating about 40% of NRPP resources to environmental transition.

The Italian NRPP allocates about 40% of its financial resources to the environmental transition. This is a significant investment, but its environmental effectiveness may be limited because, as in many other EU countries, the socioeconomic impact of the transition could be very costly from a political perspective.

Effective Environmental Health Protection

Policy Efforts and Commitment to Minimizing Environmental Health Risks
Score: 7

Protecting the population from environmental health risks is a complex objective included in various programs of the National Plan for Ecological Transition, approved in 2022. The primary programs pursuing this goal are the National Sustainable Mobility Plan, the National Atmospheric Pollution Plan, and the National Health Prevention Plan, which is based on the One Health approach.

Two institutional networks monitor and provide technical advice to the national government: the National Network System for Environmental Protection and Regulation of the Higher Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (established in 2016) and the National System for Health Prevention from Environmental and Climate Risks (established in 2022). These networks comprise institutional and scientific actors at all levels.

Additionally, significant funding has been allocated in the NRRP to strengthen environmental health protection. Italian policy in this area is characterized by a well-designed and inclusive approach that involves key stakeholders,

supported by dense and binding legislation. However, implementing these policies relies heavily on the appropriate behavior of numerous public and private actors across various levels of government. Therefore, increased coordination is necessary to effectively manage this complex policy environment.

Effective Ecosystem and Biodiversity Preservation

Policy Efforts and Commitment to Preserving Ecosystems and Protecting Biodiversity
Score: 6

Italy is one of the most biologically diverse countries in Europe, but the situation is critical for many species and habitats. According to ISPRA, 54% of flora, 53% of terrestrial fauna, 22% of marine species, and 89% of terrestrial habitats are in an unfavorable conservation status. A third of marine habitats have an “unknown” conservation status. The management of invasive alien species is also a significant concern, with 35% of these species not yet subject to control measures.

Italy’s specific geomorphological characteristics make its territory inherently fragile. Without special attention to managing the territory, transportation infrastructure, and buildings, biodiversity can be directly harmed. Biodiversity issues are problematic in many EU member states as well.

The new National Biodiversity Strategy, adopted in 2023, builds on the experience of the previous strategy (2014-2020), which only partially achieved its objectives. The new strategy is detailed in its objectives and targets but depends on various policy actors and stakeholders. While the governance of the strategy is inclusive, it lacks a clear chain of accountability. Strong policy coordination is needed to avoid loose implementation, as recommended by the National Committee for the Natural Capital 2022 report.

Effective Contributions to Global Environmental Protection

Policy Efforts and Commitment to a Global Environmental Policy
Score: 6

The Italian government’s contribution to international efforts in global environmental policy has generally been positive. Italy has supported coordinated international action, including COP27 (2022) and COP28 (2023), although it has not played a significant leadership role. The Ministry of the Environment has limited political weight and financial resources, while the government’s attention and priorities have primarily focused on domestic economic recovery under the Draghi government and domestic issues under the Meloni government.

In selected areas, however, Italian policy has been more innovative. For example, the National Consortium for Packaging Recycling (CONAI) has enabled Italy to exceed the European 2020 targets in this area. This covers a significant proportion of plastic production and provides an efficient model for other countries. Regarding the marine environment, in 2019, Italy joined France and Spain in proposing a Mediterranean Emission Control Area (ECA).

During the Meloni government, there has been less proactivity, with most signed agreements being with small states, such as the 2022 agreement with Caribbean states. There is a clear difference between the attitudes of the Draghi and Meloni governments. The Draghi administration played an active role in promoting ambitious environmental goals during the G20 meeting chaired by Italy in October 2021, including deadlines for reducing CO₂ and preventing global warming.

Furthermore, the Italian Climate Fund, the main national public instrument for pursuing the country's commitments under international climate and environmental agreements, was established by the budget law for 2022, enacted under the Draghi government. It is a revolving fund with an endowment of €840 million per year from 2022 to 2026 and €40 million per year from 2027 onwards.

In contrast, the Meloni government has not held a significant position in terms of global environmental protection. In the budget law for 2024, the Meloni administration postponed the use of these financial resources until 2027.

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