**

***Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation***

***Inter-ministerial Committee for Human Rights***

***Italy contribution for the OHCHR Report to the High Level Political Forum on the***

***Sustainable Development Goals and the rights of the child - Human Rights Council***

***Resolution 37/20 “Rights of the Child”***

***30 November 2020***

**

**Italy contribution for the OHCHR Report to the High Level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals and the rights of the child - Human Rights Council resolution 37/20 “Rights of the Child”**

Italian Authorities are pleased to provide the following information.

***1. How the rights of the child are being upheld as a priority in your country in the face of the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children’s rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.***

It is widely internationally accepted that children and adolescents have been severely affected by the pandemic. This is due in particular to lockdown, closure of schools and educational services, and, in cases of vulnerability for various reasons - poverty, disability, violence, family inadequacy - also to a decrease of social welfare. At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted yet recorded criticalities and strong differences on the national territory as per the availability of public goods, such as early childhood education services, full-time schooling, healthcare and social services, access to digital tools, and material and educational poverty. Territorial differences are also caused by the lack of definition and implementation of essential levels so far exacerbating inequalities among children and adolescents.

Although children have been largely spared from the direct health effects of Covid-19, the crisis has had deep effects on their mental wellbeing, their social development, their safety, their privacy, and their economic security. Moreover, the harmful effects of the pandemic are not distributed equally. They are inevitably most damaging to children already living in marginalization and vulnerable situations. Struggling families are seeing breadwinners lose their jobs, with long-lasting consequences for child poverty. The educational consequences of the pandemic have particularly impacted children living in poverty or in informal settings, migrant and refugee children, homeless children, children in alternative care, as well as children of single parents and large families.

The medium-long term effects of the pandemic on children and adolescents can be found at different levels: psycho-physical well-being, learning and development. The effects have been particularly severe, and with a greater risk of irreversibility, among those who were already in disadvantage and vulnerability due to poverty conditions, severe disabilities, or difficult family situations.

There appear to be four targets to work in a timely manner:

1) Investing in school and educational material and human infrastructures;

2) Guaranteeing educational continuity even in emergency conditions;

3) Fighting child material and educational poverty;

4) Supporting the rights of those in vulnerable situations.

Moreover two cross-cutting targets could be added:

a) Reducing territorial inequalities in the availability of public goods, such as healthcare, childcare, school;

b) Encouraging the participation of children and adolescents in designing actions that affect them.

With this framework, Italy has been putting in place several measures at the national level to address the negative impact of the pandemic on families and on children’s rights with a special focus on vulnerable children.

Among the measures that are currently being implemented by Italy, the following are particularly worth mentioning:

* **Guidelines for the safe management of social and leisure opportunities for children in phase 2 of the Covid-19 emergency**

The Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department for Family Policies has drafted specific Guidelines for the safe management of social and leisure opportunities for children in phase 2 of the Covid-19 emergency, in collaboration with the National Association of Italian Municipalities, the Conference of Regions an Autonomous Provinces, the Ministries of Education, Health, Labour and Social Policies, Youth Policies and Sport. The guidelines are aimed at concretely protecting

the psychological and physical wellbeing of children and regulating the modalities for the safe implementation of leisure and recreational activities.

* **National Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence**

On 8 April 2020, Italy re-established the National Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence, whose extensive mandate also includes the adoption, next year, of the new National Action Plan for the Protection of the Rights and Development of Children.

* **Experts’ Group on children and Covid-19**

Within the framework of the activities carried out by the National Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence, a specific Working Group of experts for the assessment of the current health emergency’s impact on children and the identification of actions and strategies on the topic to be proposed to the Government has been established.

* **Anti-Wastage donations**

With the aim of contributing to overcome the loneliness experienced by hospitalized children and elderly people, as well as by vulnerable children and their families staying home in compliance with the lockdown measures currently in force in Italy, and with a view to providing people with more educational and cultural opportunities while in the hospitals and at home, the Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family called upon the main IT and toy-selling companies operating in Italy to donate them electronic, IT, educational and play materials (toys, personal computers, tablets, e-readers, etc.) in line with the anti-wastage provisions extended by Art. 31 of Decree Law No. 9 of 2 March 2020.

* **The “#CiStoDentro” (#IAmIn) initiative**

The “#CiStoDentro” (#IAmIn) project is the initiative launched by the Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family to provide all parents with a tool for experimenting new ways to play with their children at home during the current lockdown. The initiative is available on the website of the Department for Family Policies (http://famiglia.governo.it/ci-sto-dentro/) and includes several sections, such as 1) information on Coronavirus; 2) the possibility to send a letter to the Minister; 3) pieces of advice on new games to be played at home; 3) suggestions on books to read; and 4) a photo gallery.

* **Extraordinary leave for parents and babysitting bonus**

As a consequence of the spread of the Covid-19 virus all over the country and considering the subsequent temporary suspension of the provision of child education services and teaching activities in all Italian schools, Art. 23 of Decree Law No. 18 of 17 March 2020 (the so-called *Cura Italia* Decree) introduced an extraordinary leave and bonus for parents, with the aim of supporting them during the period of temporary closure of school activities.

* **Extension of the Fund for the Family Policies**

With a view to supporting children, youth and their parents in the summer period after the first wave of the Covid-19 health emergency and combating educational poverty, the *Rilancio* Decree Law has established the increase by 150 million euros of the national Fund for Family Policies for 2020. Such amount has been allocated to municipalities:

* for the strengthening of day-time summer camps, local social and educational services, and educational and recreational centers for children aged 3-14 in summertime, in collaboration with public and private entities;
* to combat educational poverty through the financing of specific projects during and after the emergency, with a view to catching up the educational and cultural opportunities lost during lockdown.
* **Family Card**

On 18 March 2020, the new Family Card was lunched by the Department for Family Policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The Card allows families with 3 children under 26 years of age to access discounts and price reductions on goods and services offered by the companies participating in the initiative and listed in the online portal specifically set up by the Department. With the entry into force of Decree Law No.9 of 2 March 2020, the Family Card has been extended to all families with one child living in the Italian territory, with a view to providing additional support to families during the current virus crisis.

***2. Particularly noteworthy examples of good practice towards realizing the rights of the child in your country, in relation to sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the goals under review - including specific laws, policies and actions to advance the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.***

Among the main actions carried out by Italy for the future sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic and for advancing the implementation of the CRC during the current health and economic crises, the following are particularly worth mentioning:

• **Call for proposals for the financing of leisure, non-formal and informal education projects for the empowerment of children and youth**

With a view to contributing to narrow the educational gap generated by the lockdown measures during the Covid-19 emergency, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department for Family Policies elaborated a public Call for proposals for the financing of leisure, non-formal and informal education projects for the empowerment of children and youth, with a view to allowing them to acquire knowledge and abilities that will contribute to the development of their potential as active and responsible citizens and promote their commitment towards their society, while respecting differences. The Call has been aimed at promoting education activities to accelerate the recovery of the society after the end of the first wave of the pandemic, in collaboration with civil society organizations and local bodies. The total allocated amount is equal to 35 million euros and is funding projects on children’s and youth’s empowerment, intercultural exchange, intergenerational dialogue, non-discrimination and equality, inclusion of disadvantaged children and persons with disabilities, promotion of healthy lifestyles among children and youth, environmental protection and sustainable development, appreciation of local cultural heritage and respectful use of social media. The funded actions will also be aimed at supporting children and their families whose vulnerable conditions have worsened after the Covid-19 outbreak.

• **Family Act**

On 12 June 2020, the Council of Ministers in Italy adopted the bill delegating powers to the Government regarding the adoption of a universal allowance and the introduction of measures to support families, namely a specific set of measures for families with children called Family Act. The Family Act is aimed at supporting parenthood and the social and educational role of families, combating low birth rates in Italy, valuing the harmonious growth of children and youth, and promoting work-life balance.

The Act envisages, inter alia:

* The establishment of a monthly universal allowance for each child from their birth to their adult age and without age limits for children with disabilities;
* The strengthening of policies to support families for the payment of educational and school expenses, as well as of sport and cultural activities;
* The reforming of parental leaves, including by extending them to all professionals and establishing compulsory and structural paternity leaves.

• In 2021, the Department for Family Policies of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and UNICEF will implement a **24-month pilot project within the framework of the programme “Testing the Child Guarantee in the EU Member States” of the European Commission**. The programme will showcase innovative approaches and develop national action plans to reduce child poverty and address systematic disadvantages for children in need. These include children at risk of poverty and exclusion, Roma children, children in institutional care, children living with disabilities, and refugee and migrant children. The intervention will also contribute to strengthening the capacities of the Member States to collect, analyse, and present data on indicators related to child poverty and social exclusion.

• Over the last months, Italy coordinated the elaboration of a **Non-paper on strengthening the European Commission’s commitment on children after the Covid-19 pandemic**, which focuses on the following priority areas:

• Reduction of educational poverty and inequalities concerning children’s access to education;

• Supporting families in the recovery stage from the pandemic;

• Prevention of domestic violence against children, including domestic violence witnessed by children, and protection of its victims;

• Increasing equal access to affordable and quality health services for children;

• Increasing the participation of children in decision-making processes as active agents for change.

The Non-paper was bilaterally agreed with the French Government and sent to the European Commission.

As above mentioned, within the framework of the National Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence, established at the Department for Family Policies of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers and put under the political leadership of the Minister for Equal Opportunities and the Family an **Experts’ Group on children and Covid-19** has been established in May 2020. It has performed and completed its task in October 2020 to identify critical issues in the pandemic's condition of children and adolescents and making proposals for action to be taken in the short term, albeit in a broader perspective and considering the reflections carried out in the parallel Working Groups of the aforementioned Observatory, so as to avoid inconsistencies.

To this end, it has prepared an extensive detailed document, accompanied by a series of summary sheets highlighting the key-points on the matter. An appendix to the document also lists both the recommendations made by international bodies and the main research on the impact of the pandemic on children and adolescents carried out at national and international level.

So far the following recommendations have been formulated.

**Investing in the school and education**

* Allocation of 15% of the Next Generation EU fund, in order to reach full capacity (5%) for material infrastructure and digitisation, but also for training teachers granting more participatory and interdisciplinary teaching.
* Contrast any reduction of the educational/time offer, to be expanded by:
* *increasing the offer of nurseries, to reach within 3 years at least 33% coverage at the local level (60% in the long-term);*
* *generalising full-time in kindergarten and at least in primary schools, starting with the areas with the highest concentration of poverty and social disadvantages;*
* *expanding full-time opportunities in secondary schools (first level).*
* Mutual opening between schools and local environments during the school year school and suspension of teaching activities.
* Incentivising and monitoring jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Department for Family Policies the so called community education pacts, preventing the creation of territorial inequalities during their implementation. The preliminary funds to be used for this purpose have been allocated by Law Decree No. 104 of 14 August 2020 to be refinanced every year, plus funds of the Ministry of Education yet allocated for this purpose.
* Investing in the acquisition of digital competences by students and guarantee the availability of devices and free internet access for all.
* Incentivising the participation of students to define behavioural rules for the prevention of pandemics and the related educational programmes.
* Fostering active collaboration of parents.
* Instituting in schools a point to promote and protect health and global well-being of students, supported by health professionals who also act as a bridge with local services (possible use of EU Funds-MES).

**Guaranteeing school continuity also during emergencies**

* Systematically monitor that schools of all kinds have an integrated teaching plan to be started in all cases where there conditions are not met to carry out or participate collectively or individually to school teaching in presence.
* In case of need for distance learning, encourage cooperation among all actors within the educational community, especially in the case of children and adolescents suffering from disadvantages due to economic conditions, learning difficulties, disability.
* Distinguish measures to support the need for a parent's presence for confinement of an infra-teen-year-old, taking into account different employment and contractual conditions.

**Fighting material and educational poverty of children**

* Review the criteria for accessing to the so called *Reddito di Cittadinanza* to overcome difficulties penalising families with an high number of children.
* Considering the specific needs/costs of families with children with disabilities.
* In the so called inclusion pacts for beneficiaries of the *Reddito di Cittadinanza*, consider also needs and capabilities of children and adolescents.
* Assessing, within the Child Guarantee, the opportunity to establish vouchers for extra-school activities to be used in the community education pacts.
* Facing food poverty, exacerbated by closure or reduction of canteen services.
* Ensuring that all planned initiatives are actually implemented in all schools and throughout the territory to complete learning paths, without producing effects of marginalisation and discouragement and to strengthen resilience.

Jointly with the educational community:

* To also address the issue of children and adolescents with particular fragilities - behavioural disorders, learning disorders, disability , poor foreigners, unaccompanied minors and minors in communities - so that they are not further marginalised in and from the school due to security needs.
* In the case of individual or class confinements or lockdowns, it is necessary to provide hospitality for those children and adolescents - and adults, who have inadequate housing and/or family conditions.

**Supporting the rights of vulnerable children**

* Define essential services levels, according to a minimum ratio between adequately trained and monitored staff and the children population, to be absolutely guaranteed and implemented on the basis of needs’ indicators.
* Establishment of a national intersectoral information system.
* For children with disabilities, encourage participation to inclusive interaction activities with peers and to targeted enabling/rehabilitation paths, and recover therapies through personalised rehabilitative projects, identifying the most appropriate interventions.
* In educational contexts, provision of assistance measures according to the type and level of disability.
* Implementation of the 3 National Guidelines (family fostering, vulnerable communities and families) throughout the national territory, also by the allocation of specific economic resources and adopting uniform and systematic monitoring.
* Guaranteeing for minors in communities the right to sociality and relationships - denied during the lockdown, and full participation educational activities.
* Sustaining and implementing family support and, more generally, projects to prevent the removal of children from the family.
* Re-launching national and international adoptions.
* Pursuing effective compliance with the legislation on the protection of unaccompanied minors, ensuring as much as possible the reception standards also during confinement. In particular:
* *the prompt identification of minors at disembarking points and the timely verification of their specific needs and their reception in dedicated and suitable centres;*
* *timely appointment of a guardian;*
* *respect for the best interest and the right to participation, through effective enforcement of legislation and international standards.*

In the final document released by the Covid-19 Experts’ Group a specific reference has been introduced to the UN CRC Convention, as follows: “As enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and reiterated by the UN Committee Concluding Observations of February 2019, listening and participation of children and adolescents must become effective, fully implementing and, if necessary, incorporating the regulations in force. They must be valorised not only within each system in which they express their personality, but also with regard to budget planning, policies definition, laws drafting processes. To this scope and with reference to the measures introduced and implemented during the pandemic, it is important that they

a) actively participate in the process of implementation of rules relating to school planning and security protocols;

b) they become promoters of empowerment processes towards peers, through peer education models;

c) they are agents for innovative learning models, also in implementation schools regulations;

d) they are promoters and users of specific listening spaces for the elaboration and management of emotions and anxieties depending upon the Covid-19 pandemic”.