
EU: Citizenship Income and family allowance promote discrimination. Bassi: "The European Commission should take steps to address the demographic winter"

The European Commission decided to open an infringement procedure against Italy because its minimum income scheme "is not in line with EU law on free movement of workers, citizens' rights, long-term residents and international protection" since "its 10-year residence requirement qualifies as indirect discrimination as it is more likely that non-Italian nationals do not meet this criterion. It directly discriminates against beneficiaries of international protection, who are not eligible for this benefit." Brussels opened another infringement procedure against Italy "on the single and universal dependent child allowance" intended for people who have been living in the country for at least two years and who share a household with their children. SIR interviewed **Vincenzo Bassi**, president of the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (**FAFCE**), to discuss these two infringement procedures.



[According to the EU Commission, the new family allowance should be granted irrespective of residence. Let us discuss it constructively, in the awareness that this family allowance is the first demographic policy measure in Italy. In fact, for the first time Italian families have been recognised for their service to the common good. In this respect, it is to be hoped that steps for addressing the demographic winter will be taken actively also by the European Commission, supporting initiatives such as the new family allowance. Commission and European Parliament indifference on this issue poses perhaps the greatest threat to the future of our Europe, regardless of the outcome of this infringement procedure. Measures granting incentives to anyone investing in Italy, thereby promoting its development, cannot be contrary to the treaties. It is necessary to find a way to give a central role to childbearing families in policy-making.](#)

[A child is a child. We need children. Hopefully the European Commission will also realise this. Over and above the specific issue of the residence requirement, it is a reminder of the extent to which families with children are discriminated against. In Italy in particular, families with children are not treated fairly. Family policies and, more importantly, demographic policies, are not merely a part of welfare policies. Indeed, they are policies in their own right, and can be considered veritable economic policies, for investing in the future. While it is normal for a nation to seek ways to attract new residents \(and thus more children and labour, a country's true wealth\), it goes without saying that this should be done in compliance with EU law. However, we must remember that unless the demographic winter is stopped, it will affect the convergence criteria \(or "Maastricht criteria"\) that EU Member States are called to meet. Inflation, annual and overall public debt to GDP in particular, are bound to increase and slacken the economy, economic stability and growth. In order to tackle EU instability, it might therefore be useful to address demographic issues, as well as the Maastricht criteria. In other words, a thorough reflection is needed not so much on the instruments but rather on the objectives of EU countries' demographic policies. **How does Italy compare to other European countries in terms of measures resembling its family allowance?** Drawing comparisons between](#)

EU member countries is complicated, since provisions such as the family allowance ("assegno unico") should be viewed within the broader tax policy framework, which varies between countries. Admittedly, freedom of movement is a cornerstone tenet of EU law, whereby every EU citizen must be recognised as such in any Member State. This applies to all areas of social life - except for specific cases such as elections - and citizens are entitled to the same treatment as their fellow citizens in a given State. Nevertheless, each Member State must prevent situations of abuse, for example, of citizens travelling solely for the purpose of benefiting from better welfare treatment. With respect to family policies, there is no such thing as a single European family policy. It is indeed the responsibility of each Member State. However, the demographic issue falls within the competence of the EU. Therefore, __

the Commission should pay greater regard to the fact that the family allowance is a premium measure of demographic policy.

In fact, the new family allowance is designed to encourage families' desire to responsibly give birth and raise their children, which is also in the interest of individual Member States (as well as the EU). As a matter of fact, families are the ones who build the future of a given territorial context. Given this dynamic, families' bond with the territory where they live is a key aspect of demographic policies. If the specific character of demographic policies as opposed to welfare and social policies is overlooked, compliance of the new family allowance with EU law will be hard to assess. In this regard, it would be interesting to know the Commission's opinion on the extent to which, in the context of demographic policies, a family's long-term bond with the local community can be considered as a vital element rather than a discriminating factor. Clearly, any ideological approach is unacceptable. **Italy has been facing the serious problem of demographic winter, with birth rates declining every year. The new family allowance is a measure to support childbirth. In your opinion, to what extent can it be improved?** In the words of Gigi De Palo, president of the National Forum of Family Associations, we must do something now before it is too late. As FAFCE we held several meetings with ministers from several European countries for the past three years. And I have to say that awareness on this issue is widespread. However, concrete steps for promoting family-support measures are lacking. Maybe the trend will never be reversed in the opposite direction, but the slide towards the precipice could certainly be slowed down. In our view, families are encouraged if they form part of family networks. In fact, children are more likely to represent a resource and an asset for the whole community within these family networks. Therefore, let us work towards building fairer and more authentic communities of families with a view to intergenerational solidarity. **The second infringement procedure concerns the Citizenship Income legislation ("Reddito di cittadinanza") due to the residence requirement. Large family size and poverty are often closely linked. Italy still has a long way to go on this issue... What is the situation in the rest of Europe?** According to the latest OECD data, family support spending in France (without calculating tax deductions) made up almost 3% of GDP in 2020. In 2019, Italy's contribution was less than half this percentage (1.4 per cent), closely followed only by Spain and Portugal. Yet again, it's not a question of increasing welfare measures, but rather of initiating genuine family support processes. It is only by giving families - their savings and their networks- renewed impetus that poverty can be effectively prevented, thereby initiating intergenerational solidarity.

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