
More than 340,000 child workers in Italy, 3 out of 4 within family businesses. School closures will have "devastating effects"

The closure of schools due to the Coronavirus, with many students unable to access distance learning, will have "a devastating effect" on child labour in Italy. On the World Day Against the Exploitation of Child Labour, little is said about this uninterrupted national phenomenon which institutions are not sufficiently investigating. The latest national survey, conducted by the B. Trentin Association at CGIL - National Labour Confederation - (which has been addressing the problem of child labour for over twenty years) and Save the Children, dates back to 2013, estimating approximately 340,000 children under 16 years of age in employment, representing 7% of their peers. Two out of three of these 14-15 year-olds are males. 7% are foreign nationals. The International Labour Organization also reports approximately 300,000 children involved. With regard to controls, the National Labour Inspectorate found a total of 502 offences in 2019, 243 of which involved "protection of children and young people at work". It should be noted that child labour in Italy was outlawed in 1967. A total of 1,437 criminal offences were found between 2013 and the first half of 2018. These are not slave children exploited 12 hours a day as in African mines or Asian textile industries.

Child labour in Italy has its origins in the family, it is a major educational and cultural problem.

Many parents encourage their children, especially when they fail at school, to devote their time to family businesses in the catering industry, retail, agriculture and handicrafts. Another issue is that of unaccompanied foreign minors who escape from shelters and vanish into thin air, amounting to up to 50% of the total number. Many of them end up in illegal employment victims of serious exploitation.

[The Covid-19 effect. Sector associations and trade unions have long been calling for national monitoring, so far in vain. They have been repeatedly denouncing the gravity of this phenomenon that risks growing worse as a result of the Covid-19 crisis with escalating school drop-out rates. "Clearly, three months outside the classroom will have a devastating effect on thousands of children - Anna Teselli, in charge of school policies at CGIL, is alarmed -. These children were already in danger of dropping out of school, let alone of distance learning. Many of them have no PCs, tablets or internet connections".](#)

["This year we risk seeing children aged 10 and 11 dropping out of school".](#)

["In Italy," she said, "there is a tendency towards early family-oriented labour, especially when parents have a low level of education or when children are expelled from school. These are all areas with a poor cultural and educational offer. They send their children to work in cafés, repair shops, family-run restaurants and so on. In some parts of the country, such as Naples, Palermo, Bari, there is a further risk of being approached by the Mafia." The cases reported by the Labour Inspectorate, several hundred, "are but only among the most extreme cases of exploitation", she explained: "child labour is linked to educational poverty and to the socio-economic growth of the country."](#)

3 in 4 children work for the family. According to the latest national survey almost 3 children out of 4 work for the family, helping parents in their small and very small family-run businesses (41%) or supporting them in household chores (30%). The remaining 29% are equally distributed among children working for relatives and friends or for other people. Males represent the majority. The critical experience of failing school examinations is significantly more frequent in minors with work experience. One in five 14-15 year-olds who work are in a full-time job (almost 55,000), especially in the family environment. 65% work on a daily or regular basis, i.e. for more than 6 months (67% vs 27%). 34% of all types of work are carried out in the evening or at night.

Some 28,000 children are involved in activities "at risk of exploitation".



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Many Italian working minors fit into the categories of so-called "Early school leavers" (or school dropouts) and NEET (Neither in employment nor in education or training), estimated at over 2 million in Italy - with the largest numbers in the south of the Country - the highest in Europe. "We are condemning an entire generation to cultural and economic deprivation," Teselli pointed out. Requests have been repeatedly made to national authorities for years. These include: "to increase teaching staff and inclusive teaching methods to keep children in school; to differentiate and strengthen the educational offer, especially in the technical-professional sector;

to develop awareness campaigns involving local authorities, parishes, oratories, to make families understand that their children must not drop out of school".

