**

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

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

***Contribution for the Study on***

***the Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human rights of young people***

***pursuant to HRC Resolution 48/12***

***February 2022***

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Following the request from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Italian authorities are pleased to provide the following contribution.

**1) What are the main challenges that young people face in your country in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic and the response to it? If any age disaggregated data has been collected in this regard, please include it in your response.**

COVID-19 pandemic has put the world on an unprecedent crisis where children and youth have been especially vulnerable.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis has been felt across countries—from the economic and social impacts of national lockdowns, to the near collapse of overburdened health systems, to the loss of learning opportunities for children due to school closures, and to the strains felt by families both financially and psychologically.

Timely, disaggregated, and quality data on the situation of children can help identify where the most vulnerable live so that interventions to counteract the potential adverse effects of COVID-19 can be implemented to reach those most in need.

**2) What measures is your Government taking to support young people and ensure the full implementation of their rights during and after the pandemic? Please provide examples of policies and programmes adopted to this end, in particular regarding**

**• right to work and social security (including, for example, to address the job loss, reduction of working hours, wage cut, etc.);**

According to the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) preliminary estimates , in 2020 the number of people in absolute poverty in Italy reached the highest level in 15 years.

This means that the rise registered in the year of the COVID-19 pandemic reversed the reduction in poverty levels achieved by Italy in 2019.

ISTAT reported a massive jump in poverty in Italy in 2020, with around one million more people landing in absolute poverty.

Absolute poverty is defined by ISTAT as an income level below that of a “basket of goods and services considered essential, and which allows for a dignified life”.

The incidence for individuals rose from 7.7% in 2019 to 9.4% in 2020, meaning 5.6 million people were in absolute poverty (a number which includes 1.3 million minors).

The incidence of families in absolute poverty was up from 6.4% in 2019 to 7.7% in 2020, which means over two million households were in absolute poverty, up 335,000.

The Emergency income (“Reddito di Emergenza”) and the Citizenship income (so called “Reddito di Cittadinanza”) ensured the increase wasn’t a drastic as it would have been otherwise. However, the citizenship income shown itself to be less favourable towards those living in the North, and those with more children: as a matter of fact, the North of Italy saw the biggest increase, accounting for 720,000 of these ‘new poor’, while large families (those with at least five members) were worst hit, with the incidence rising to 20.7 per cent.

To deal with the Covid-19 emergency, in 2020 the Italian Government introduced a series of measures to support Italian families, in particular new “schemes” such as the above mentioned Citizenship income and the Emergency income as well as measures to support working parents :

- the Emergency income is an economic contribution introduced by the Italian Government in May 2020, aimed at households who, due to the COVID-19 health emergency, find themselves in particular economic difficulties.

- the Citizenship income (initially introduced in 2019 to replace the so called Inclusion Income - Reddito di Inclusione/REI) is actually a means-tested cash benefit characterised by stricter conditionality rules for beneficiaries, which is targeted at poor and socially excluded households and conditional on participation in job-search activities.

- Parental leave for parents who are private-sector employees and have children children under the age of 12, granting an allowance equal to 50 per cent of their salary;

- Vouchers to purchase babysitting services to be used for services provided in 2020. for up to a maximum of € 600 that was then increased up to 1200 euros (up to 2000 euros for health sector employees);

- Smart working: During the state of emergency and up until 31 December 2020, parents employed in the private sector with at least one child under the age of 14 had the right to work from home, even without an individual agreement to do so, provided that there is no other parent in the household benefiting from income support schemes should their work have been suspended or terminated, and as long as the other parent is working. All public-sector employers could opt for smart working, too for most of the working week.

From January 1st 2022, the Italian Government introduced the so called Child Universal Grant for all families with children up to 21 years old (and infinitely for children with disabilities). The new single allowance replaced a raft of other “child benefit” unifying a series of measures to support families: from July to December 2021 there was a transition phase and UCG was reserved for families who did not receive any other income support measures for their children.

COVID-19 has deepened existing inequalities, in particular socio-economic inequalities and fragile social safety nets that leave vulnerable categories and communities to bear the brunt of the crisis. At the same time, social, political and economic inequalities have amplified the impacts of the pandemic.

Since poverty and social exclusion are expected to rise in the coming years across Europe and the causes and impacts of child poverty are multidimensional (as access to health, education, childcare, leisure, food, health and housing are all interlinked), the European Commission in partnership with UNICEF is implementing a 2-year project to support the testing of the Child Guarantee Programme in 7 EU Member States, including Italy.

The Child Guarantee aims to ensure that vulnerable children have access to quality services and to implement interventions that reduce the effects of poverty and social exclusion on them. This includes the most vulnerable among them, such as children without parental care, children with disabilities, children belonging to minorities and refugee and migrant children.

Since the second half of 2020, Italy’s National Autorithies in charge (in particular the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Family and Equal Opportunities), are working in close partnership with the EU Commission and UNICEF (Europe and Central Asia Regional Office and UNICEF Italian Committee) on strengthening the capacity of the Country to deliver services, care and support to vulnerable children and their families, including improving access to education, healthcare, education, nutritious food, quality housing and childcare and identifying examples of best practices that could be scaled up across the European Union.

To ensure children’s and young people’s participation in all phases of the Child Guarantee pilot testing – including the development of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan - UNICEF, in collaboration with Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Family and Equal Opportunities, established a Youth Advisory Board.

**• right to education (including in the context of the closure of educational institutions and transition to online learning);**

At the height of COVID-19 lockdowns, around 1.5 billion schoolchildren in the world were affected by school closures and at least a third of the world’s schoolchildren were unable to access remote learning during school closures .

In March 2020, Governments began implementing measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus, closing schools globally and moving to distance learning almost overnight: about 150 countries fully closed their schools, about 10 countries partially closed them, and another 10 kept schools fully open. This situation began to change in May, with a decline in the number of countries deciding to fully close their schools and an increase in number of countries who were partially or fully open. Six months from the start of school closures — in September, a reversal in trends emerged: around 100 countries opened schools fully, while about 50 countries opened schools partially and around 25 countries kept their schools fully shut.

Italy was the first country in Europe to implement a nationwide lockdown. Schools and universities began to close in late February 2020, starting with the north of Italy (Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Liguria, Piedmont, Veneto, and Friuli Venezia Giulia). By 10 March 2020, the Government extended lockdown measures to all regions in the country. Children and their families lived in almost complete isolation for almost two months until 3 May 2020, and schools remained closed until September. Excluding scheduled academic breaks, students in Italy missed 65 days of regular school due to COVID-19 lockdown measures, as compared to an average of 27 missed days among high-income countries worldwide. This prolonged break has been of concern, as even short breaks in schooling can cause significant loss of learning for children and lead to educational inequalities over time.

According to a study carried out by UNICEF Office of Research based on interviews with 1,028 families across Italy, at least 3 million Italian students may not have been reached by remote learning due to a lack of internet connectivity or devices at home; approximately 27 per cent of families reported not having suitable technology during the lockdown in Italy and 30 per cent of parents said they didn't have time to support their children with remote learning,

Six per cent of the children in the same sample were unable to take part in distance learning activities provided by their schools due to unstable connectivity or lack of devices.

To deal with the impact of Covid-19 emergency on Education, the Italian Government introduced a series of measures, such as:

• increasing resources for the ‘Fund for digital innovation and teaching workshops’, dedicating resources to the purchase of digital platforms and tools for state schools, to loaning personal digital devices to less well-off students and to staff training;

• increasing resources available to the Fund dedicated to school building requirements and adapting educational activities for the 2020/2021 academic year, in order to make them safe and to hire new teachers;

• increasing resources for the Fund for the proper functioning of schools, ensuring that they can reopen safely and that the 2020/2021 School year would have gone ahead appropriately, in line with the requirements of the epidemiological situation; this includes also resources dedicated to special-need teachers for students with disabilities and students with specific learning disorders and other special educational needs.

In terms of school inclusion for children with disabilities, according to ISTAT latest data :

• In Italy in the school year 2020/2021 there were over 300 thousand students with disabilities (3.6% of the total; + 2% with respect to the previous School Year);

• Characteristics and quality of school services play a key role for an effective inclusion process: in the school year 2019/2020 there were still too many physical barriers in the Italian schools and only one school out of three was accessible for pupils with physical disabilities.

• Due to COVID-19 epidemic, between April and June 2020 over 23% of pupils with disabilities (about 70 thousand individuals) were unable to take part in distance learning activities provided by their schools (reaching 29% in the South of Italy); these data improved in the School Year 2020/2021 with just 2,3% of students with disabilities unable to attend distance learning activities.

• The reasons that made it difficult for pupils with disabilities to participate in distance learning have been the same through School Year 2019/2020 and 2020/2021, although the percentages decreased from one year to another: the severity of the pathology (from 27% to 26%), the difficulty of the family members to support them (from 20% to 14%), socio-economic distress (from 17% to 14%), difficulty in adapting the Individualized Educational Plan (PEI) for distance learning (6%), the lack of specific technological tools (from 115 to 6%) and specific teaching aids (from 3% to 2%).

During the most critical phase of the pandemic, the Italian Government has implemented many initiatives to support children in the enjoyment of their human right to education, including the publication of 3 Calls for Proposals for the financing of non-formal and informal education projects for children’s empowerment. In particular, the Call for Proposals called “Educare” (literally ‘Educating’) was launched by the Prime Minister’s Office – Dept. for Family Policies - on 10 June 2020 with the aim of promoting the restart of the educational, leisure and recreational activities for children, who were strongly damaged by the restrictions imposed during the first stages of the pandemic. The Call envisaged the allocation of 35 million Euros, that were used for the funding of 328 projects carried out all over the national territory.

The second Call for Proposals, called “Educare Insieme” (Educating Together) was aimed at the financing of projects for the elimination of educational poverty and the promotion of cultural and educational opportunities for children. It was launched by the Department on 30 December 2020 with a total allocation of 15 million euros. Through this Call, 98 projects were funded all over the country.

On 1 December 2020, the public Call for Proposals called “Educare in Comune” (Educating in Municipality) was published with the aim of funding projects to be implemented by the Italian Municipalities to combat the educational poverty and social exclusion of children precisely in a historical period in which the health emergency had exacerbated the already existing inequalities, vulnerabilities, and social and economic gaps. The amount allocated for this Call was equal to 15 million euros. The assessment of the submitted projects is currently underway.

**• right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (including with the increase in domestic violence and abuse, anxiety and depression, stress caused by social isolation, etc.);**

Children and young people seemed to remain at low risk of COVID-19 mortality, according to a Study published by The Lancet which reports data from seven Countries (including Italy) comparing COVID-19 deaths to all-cause mortality in under-19s between March 2020 and the beginning of 2021: in Italy the rate of deaths per 100 000 children was 0·16 for children aged 0–9 years and 0·17 for children aged 10–19 years corresponding to 8 deaths among children aged 0–9 years and 10 deaths among children aged 10–19 years.

About COVID-19 transmission in schools, the reopening of schools in Italy in September 2020 coincided with the beginning of a new acute phase of the epidemic, which, starting from the end of the month, saw an exponential increase in COVID-19 cases until reaching a peak around mid-November 2020. That’s why, to contain virus transmission, the Government, between October and November 2020 extended distance learning (already adopted by some Regions in secondary schools soon after the September reopening) - to first grade secondary schools in the so-called “red zones” Regions. A Report of the National Health Institute (ISS-Istituto Superiore di Sanità) analysed the national epidemiological trend of COVID-19 cases in school age children (3-18 years) in the period 24 August - 27 December 2020 describing the evidence currently available on the impact of closure / reopening of the school on COVID-19 community transmission

According to the above mentioned Report, between the end of August and the end of December 2020 1.783418 individuals were diagnosed in Italy with COVID-19 of which 203.350 (11%) were pupils between 13 and 18 years. Most school-age cases (40%) occurred among upper secondary school adolescents aged 14-18, followed by primary school children aged 6-10 (27%), lower secondary school children aged 11- 13 years old (23%) and by 3-5 year old preschool children (10%).

UNICEF warned that even before the pandemic, children and young people globally carried the burden of mental health risks, with half of all mental disorders developing before age 15 and 75% by early adulthood. The majority of the 800,000 people who die by suicide every year are young people, and self-harm is the third leading cause of death among 15–19-year-olds, with higher rates among adolescent girls. Mental health of millions of children worldwide has been put at risk further during the COVID-19 pandemic: the latter has disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93 per cent of countries worldwide, while the demand for mental health support has increased. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic at least 1 in 7 children (332 million globally) has lived under required or recommended nationwide stay-at-home policies for at least nine months: for children experiencing violence, neglect or abuse at home, lockdowns have left many stranded with abusers and without the support of teachers, extended families and communities.

In June 2020 the Ministry of Health presented the results of a survey conducted by Gaslini Children's Hospital of Genoa within the “Families and Children cope with COVID-19” (Face-COVID-19) project which was set up during the early stages of the lockdown in Italy in early March. The purpose of the project was to support families and children during the critical phase of confinement. through a dedicated anonymous phone and mail service that was managed by specialists in children and adolescents' psychopathology and trauma.

In particular, the above mentioned survey was developed by child and adolescent psychiatry specialists and experienced psychologists and administered to Italian families between March 23 and April 4, 2020. The questionnaire was officially released on the institutional website of the Gaslini Children's Hospital and disseminated through institutional and private social media. The analysis focused on adults (caregivers) with children under 18 years, specifically those under 6 years and those between 6 and 18 years. The questionnaire was completed by 6,871 respondents. Behavioral changes in children were reported in 64.3% and 72.5% of the <6 years group and 6–18 years group, respectively. Disorders that were frequently reported in the <6 years group included increased irritability (34.7%), sleep disorders - which constituted difficulties in falling asleep and night awakenings - (19% each), and stress symptoms, such as restlessness (18.6%) and separation anxiety (16.4%). In the 6–18 years group, the main behavioral changes concerned somatic aspects, such as short breath (71.3%) as well as sleep problems, which comprised difficulties in falling asleep (48.6%) and waking up (33.2%).

In addition, in December 2020 the Italian Ministry of Health hosted the conference “Health and Mental Wellbeing of Children and Adolescents”.

As highlighted in UNICEF State of the World’s Children Report 2021 , children continue to bear the brunt of the mental health burden globally, with over half of mental health conditions starting by the age of 14. According to UNICEF “State of the world Children - European Brief” launched in October 2021 , in Italy the prevalence of psychological conditions in adolescence is reported to be higher than the global and European average (respectively, 13.2% and 16.3%), with 16.6% of boys and girls between 10 and 19 years suffering from mental health issues in 2019 (about 956,000 in total), with the majority being girls (17.2% over 16.1% boys).

**• right to participate meaningfully in political and public affairs (including in connection with the prohibition of gatherings and transition to online rallies);**

In April 2020 the Italian National Observatory on Childhood has been renewed and convened by the Ministry of Family and Equal Opportunities. The National Observatory is composed of around 60 people representing, among others, Ministries, Regions, Municipalities, civil society organizations. It is in charge of drafting every two years the National Plan of Action on Childhood: from July to November 2020 the Observatory has worked on the draft of the Plan through the establishment of 5 thematic working groups dedicated to: child poverty, educational role of Communities at local level (so called “Comunità Educanti”), health and wellbeing, protection of most vulnerable groups, children’s participation. In consideration of the COVID-19 epidemic spread, a dedicated working group composed of experts has been set up and tasked to come up with two documents identifying the priorities of intervention to tackle the impact of the emergency on children and adolescents’ rights.

The National Plan of Action was then adopted by the National Observatory in May 2021 and approved by the Council of Ministers in January 2022: the whole process was conducted taking into account the Concluding Observations addressed to Italy by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The overall goal was to design a public and integrated system of services, providing adequate care and protection for children, based on non-discrimination and full, inclusive and meaningful participation to ensure that their views are heard and valued in decision-making processes affecting their lives. This strategy requires different, multilayered and coordinated forms of prevention and protection, which can be achieved within families, through education, social, cultural and health services, and within communities.

In November 2020, the Chamber od Deputies’ President and the Senate of the Republic’s President jointly appointed the new National Ombudsperson for children’s rights (AGIA), whose previous mandate had expired in April 2020. The new Ombudsperson begun her mandate in January 2021, going to be in charge for the following 4 years. Among the actions pursued by the latter during the pandemic, in collaboration with the Interministerial Committee for Human Rights and the Italian Committee for UNICEF, there is the Italian translation and dissemination of the CRC General Comment n. 25 on the digital environment and the rights of children: due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the related restrictions, data showed that children have been spending more time online facing multiple risks.

In 2020, after a preliminary snapshot on reactivation of universal civil service projects suspended due to the Covid-19 emergency released in May, the Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service has published an update of data and some reflections as of July 15. 32,628 young people returned to active service in 12,431 locations, while there were only 831 volunteer operators in projects that had been temporarily interrupted due to the impossibility of continuing project activities, lacking sufficient safety conditions or the organizational and operational tools necessary to restart. On a general note volunteer operators were employed in the field or remotely, projects restarted as originally planned or rescheduled, territorial distribution, twinning, situation of young people returned from abroad and those engaged in the Civil Peace Corps were monitored.

**• other rights or freedoms.**

**3) What role have the young people had in COVID-19 response, vaccination and recovery efforts in your country?**

On May 2021 vaccination campaign for young people under 30 started (#MiVaccinoPerchè), promoted by Regions and coordinated by the Extraordinary Commissioner for the Covid-19 emergency, General Francesco Paolo Figliuolo. The key goal has been that one to achieve adequate vaccination coverage to defeat Covid-19 and take back youth lives.

**4) What measures is your Government taking to value/encourage the role of youth in COVID-19 response, vaccination and recovery efforts?**

In August 2021 a substantial increase of the national fund for youth policies up to 35 million euros was granted by the Minister of Youth Policies, also in order to counteract the phenomena of youth distress.

Indeed 2020 was critical for young people: so far projects have been reinforced through financial and human resources through the promotion of interventions that offer paths of growth, participation and inclusion especially at the local level and according to a multi-sectoral approach covering the education, sports and social fields. In particular, interventions have been aimed at strengthening actions to counteract distress phenomena through the promotion and support of youth centers of aggregation, as well as opportunities for psycho-physical support, through the organization of artistic and musical workshops and free access to sports activities throughout the territory.

The fund will be managed by 51% by Regions, municipalities and provinces, and by 49% by the Department for Youth Policies at the Prime Minister’s Office.