Confederazione Unitaria di Base

# MINIMUM WAGE AND WORK DIGNITY:

## CASE IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

## JUNE 23, 2026 – 3:30 PM

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT - BRUSSELS

## Paul-Henri Spaak Building (Rue Wiertz 60)

## (Room SPAAK 1C51)

### LABOR HOLDS A POSITION OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE IN THE ITALIAN CONSTITUTIONAL CHARTER

This is clear right from Article 1, which proclaims that "*Italy is a democratic Republic, founded on labor.*".

But that is not all. Article 4 and Article 35 establish, respectively, that the Republic recognizes "*to all citizens the right to work*" and "*protects labor in all its forms and applications, provides for the training and professional advancement of workers, promotes and favors international agreements and organizations aimed at affirming and regulating labor rights*".

Article 36 of the Italian Constitution also intervenes on labor, proclaiming that "*the worker has the right to a remuneration proportionate to the quantity and quality of their work and in any case sufficient to ensure a free and dignified existence for themselves and their family*".

Furthermore, the European Social Charter, which Italy, as a member of the Council of Europe, has ratified—with the exception of Article 25 (the article defining the right of workers to the protection of their claims in the event of the insolvency of their employer)—sanctions important rights and principles in Points 1, 2, 4, 12, and 30 of Part I and Articles 1, 4, 12, and 30 of Part II. These include the right of workers to a decent remuneration, the right to social security, and the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion.

However, it is significant to remember that among the 27 EU member states, Italy—along with Austria, Denmark, Finland, Sweden,—is one of the 5 States that have not approved a law defining a Minimum Wage, meaning a law that establishes a wage threshold below which it is not permitted to pay a worker.

European Directive 2022/2041 nevertheless requires all member states to guarantee an adequate minimum wage by 2029 or, alternatively, to demonstrate that collective bargaining covers at least 80% of workers. This is a threshold that Italy currently meets, but which—aside from the risk of being eroded by precarious and irregular labor—does not in practice guarantee constitutional provisions, nor the principles and norms sanctioned by the European Social Charter.

Consider that the legal minimum wage in some countries establishes an hourly economic compensation, while in others it defines monthly pay and any additional monthly installments: in France it is 12.02 Euros per hour, in Germany 13.90 Euros per hour, in the Netherlands 14.71 Euros per hour, in Spain it is 1,221 Euros per month for 14 monthly installments, in Portugal 920 per month for 13 or 14 installments (depending on the sector of employment), in Belgium 2,112 Euros per month for 13 installments plus additional year-end bonuses, in Greece 920 Euros per month generally for 14 installments, and in Poland 1,115 Euros for 12 installments.

**It is precisely to support the implementation of the Italian Constitution, particularly Article 36, and to support the principles and rights sanctioned in the European Social Charter ratified by Italy, that the Confederazione Unitaria di Base (CUB) will participate in the debate organized by Professor Pasquale Tridico, Member of the European Parliament, in Brussels on June 23, 2026, in support of establishing a statutory Minimum Wage in Italy. Members of the European Parliament, as well as representatives from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR), will participate in this debate.**

In this regard, it is significant to recall that at the end of 2023, CUB submitted a collective complaint, the outcome of which is pending, for violations of the European Social Charter. Against this complaint, the Italian Government initially raised groundless arguments regarding the lack of standing of the aforementioned Italian grassroots union to present the petition. Later, once the European Committee of Social Rights dismissed that objection, the Government maintained—with arguments that are far from real—that the raised issues were unfounded and requested that the case be dismissed.

**On the other hand, firsthand knowledge of the labor market and data provided by national and international institutional sources reveal a reality that is very different from the provisions of the Italian Constitution, as well as from the principles and rights sanctioned in the European Social Charter.**

## POVERTY AND WORKING POVERTY: A TRUE SCOURGE IN ITALY

n 2025, approximately **13 million** people in Italy were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (meaning they were in severe material and social deprivation or living in households with very low work intensity), equal to **22.6% of the entire Italian population**.

**In particular, workers at risk of poverty or social exclusion accounted for about 12%, meaning roughly 2.7 million people were employed yet lived in the aforementioned conditions.**

The recent **2026 *Caritas Statistical Report*** also argues that following the elimination of certain social safety nets (such as the old Citizens' Income), **many low-income working families were deprived of the supplementary subsidy that prevented them from chronically sliding into social exclusion**.
Consequently, in Caritas listening centers, **the share of "working poor" who sought help in 2025 jumped to 24% of all assisted individuals**, translating to just under 70,000 people.

## STARVATION WAGES: OVER 18% OF THE WORKFORCE EARNS UNDER 9 EUROS

**n 2025, about 2 million workers received an hourly wage below 9 Euros, including the 13th-month installment. This represents roughly 13% of regular private-sector workers, or just under 8.5% if the self-employed are included.**
Obviously, this calculation accounts exclusively for regular workers registered in the INPS databases, leaving out the more than 3 million undeclared or irregular workers present in Italy.
For this vast group, actual pay does not include a 13th-month salary or additional protections, and remains almost steadily below 5–6 Euros per hour. Therefore, including these workers in the count, those earning a wage under 9 Euros an hour in Italy account for about 18% of the total employed workforce.

In 2025, between 2.8 and 3 million regular employees earned less than 10 Euros gross per hour, including the 13th-month installment. This represents 17%–18% of private-sector employees: about 1 out of 6 private employees does not reach a total of 10 Euros per hour, even when adding the 13th-month installment to their paycheck.
If we look at the country's entire workforce (totaling 24.3 million people, which also includes public employees, the self-employed, and professionals), this low-wage segment accounts for slightly more than one out of eight workers, or about 12% of all employed individuals.

**Also in 2025, 3.2 million private-sector workers earned less than 12 Euros per hour, including the 13th-month installment, which equals 23% of the private sector.**

In these last two cases as well, the calculation captures exclusively workers with a regular contract registered with INPS. If we were to add the roughly 3 million undeclared workers in Italy—who by definition do not receive a 13th-month salary and have actual wages almost always below 6 Euros an hour—the total number of people earning under 10 Euros an hour would rise to about 6 million overall, nearly 25% of those working in the country. Meanwhile, the 3.2 million workers earning an hourly wage under 12 Euros would exceed 25% of the total.

## AN ALARMING SITUATION ALSO DRIVEN BY PRECARIOUS WORK AND PART-TIME CONTRACTS

In Italy, there are approximately 2.4 million fixed-term workers, accounting for about 13%–14% of total employees.

**The recent reduction in fixed-term work has not been entirely offset by an increase in permanent contracts.**

In reality, the overall employment growth recently declared by the Government is driven by independent workers (the self-employed and freelance VAT-number holders).

**VAT-number workers in Italy number around 3.7–3.8 million, including so-called "false VAT numbers"—individuals who, despite holding a VAT number and appearing self-employed, effectively work for a single client, adhering to schedules and directives as if they were regular employees. This "formula," utilized by certain companies, is used to slash stable social security contribution costs for subordinate labor, shifting the entire business risk onto the worker.**

Furthermore, according to quarterly ISTAT data, there are 3 million and 32 thousand part-time workers in Italy, meaning about 15.6% of all employees have a reduced-hours contract (practically nearly 1 in 6 workers).

Moreover, nearly 71% of all part-time contracts are held by women. Looking at female employment alone, more than one-third of female employees work part-time.

**However, the true Italian problem is involuntary part-time work. This is the figure that most differentiates Italy from the rest of Europe.**

**In other European countries, part-time work is often a voluntary choice to balance life and work. In Italy, the situation is reversed: a staggering 2 million people find themselves in an involuntary part-time condition. This means that about 65%–70% of part-time workers do so because they were unable to find a full-time position.**

Involuntary part-time work is one of the main causes of the "working poor" phenomenon. Even if the hourly pay complies with National Collective Labor Agreements (CCNL), working only 15 or 20 hours a week generates a monthly paycheck that often does not exceed 600–800 Euros—an amount that fails to lift the worker above the poverty line. The sectors where nearly all involuntary part-time contracts are concentrated are personal and social services, retail, large-scale distribution, catering, and cleaning services.

## INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO): UNEQUIVOCAL DATA

**The report by the ILO (International Labour Organization), published in the brief titled *"Wage trends and wage inequalities in Italy and worldwide – International Labour Office, 2025,"* is clear and provides unequivocal data on wage trends and inequalities in Italy.**

Wages in Italy decreased in 2022 and 2023, returning to growth in 2024 and 2025. As in most other countries, however, the increase recorded over the last two years was insufficient to offset the losses suffered during the high-inflation period. The same situation was recorded in the first months of 2026. Regarding the current year, it is significant to highlight what the Bank of Italy states in its April 2026 economic bulletin: "*Given the very small share of contracts awaiting renewal, a sharp rise in wages in 2026 to recover the increase in inflation generated by the conflict appears unlikely at the moment*", noting, moreover, that "*the current collective bargaining system generally does not include automatic clauses indexing wages to inflation*".

Indeed, it is critical to consider that the gap between the loss of purchasing power of wages and pensions tends to widen with the inflation caused by ongoing wars. According to the International Monetary Fund, the latest war in Iran and the Middle East will cost Italian families between 450 and 2,270 Euros over the course of 2026.

ISTAT also confirms this scenario, calculating that the growth in contractual wages in 2022, 2023, and partially in 2024, 2025, as well as the first months of 2026, is not enough to recover the loss of wage purchasing power from previous years: wages in March 2026 recorded a purchasing power loss of over 8.5% compared to January 2021, peaking at 10% in services. The situation was slightly better in agriculture and industry, but worse in private services and public employment.

**France and Germany recovered their pre-Covid levels as early as 2024, while Spain even exceeded them (see Table 1).**

Tabella 1 – Variazione percentuale retribuzioni reali, diversi paesi.

| Paese | 1991-2023 | 2019-2024 |
|---|---|---|
| Italia | -3,4% | -8% |
| Francia | +30,9% | +0,5% |
| Germania | +30,4% | +0,2% |
| Spagna | +9,1% | +1,2% |
| Media Ocse | +25% | 0% |

The decline in real wages in recent years is attributable to the limits of our system of industrial relations and collective bargaining. Delays in renewing crucial contracts, particularly in the service sector, caused losses in purchasing power that were never recovered despite the slight improvement over the past year. Most worrying is that under current contracts, no recovery of wage purchasing power is projected even over the next three years, especially in the vast service sector which covers about 70 percent of employed workers.

Furthermore, unlike most G20 nations, Italy stands out for a negative long-term dynamic, with wages whose purchasing power is lower than that of 2008.

Pensions have also suffered a significant setback in their purchasing power from 2021 to today: various Italian and foreign research institutes measure a loss between 9% and, in some cases, even 25%.

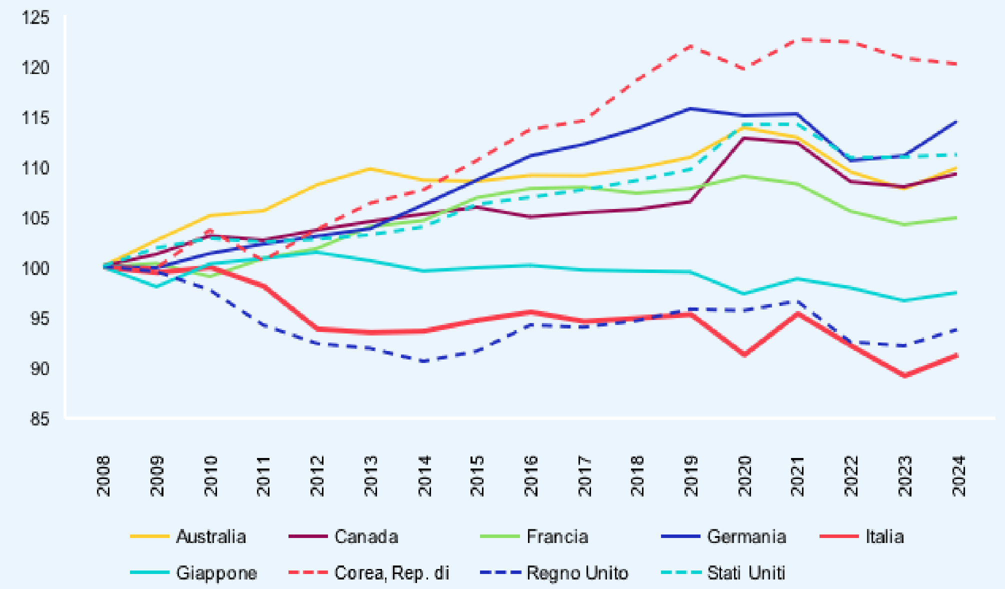
## WAGE TRENDS IN THE LONG TERM

**An analysis of wage trends over an 18-year timeframe highlights how Italy has suffered the greatest losses in absolute terms of wage purchasing power since 2008.**

## N ITALY FROM 2008 TO 2024, REAL WAGES LOST 8.7%.
## ONLY A FEW DECIMAL POINTS RECOVERED FROM 2024 TO 2026.

**Real wage losses (meaning their purchasing power) from 2008 to 2024 were 8.7% in Italy, 4.5% in Spain, and 2.5% in the United Kingdom. Conversely, real wages grew by 14% in Germany and 5% in France.**

▶ **Grafico 1. Indice medio dei salari reali nei paesi ad economia avanzata del G20**



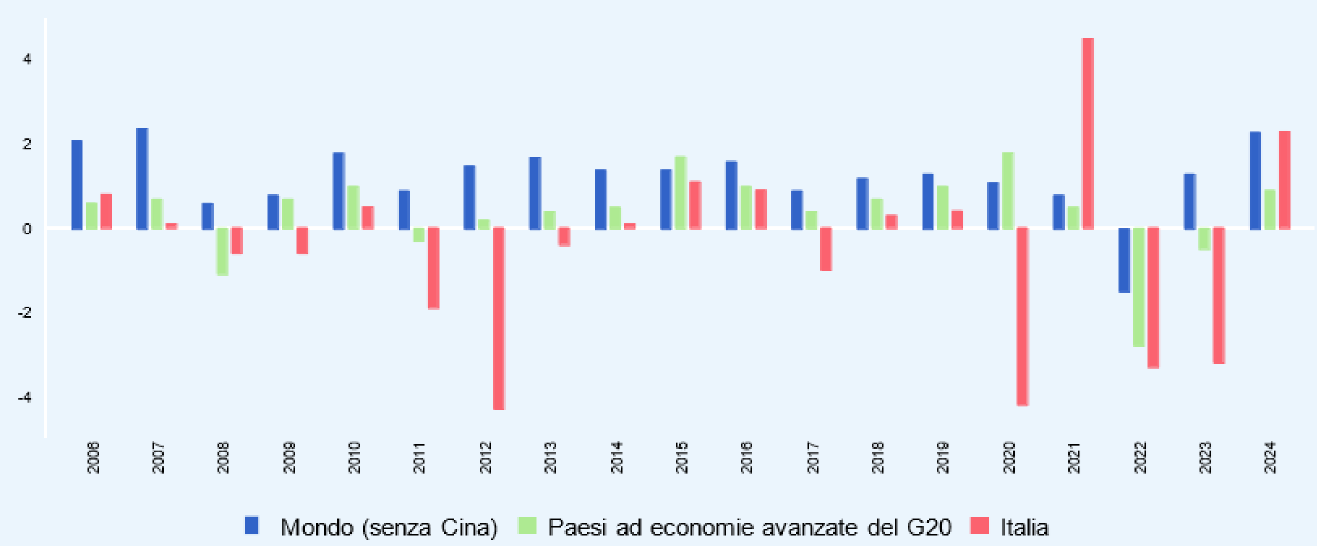

The highlighted data shows how the recent cost-of-living crisis negatively impacted all advanced G20 economies, with a particularly severe effect in Italy during 2022 and 2023. This situation has remained substantially intact despite a faint recovery in nominal wage growth in 2024 and 2025, which was eroded by inflation and remained insufficient to recover previously lost purchasing power.

**Inflation, after peaking at 8.7% in 2022 (and well over 10% for the lowest-income segments of the population), decreased in Italy in 2023 and particularly in 2024, partially picking up again in 2025 and, on an annual basis, in 2026.**

**In any case, ISTAT, the ILO, the Bank of Italy, and the OECD all certify that from 2019 to today, an average loss of 8.7% in wage purchasing power and about 12% in pensions has materialized.**

**In 2024, the ILO further notes, real wages in Italy grew on average by 2.3%, whereas they had fallen by 3.2% in 2023 and 3.3% in 2022, marking a greater loss than in other advanced G20 economies. It is a situation that, combined with rebounding inflation, has never been "recovered."**

▶ **Grafico 2. Crescita media annua del salario reale mensile, periodo 2006–2024 (in percentuale)**



In 2025, contractual minimums grew on average by 3.1%. However, because inflation hovered around 1.7% (1% in 2024) and rose up to 2.6% on an annual basis in 2026, workers experienced only a slight wage recovery that was subsequently erased. All this occurred while labor productivity in Italy grew, even outpacing real wages—reversing the opposite trend seen over a long period, given that over the past 25 years, productivity in high-income countries increased by 30%, whereas in Italy it decreased by 3%.

## LOW-INCOME WORKERS (EMPLOYEES AND SELF-EMPLOYED) PAID THE HIGHEST PRICE FOR THE RISING COST OF LIVING

**Wage adjustments in recent years have not been sufficient to compensate for the rising cost of living, especially for low-income workers who spend a larger share of their income on basic goods and services (food and housing) and are, therefore, the hardest hit by inflationary crises.**

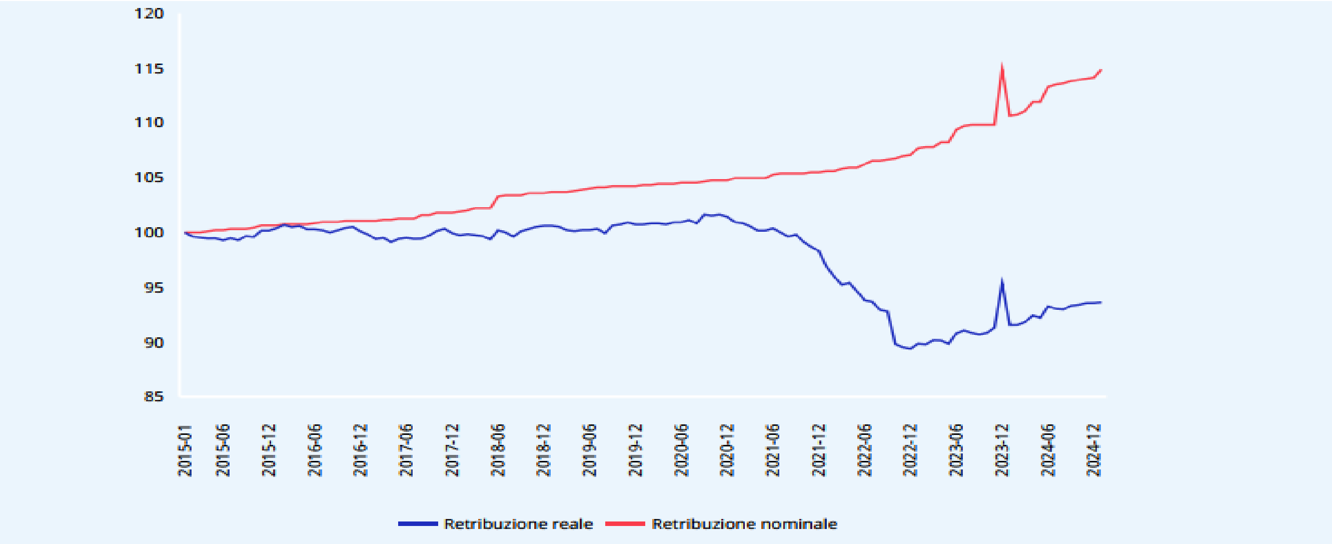
A comparison of the general consumer price index (General CPI) with the prices of food and housing—two items representing over 60% of expenditures for low-income households—shows a greater increase in the food price index in Italy compared to the general index starting from March 2022, reaching a growth of 13.6% in November of the same year.

**Additionally, ISTAT certifies that the total cost of the "shopping cart" increased by 24% from 2021 to March 2026.**

**The housing expenditure index increased far more than the general index, also driven by surging utility bills (electricity and gas).** Comparing the evolution of Italy's consumer price index with three other EU countries (France, Germany, and Spain) relative to 2022 highlights a greater price increase for housing in Italy. Meanwhile, in the other countries, the increase in food prices prevailed over both the general index and the housing index, particularly in the first two of the three aforementioned nations.

**To verify whether the increase in consumer prices affected workers' purchasing power, it is necessary to analyze the evolution of wages over the same period, particularly for low-income earners who are the most vulnerable to the impact of inflation on basic goods.** For this latter type of worker, a wage adjustment based on the general CPI still results in a loss of purchasing power. The findings from the study conducted by the ILO up to 2024 are confirmed in the following years up to the present day, failing to "close" the gap highlighted in Chart 3.

**Grafico 3. Indice della retribuzione contrattuale oraria reale e nominale in Italia**




**Fonte:** Stime dell'OIL basate sulle serie storiche dei dati dell'Istituto nazionale di statistica italiano (ISTAT) e della banca dati online del Fondo monetario internazionale (ultima consultazione 14 marzo 2025).

## IN ITALY, COLLECTIVE BARGAINING HAS NOT GUARANTEED THE ADJUSTMENT OF REAL HOURLY WAGES

**In Italy, where a statutory minimum wage does not yet exist, wages are set through collective bargaining.**

The National Collective Labor Agreements (CCNL) resulting from negotiations and agreements between employer organizations and trade unions define minimum wages (so-called base minimums) for each sector, profession, and classification level. They cover most employees and guarantee a baseline level of pay based on job category and seniority.

**Nominal hourly contractual wages calculated across an average of CCNLs increased by 15% over the past 10 years.**

**In real terms, however, hourly wages suffered a loss of over 8 percentage points, resulting in a drop in workers' purchasing power.**

L'impatto della crisi sul costo della vita è particolarmente evidente. **The impact of the cost-of-living crisis is particularly evident. Real hourly wages remained relatively stable before declining rapidly starting from mid-2021. This decline continued until the end of 2022, after which real hourly wages resumed growing, though remaining below early 2015 levels.**

Although the data reproduced in Chart 3 does not correspond directly to base minimums, the significant drop in real hourly wages and the concentration of low-hourly-wage workers in low-income households—who are more exposed to inflation higher than that recorded by the general consumer price index (General CPI)—indicate that low-income workers in Italy suffered a significant loss in real wages from mid-2021 and throughout 2022, which was never recovered afterward.

## DELAYS IN CONTRACT RENEWALS, LACK OF WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY, AND CONCESSIONARY RENEWALS

One of the issues aggravating the situation is the delay in renewing collective bargaining agreements, which averages around 30 months (Source: ISTAT). In the first quarter of 2025, there were 35 expired contracts awaiting renewal, affecting approximately 6.2 million employees, or 47.3% of the total.

**This bargaining weakness is also due to choices made by mainstream trade unions. This is a consequence of a representation law that, besides failing to foster workplace democracy, favors the "selection" by employers of union counterparts based on their willingness to sign off on the steady loss of wages and rights recorded over the past 30 years.**

**Nor did the recent Decree on the "Fair Wage" consider the need to pass a statutory Minimum Wage; on the contrary, it excluded it to maintain the "Status Quo."**

Even the Intersyndical Pact signed on June 17, 2026, by CGIL, CISL, and UIL "sanctified" the decision to consider the Total Economic Treatment (TEC), which is an accounting trick whereby all existing contractual mechanisms, corporate welfare, and much else are funneled into the hourly pay calculation. In this way, a meager hourly wage of 6 Euros is "magically" inflated to 11 Euros, obviously without adding a single penny to workers' pockets. **Not only that, but the system proposed by these unions ties contractual adjustments to an inflation calculation that excludes rising energy costs: workers bear the increased expense of purchasing diesel and gasoline but cannot include them in their bargaining platforms.**

## WOMEN AND MIGRANTS FACE SIGNIFICANT WAGE DISPARITIES

**The female employment rate in Italy stands at over 53%. Among employees considered "low hourly wage" earners, women represent nearly 60% of the total, compared to an overall labor market presence of 41%.**

Looking at the official definition of *low-wage earners* (workers earning an hourly wage below two-thirds of the national median, i.e., roughly below 8.8–9 Euros per hour), this share emerges: a disproportion that confirms a gender discrimination that urgently needs to be remedied in Italy.

However, if we look at monthly wages, the gender pay gap calculated by ISTAT in 2020 was 16.7%, while that calculated by INPS in 2024 was 20%, and according to other sources reaches 25.7% in 2026. It is entirely evident that the monthly gender wage gap is partly driven by the higher use of part-time work among female workers.

**In Italy, the wage gap between Italian and foreign workers is among the highest in Europe**. Recent studies, including reports prepared for the European Commission and data from ISTAT and the ILO, highlight a deep and structural phenomenon.
**The average hourly wage gap between Italian and foreign workers exceeds 32%.**
**n practice, for the same hours worked, a migrant worker earns about one-third less than an Italian colleague.**
**Furthermore, looking at the low-wage bracket, over 35% of foreign workers are trapped in it, a share more than double that of Italians (which hovers around 15%).**
**If we intersect nationality with gender, the situation becomes even more critical. Foreign women in Italy face a double penalty: gender and origin.**
**The shocking statistic: average wages for migrant women (especially non-EU) are 42.6% lower than those of Italian men.**
This immense gap is due to the fact that foreign women experience segregation within segregation: over 65% of them work in the domestic care and assistance sector (housekeepers, caregivers, babysitters). This sector is historically characterized by very low minimum wages, a very high incidence of part-time contracts (often involuntary), and a unfortunately high rate of underground economy or gray contracts (where fewer hours are declared than actually worked).

## LOW WAGES AND INEQUALITIES: UNACCEPTABLE SOCIAL PLAGUES

**Resolving wage issues is fundamental to reducing inequalities and achieving social justice.**

**The reduction of inequalities and in-work poverty are vital goals for achieving social justice.**

Knowing and addressing income inequalities in the labor market, including gender pay gaps and pay gaps suffered by workers in vulnerable situations**, is necessary to reduce inequalities and working poverty.**
**oreover, labor income is the main, if not the sole, source of income for most workers and their families.**

**Wage-led economic growth accompanied by redistributive policies, the definition of a minimum wage, and collective bargaining translates into higher overall growth.**

**It is well known that if wages increased, workers would have more disposable income and would consume more.** Furthermore, higher consumer spending drives companies to produce more and hire more workers, who in turn stimulate the economy.

Existing wage inequality is unacceptable, and the rise in wage inequality among the lowest earners has become a symptom of a situation that must be immediately overcome.
This requires intervention by the legislator, without which trade union efforts alone are insufficient to force a reversal of the situation.
**Consider that globally, the bottom 10% of lowest-paid workers receive only 0.5% of the total wage bill, while the top 10% of highest-paid workers obtain about 38% of that same bill.**

## POVERTY IN ITALY: CARITAS ALSO SOUNDS THE ALARM

**The 2026 Caritas Statistical Report confirms the alarm over growing poverty and working poverty in Italy, highlighting that the number of assisted individuals has reached the highest level ever recorded.**

Consolidated data shows that during the year, the Caritas network directly accompanied and supported 282,539 people (corresponding to as many households). Compared to the previous year, this represents a growth of +1.7%.

Although year-on-year growth may seem modest in percentage terms, the report's authors focus their alarm on the chronic nature of poverty. In a decade, the number of assisted individuals surged by +48%, with a worrying spike in Northern Italy (+61.8%).

The expansion of this pool is driven mainly by three categories, including the "Working Poor," meaning that having a job is no longer a sufficient guarantee. Today, 24% of those seeking help from Caritas hold regulated employment but with a wage that is too low (especially part-time or atypical contracts) to cope with the cost of living. This percentage rises to over 31% in the 35–54 age bracket.
Among the people turning to Caritas, occupational vulnerability prevails: 47.9% are unemployed, while 23.9% have a job that fails to protect them from indigence.

Furthermore, in Italy, the parameter used to determine whether individuals are subject to poverty or social exclusion is equivalised net income (the total income of all household members net of IRPEF, increased by 20% of the asset value, excluding the primary home). **In their case, this parameter is lower than 60% of the distribution median (the median equivalised net income is approximately 28,000 Euros). A total of 13 million 391 thousand people find themselves in this condition, equal to 22.8% of the population, compared to the European average of 21.4%.**

## FOR CARITAS, TOO, WORKING POVERTY IS A PROBLEM

An element confirming the alarming social situation in Italy can be drawn from the working poverty data provided by ISTAT: poverty continues to rise among those who hold a job.

Caritas maintains that poverty affected 8% of employed workers in 2024 (up from 7.7% in 2022) but reached 10.2% in 2026, though differences exist based on worker category: if one performs blue-collar or similar work, the incidence of absolute poverty is 15.6%. This means one out of six blue-collar families officially lives in absolute poverty. In numerical terms, this translates to roughly 1 million individuals within these households who fall below the subsistence threshold.
**This latter figure is frightening and urges intervention—a symbolic sign of a weakness in labor that ceases to be a factor of protection and social security.**

Tabella: Incidenza della povertà assoluta familiare (%) – Focus 2023-2026

| Condizione / Posizione Professionale della p.r.* | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **OCCUPATO** | **7,6%** | **7,7%** | **7,6%** |
| *— Lavoratore Dipendente* | *9,1%* | *10,8%* | *10,5%* |
| *—— Operaio e assimilato* | **14,7%** | **18,5%** | **15,6%** |
| *— Lavoratore Autonomo* | *4,2%* | *4,5%* | *4,4%* |
| **NON OCCUPATO** | **9,7%** | **9,4%** | **9,5%** |
| *— In cerca di occupazione (Disoccupato)* | **21,6%** | **25,5%** | **21,3%** |
| *— Ritirato dal lavoro (Pensionato)* | *5,7%* | *5,8%* | *5,8%* |
| **TOTALE FAMIGLIE IN ITALIA** | **8,4%** | **8,4%** | **8,4%** |

## WORKING IS NO LONGER ENOUGH TO BREAK FREE FROM A CONDITION OF NEED.

Looking at the occupations of people requesting assistance from Caritas, men are often found working in construction, catering, street vending, or as movers, gardeners, couriers, etc.
**Women, on the other hand, work in domestic cleaning, childcare, and elder care.**

Generally, however, these are non-linear, highly segmented careers, fragmented in terms of tasks performed and contractual conditions, with low work intensity.

**In a word, precarious: workers hit by the rampant "modernity" of labor, against which an urgent legislative intervention is needed in the exact opposite direction of the path traveled so far, particularly in recent years.**

## CUB'S PROPOSALS: IT IS URGENT TO CHANGE PACE AND DIRECTION

The overall situation is by no means simple, but the direction taken is causing the entire society to derail and crash.

**It is important and urgent to evaluate the reasons, logic, and practices that created the current situation.** It is appropriate and necessary to know and understand the responsibilities that produced the spread of working poverty—not so much to assign blame to this political force or that union, but rather to stop continuing down this path.

The neoliberal hangover, which assumed the market could regulate itself, must be permanently archived. Similarly, we must move past the income policies embraced by "mainstream" trade unions; policies that have led them to sign off, agreement after agreement—even recently—on unacceptable sacrifices for workers, all in the name of an economic recovery that was never achieved. Quite the contrary.

**Redistributive policies are urgently needed.** Social concertation, trade union consociationalism, income policies, wage suppression, and a lack of investment are all expired, failed recipes that cannot be proposed again.

*This will be no gala dinner*. We must prepare ourselves for a season of trade union and political struggles that simply cannot be avoided.

To this end, we must immediately oppose the ongoing watering down of Laws 146/90 and 83/00 (the Italian strike laws). These regulations were enacted to neutralize the impact of worker mobilizations under the guise of guaranteeing public services—services that are being stolen daily from workers and the general public.

Consider also the increase in military spending, which the Government is willing to skyrocket up to 5% of GDP. These investments will be stripped away from services already in severe distress, such as Healthcare, Education, and Transport. We must urgently prevent the shift from Welfare to Warfare.

### 1) MINIMUM WAGE, AUTOMATIC WAGE INDEXATION, AND REAL PENSION ADJUSTMENTS

The definition of a statutory minimum wage in Italy, of no less than 12 Euros per hour, has become an pressing priority.

Some collective agreements still provide for a wage of around 5 Euros an hour. These are ridiculous amounts that must be banned and outlawed, forcing the social partners who negotiated them to renounce such agreements.

The arguments raised by those making excuses to avoid passing legislative interventions that favor the immediate redistribution of generated profits are specious.

Denying the failure of concertation policies—which have degenerated into co-management and were "sanctified" by the "Sbarra law"—is a bold exercise in mystifying reality. It demands a supportive intervention to achieve goals that are otherwise currently unattainable.

Similarly, it is unacceptable and unsustainable to keep refusing to adjust pensions, thereby impoverishing those who have the right to a retirement that is not defined by hardship and misery.

## 2) REINSTATING THE CITIZENS' INCOME (REDDITO DI CITTADINANZA) AS A UNIVERSAL POVERTY ALLEVIATION MEASURE

We demand the reinstatement of the Citizens' Income (*Reddito di Cittadinanza*) in Italy or, at the very least, a truly universal poverty-relief measure—one that frees people from the blackmail of underpaid, sometimes hazardous, and often undeclared or "grey-market" work.

The Citizens' Income was one of the few "class-conscious" initiatives for social justice in recent years. Repealing it carries a heavy responsibility; it was a decision to take money away from the poor to guarantee it to corporations and higher income brackets through a tax reform that favored the wealthiest.

## 3) INTERVENTIONS AGAINST THE ABUSE OF PRECARIOUS WORK

Precariousness and its systemic abuse have become an endemic plague in the Italian labor market, across both the public and private sectors.

Legislative intervention is urgently required to enforce a reduction in the types of temporary contracts available and to prevent their mass utilization, blocking any possibility of bypassing these limits through union agreements.

## 4) GUARANTEEING DEMOCRATIC AND PLURALISTIC UNION BARGAINING

It is time to pass a truly democratic and transparent law on union representation.
Since 1995, the legislature has shirked the duty to define a rule that strips employers of the power to choose which trade unions they negotiate with—a practice that restricts invitations for national, territorial, and company contract renewals only to unions deemed "reliable." The choice of trade union representation belongs, and must remain, in the hands of the workers.

## 5) ECONOMIC POLICY INTERVENTIONS TO FOSTER PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN STRATEGIC SECTORS

We need a paradigm shift in Italian economic policies. The fire sale of the nation's "family silver" to raise quick cash—which over time has devolved into selling off expertise and know-how at bargain-basement prices—must be stopped and rethought.

Skills and assets have been surrendered even in strategic sectors due to short-sighted, bean-counter calculations completely lacking industrial vision.

Rethinking these important sectors with a view to revival is still possible. This opportunity must be seized before it is too late.

## 6) COMBATING TAX EVASION AND REDUCING THE TAX BURDEN FOR LOW-INCOME WORKERS

Tax evasion in Italy remains a cancer despite the fact that, according to current Government sources, over 33 billion Euros were recovered in 2024. Qualified estimates expose a monstrous scale of tax evasion in Italy: over 1,250 billion Euros from 2000 to 2024.

It is clear that maximum effort must be dedicated to recovering what is stolen from the tax authorities and the community. This recovery must fund a reduction in the tax burden for lowest-income workers—contrary to the actions taken by the current Government.

The attack on progressive taxation, which is explicitly mandated by the Italian Constitution, unequivocally signals a descent into social barbarism. This is a condition that must be overcome by completely reversing the current perspective.

Economists Demetrio Guizzardi, Elisa Palagi, Andrea Roventini, and Alessandro Santoro, in their article *"Reconstructing Income Inequality in Italy"* (published in 2024 in the *Journal of the European Economic Association*), proved that the Italian tax system is regressive: the richest 5% pay a lower effective tax rate than the rest of the population.
Another study forthcoming in the *Review of Income and Wealth* shows that the wealthiest Italians pay a lower effective rate (32%) compared to a middle-class employee (45%).

## 7) ERADICATING GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND INEQUALITIES AFFECTING SPECIFIC GROUPS OF WORKERS (HORIZONTAL INEQUALITIES)

So much remains to be done in Italy regarding the need to overcome and archive gender and racial discrimination in the workplace and in society.

The data concerning wage and employment discrimination in Italy reflects a grave situation that has calcified in every sphere. This demands non-deferrable legislative action capable of driving a shift in culture and approach—a change that cannot and must not be delayed any longer.

## 8) TRAINING INTERVENTIONS AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE JOB QUALITY

It is unsustainable that highly skilled workers must emigrate to find adequate placement, while the domestic labor market in Italy offers space and roles primarily for low-skilled profiles.

On the contrary, a manufacturing country like ours cannot and must not reduce itself to merely supplying low-skilled labor to the market.

We need real investment in training and retraining workers. The ongoing development of technology and the entry of artificial intelligence into the production universe must not be viewed as a threat, but as an opportunity to be seized by preparing for it well in advance.

**IT IS THEREFORE URGENT TO CHANGE PACE AND DIRECTION. OTHERWISE, WE ARE MORTGAGING THE FUTURE OF WORKERS, THE WORKING CLASS, THE ENTIRE COUNTRY, AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.**

**THE EU HAS THE OPPORTUNITY AND THE DUTY TO POINT THE WAY AND DEMAND THAT ITALY MOVE IN THAT DIRECTION. EUROPE CAN AND SHOULD VOICE ITS POSITION ON ITALY'S FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER.**

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✉ Viale Lombardia 20 – 20132 Milano –☎02.7063104–02.76960856 Fax 02.70602409 – pec: cubnazionale@postacert.it