

## Italy, Education, demands and results of trade unions *Graziamaria Pistorino, National Secretary FLC CGIL*

The national, European and international context, which has been conditioned by austerity policies in the last fifteen years, left a sharp reduction in spending on education. For this reason, as FLC CGIL we strongly support the International Educational campaign, *Go public! Fund education!* and the ETUCE Campaign #MakeTeachingAttractive in the European Teachers' Week (2-6 October 2023). We, together, ask to all governments and the international community to increase public funding for the quality of the teaching profession and all education staff. These are claims present within the CGIL demonstration of 7 October in Rome. Also on 13 October there will be a demonstration in Paris organized by all the French trade unions and supported by the entire European trade union movement. The demonstrations are part of the ETUC's "On the road for a fair deal for workers", the continental mobilization that the CGIL proposed and obtained at the Berlin Congress. From recent data we know that Italy invests just over 8% of the state budget for schools and universities, compared to the average 9.9% recorded in the European Union, while until 2000 it allocated 10%. France is at 9.6%, Germany 9.3%, Sweden 14%. Compared to GDP, Italy spends 4% against the EU average of 4.7%. Demographic decline is often invoked to motivate these choices, but, while investment in education fell by 14% relative to wealth per capita, the student population contracted only by 2.3%.

Choices of governments had serious effects on the situation of students in Europe. In fact, according to a recent *Save the Children* report, "despite Europe being one of the richest regions in the world, the number of girls, boys and families living in poverty and social exclusion is alarmingly increasing, due to the cost of living, the climate crisis and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic". In 2021, more than 19 millions girls and boys are at poverty risk, or 1 out of 4 boys. In this context, Italy is among the European countries with the highest percentage, growing from 27.1% in 2019 to 29.7% in 2021, in fifth place for severity, just after Romania (41.5%), Spain (33.4%), Bulgaria (33%) and Greece (32%), and well above the EU-27 average (24.4%).

We highlight some critical points that emerged for Italy in the European report "[Ensuring Children's Future](#)":

- only 13.7% of children access public and affiliated nurseries,
- full-time is guaranteed only to 38% of primary school students,

- early school leaving concerns 12.7% of adolescents, third in Europe after Romania and Spain,
- in Italy the number of NEETs is 23% and is the highest among all EU countries (average 13%), 10 points higher than Spain and Poland, and more than double than Germany and France,
- access to the school canteen, for some the only daily chance of a balanced and protein meal, is reserved for 1 out of 2 children in primary school,
- up to 32.4% of migrants live in poverty.

We should underline that these data do not take into account the very serious and profound gaps between the North and the South of the country: for example, full-time is present for 18% in the South, compared to 48% in the Centre-North and overall, between 2008 and 2020, spending on education has decreased by 19% in the South and 11% in the Centre-North, while investments fell by 33% in the South and by 23% in the rest of the country. Finally, we are alarmed by some recent serious episodes of violence and degradation between children to the detriment of girls and young women.

Recently the FLC CGIL wrote an open letter to the Italian Minister of Education of the current right-wing government to ask for a school able to carry out its educational function in every region to be effectively inclusive and attractive.

First of all, we asked for care for the teaching profession and for all the professional of the school and consequently some structural, permanent, solid and effective interventions:

- increase school time starting from primary school in the poor areas, continuing in secondary school, where the government want to reduce of one year technical and vocational institutes,
- extend compulsory schooling from 3 to at least 18 years of age,
- restore the number of education personelle that in 2008 was cut by about 130,000 units,
- give permanent position to precarious and temporary workers,
- ensure the quality of teaching for pupils with disabilities by eliminating classroom overcrowding,
- maintain a national approach of the education system by abandoning any regionalisation hypothesis, due to the gap between North and South Italy,
- allocate resources for the renewal of the 2022-24 employment contract.

The proposals of the FLC CGIL in Italy take up the main themes of the ten requests made by ETUCE to raise the status and attractiveness of the teaching profession and ensure quality public education for all:

- promote professional autonomy
- provide decent and competitive wages
- support the start of one's career to encourage permanence
- ensure quality professional development
- integrate equality and diversity
- support safe working conditions
- ensure workload control and work-life balance
- create democratic school cultures
- ensure social dialogue
- valorise, respect and strengthen the teaching profession.

The FLC CGIL, in addition to improving the conditions of workers in the education and research sector, claims in Italy a quality public education for all.