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AN EVALUATION OF THE ITALIAN NATIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN

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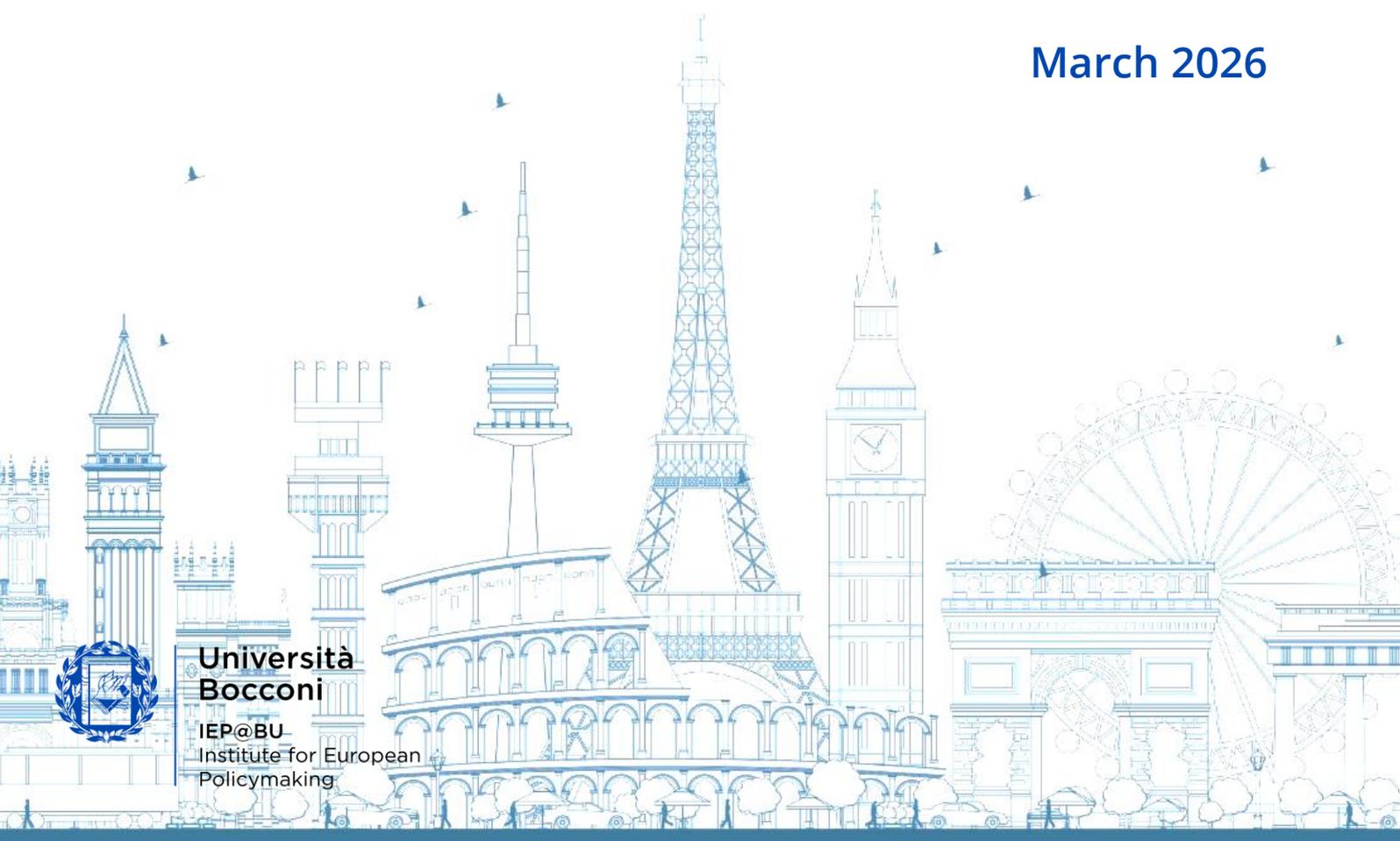
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Executive Summary

Italy is the major recipient of the Next Generation funding. Thus, its experience with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) can be very informative also for other countries. In this study we provide an overview of the issues raised in the implementation of the Italian RRP together with some concrete examples of programs and reforms planned with the facility. This experience is valuable also for countries that have been receiving (and requesting) smaller allocation of the NextGen facility because it documents the hurdles facing multi-year public investment planning and multi-level governance (local, national, supra-national) of reforms.

Our broad conclusion is that there are problems with both multi-year planning and multi-level governance that have not been satisfactorily addressed. As a result of these failures, Italy risks ending the NRRP period more indebted than before, without having solved its structural weaknesses. Reforms were not carried out. Most programs were only partly implemented. Italy treated the NRRP as a spending race, rather than as a development strategy. Moreover, there is an overall lack of transparency about the progress made in reaching targets. This limits also the capacity of European supranational authorities to monitor progress. Surprisingly, there has to date been little pressure from the European Parliament to increase this transparency.

The attention of European institutions and media is currently concentrated on the delays in the implementation of the plan. This is certainly a key issue, but there are also other fundamental design flaws that should not be overlooked. Here are the main points that we identified:

1. **Excessive size and haste.** The Plan was developed in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic with the ambition of providing a rapid response to the crisis. However, developing a coherent public investment plan at such a large scale requires time. Italy rushed to take all EU loans without a coherent spending plan, leading ministries to invent projects hastily, many of which were trivial or unfeasible. Subsequent revisions of the plan did not improve matters. The Commission should have not encouraged Governments to make full use of the facility when a coherent plan was not ready and public administrations were not equipped for such a task (see point 2).
2. **Administrative overload.** The public administration lacked the capacity to design, implement, and monitor thousands of projects, as those involved by the investment and reforms envisaged in the NRRP. Simplifications in the procurement could encourage cutting corners rather than promoting efficiency. The reform of the procurement procedures was considered a pre-requisite for the implementation of the NRRP, but it was diluted in its ambition to centralize tenders.
3. **Grossly inflated expected benefits.** In selling the plan to the country, successive governments advertised completely unrealistic expected benefits from the reforms



(which were, in most cases, nearly at zero cost). The Commission should have induced a more realistic economic projection.

4. **Monitoring gaps.** €237 billion dispersed across countless projects are nearly impossible to track. This is even more difficult for the European Commission. Thus, there is inadequate control from the funders and from public opinion at large. Needless to say, this also prevents a proper evaluation of what worked and what did not.
5. **Formalism over substance.** The presence of milestones and targets introduced a culture of planning in the Italian public administration and marked an important innovation of performance-based funding in EU instruments; at the same time, however, it fostered a “spreadsheet culture”: chasing numbers to unlock EU payments rather than achieving real impact.
6. **Unrealistic targets.** Targets that were in many cases downright unreasonable were also part of the selling pitch. Not surprisingly, in all the cases analysed in this report they had to be drastically downgraded, in some cases by more than half. Yet another example of the lack of social control is that, in virtually all cases, the participants in the debate are unaware of these large changes in targets.
7. **Neglect of maintenance and the post-2026 future.** Little consideration was given to the costs of maintenance of the investments made with the NRRP. Many structures (e.g., schools, health centres, databases) may decay quickly once EU funding is interrupted.
8. **Social myopia.** The Plan underinvested in social inclusion, marginalized groups, and urban degradation—issues crucial to long-term growth (also in light of the faster than expected demographic decline) and civic wellbeing.



Introduction

In this study we review progress made in implementing the investment and reform plans envisaged by the Italian NRRP in several relevant domains in an effort to draw from this experience useful methodological lessons also for other countries and possibly contribute to improving multi-year and multi-level planning.

The plan is as follows. We start by reviewing the inception of the plan, and the decision to ask for the maximum of the resources available. We then review the implementation and revision of the plan in several areas. The final section draws lessons that could be useful for the EU governance of these types of instruments as well as for other countries.

Why did Italy choose to take much more than any other country?

Italy is by far the largest beneficiary of the European Union's Recovery Fund. Of the total €750 billion available, €192 billion were assigned to Italy: €69 billion in grants and €123 billion in loans, for a total allocation of roughly 10% of Italian GDP. To give a sense of scale, Spain ranks second with €70 billion in grants (plus €84 billion in loans requested only in April 2023), while Poland follows at 60 billion, and then France with €41 billion in grants alone.

However, these figures do not tell the full story. Every Member State obviously accepted the grants offered—understandably so, since they are non-repayable—but only ten countries decided to request loans as well at the beginning of the RRF. Among these, only three (Greece, Romania, and Italy) applied for the maximum amount permitted from the start.

As we explain below, taking so much money is at the root of many of the problems of the Italian NRRP. Hence, it is important to understand why this happened, as this offers important lessons for the future governance of similar programs. In our view, there are several reasons.

1. *The narrative*

It would be tempting for any government to portray such a large program as an international show of confidence in the government itself. Thus, while the size of the Italian NRRP was essentially decided on the basis of an algorithm that took into account the poor relative performance of the Italian economy in the preceding years, the narrative adopted by the second Conte government—which took the key decision on the NRRP—was very different. It portrayed every euro obtained as a victory for Italy and a sign of Europe's confidence in the country. After the European Council Agreement in July 2020, Prime Minister Conte presented the deal as a "historic day for Italy". On October 31st, 2020, intervening at a meeting organized by the newspaper *Il Foglio*, Giuseppe Conte proudly stated that "we will take all the money,



including the loans to complete the reform process of the country”¹.

This optimistic framing was also embraced, at least publicly, by the Draghi government. Mario Draghi himself stressed the fact that Italy was expected to receive “more than 200 billion” and that “this is the time to give out money” (*Quest’anno i soldi si danno*). Raffaele Fitto, the Minister in charge of the NRRP implementation under the Meloni Government repeatedly stated that “we will use all the resources” and “every euro must be spent”².

We believe that this uncritical celebration of the NRRP—amplified by most of the media (with titles such as “Conte porta a casa 36 miliardi in più” [*Conte takes home an extra €30 billion*]³ or “Draghi: più fondi e più in fretta” [*Draghi: more money, and faster*]⁴) — largely discouraged a sober or evidence-based debate about the specific pros and cons of its measures.

2. “The Great Opportunity to transform the country”

The second motive was the belief that this was a unique opportunity to transform Italy, to give it a decisive “shock” that would finally set it on a virtuous path of growth. Mario Draghi, in April 2021, presented the NRRP submitted by his Government to the Commission as a “once-in-a-generation opportunity for Italy’s economic recovery and reform”. This notion of a transformational “shock” has recurred in Italian public discourse for decades.

3. Overestimating administrative capacity

The implementation of a plan on such a scale requires defining detailed pathways, issuing thousands of decrees and regulations, and launching tens of thousands of tenders and projects—entrusted to thousands of implementing bodies, most of them unprepared for such an unprecedented flood of money and rulemaking. We believe that there was a serious overestimation of Italy’s capacity to design, program, spend, and supervise. Even the most efficient organization needs adequate time to plan spending wisely; and everywhere there are limits to how quickly large sums can be absorbed productively.

4. Unrealistic expected benefits

¹ Il Foglio, October 31, 2020: <https://www.ilfoglio.it/politica/2020/10/31/video/contе-difenderemo-fino-all-ultimo-la-didattica-in-presenza--1350382/>

² Il Foglio, April 5, 2023: <https://www.ilfoglio.it/politica/2023/04/05/news/l-offensiva-di-salvini-sul-pnrr-meloni-e-fitto-sbottano-cosi-ci-facciamo-male--5137392/>

³ Il Fatto Quotidiano, July 21, 2020: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/prima-pagina/contе-porta-a-casa-36-miliardi-in-piu/>

⁴ RaiNews.it, March 19, 2021: <https://www.rainews.it/archivio-rainews/media/draghi-dare-piu-soldi-possibile-piu-velocemente-possibile-4c2168f5-b188-4a4c-813a-7c520d69de8c.html>



The NRRP was accompanied by official estimates of the expected gains that were extremely far-fetched. Consider how the reform of the justice system, which we study in depth below, was presented. Its NRRP cost was about €3 billion. Against this, the official *2023 Documento di Economia e Finanza* (the key annual Government document defining the budgetary balance in the following three years) estimated GDP gains of €16 billion in 2026 and €28 billion per year from 2031, for a cumulative impact (the sum of all these annual gains into the future, suitably discounted at a 5 percent rate) of around €600 billion. Given a one-off expenditure of €3 billion, these figures represent an extraordinary social rate of return, arguably unprecedented.

Similar exaggerated claims are evident in the government estimates of the expected benefits and costs of the other NRRP reforms reviewed below, like the reform of the labour market and of the school system as well as of procurement policy.

The mistakes

In our view, numerous mistakes were made. They can be summarized as follows:

– Scale

The NRRP was simply too large and too compressed in time. Many of its problems stem from this original flaw, whose responsibility is equally shared between the Italian Governments and the European Commission. The aim was to secure as much money as possible first, and only afterward decide how to spend it. This was clearly the philosophy of the *Stati Generali dell'Economia* convened by Prime Minister Conte in June 2020⁵, essentially a call for ideas on how to spend the money. As declared by the Minister of the Economy, Roberto Gualtieri “European institutions told us that it is good to spend a lot” echoed by EU Commissioner for Economy, Paolo Gentiloni, “I stand by the decision to urge everyone to spend”⁶. Public administrations were asked to pull out the projects they already had “in the drawer.” Among the criteria listed by the Guidelines of the *Comitato Interministeriale per gli Affari Europei (CIAE)* for the selection of projects to be funded by the NRRP, “projects that can be carried out quickly, notably in the first phase of the PNRR, projects so far rejected because of a lack of funds”⁶. When it became clear that even implementing all of them would absorb only a fraction of the requested loans, each ministry was told to come up with new proposals—triggering a burst of political creativity. Some ideas were sound, others useless, most fell somewhere in between. The result was visible even in the parties’ 2022 election programs:

⁵ Ansa Press Agency, June 14, 2020: https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2020/06/12/stati-general-conte-non-sprecheremo-nemmeno-un-euro-per-rilancio_df851222-b19f-4864-88f3-f70ebb9ce788.html

⁶ See: CIAE. (2020). Linee guida per la definizione del Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza.



endless shopping lists of extravagant proposals justified by the refrain “after all, we have NRRP money.” Based on a careful exam of their electoral platforms, we estimated that the Centre-Right program could cost as much as 165 billion Euros, and the programs of the Centre-Left parties (Democratic Party, 5 Stars Movements and Italia Viva) all taken together about €225 billion.

Obviously, what is sound, what is unsound, and what is useless is subjective, but a good example of the processes described above is the use of NRRP to fund part of the expenditure on Superbonus, the system of housing renovation tax credits at 110% introduced immediately after the end of the lockdown in May 2020. The total expenditure on renovation tax incentives between 2020 and 2024 has now been estimated at €229 billion, of which €165 billion just for the Superbonus.⁷ It should be noted that when the law was approved in May 2020, the total expenditure was estimated to be €14 billion.⁸ By the time the NRRP was approved, it was already clear that the expenditure on Superbonus had gone enormously beyond the initial estimates. Even more importantly, there was a widespread realization that the expenditure of a tax credit at 110% was virtually limitless and was indeed getting out of control, and that housing renovation was definitely not the top economic policy priority. Yet the government, with the approval of the Commission, managed to insert in the NRRP €14 billion funding the Superbonus, in investment M2C3-2.1.⁹

This use of NRRP funds stretched the spirit, if not the letter, of the NRRP, which was intended for new projects. It was useful to kickstart the process of spending NRRP funds, and most importantly gave a new lease of life to a measure, like the Superbonus, that by that time had become the object of widespread criticism. In our view the NRRP infusion of funds into Superbonus was one important reason why it was continued with little changes until 2024 and beyond, and eventually proved to cause an enormous hole in the Italian public finances.¹⁰

– *Haste*

With only a few months to define the lines of action for such a vast plan, decisions were taken partly on political grounds to satisfy everyone. Each ministry presented as many projects as possible to claim the largest possible share of resources – “if I don’t take them, someone else will.” Only later did anyone ask whether many of these projects made sense. Given inter-ministerial dynamics, even the most ill-conceived initiatives found a place. And above all, with so little time and so much money, it was impossible to assess carefully the usefulness

⁷ See Relazione Corte dei Conti, 2025.

⁸ See Relazione Tecnica al Decreto Rilancio, DL 34/2020.

⁹ See: <https://www.italiadomani.gov.it/content/sogei-ng/it/it/Interventi/investimenti/rafforzamento-dell-ecobonus-per-efficienza-energetica.html>

¹⁰ See: Relazione della Corte dei Conti 2024 and 2025.



and the implications of each proposal. At the centre, there was neither time to study the details nor the political will or technical competence to reject ill-founded projects.

– *Unrealistic objectives*

When funding seems limitless—and one does not yet know how to spend it—it becomes easy to set totally unrealistic targets. The consequences emerged later, when administrations must perform acrobatics to meet them within too little time. Some of the most important reforms suffered from this mindset, setting unattainable goals detached from reality. The reform of the justice system again provides an interesting example: originally, it envisioned a reduction in the backlog of civil cases by 90% by June 2026 – a truly outlandish number that was nevertheless taken seriously by virtually all commentators. Of course, at the time of writing, a few months away from the deadline, we are nowhere near this target (in fact the performance of the justice system has probably worsened in the meantime, as we document in Case study 1 below). The solution adopted was to change the target, but in ways that are nearly impossible to detect (again, see Case study 1 below).

– *Spending capacity*

A public investment is a complex process. Trying to execute hundreds of them in just a few years inevitably collides with hard limits on administrative capacity. Too little has been done to strengthen this capacity. The new Public Procurement Code missed an opportunity to address the excessive number of contracting authorities and the fact that many municipalities lack the skills to manage tenders and supervise works.

– *The role of the European Commission*

This also holds an important lesson for the European governance of the programs. In our interactions with senior functionaries of the Commission, they acknowledged that the Commission should have warned the Italian government against the risks of taking so much money all at once, precisely because the realistic limitations of the administrative capacity of the Italian public sector were well known, and sudden “giant leap forwards” do not happen in real life.

The Consequences

– *Distortions*

The culture of targets, deadlines, and reporting introduced by the NRRP is largely new to Italy’s public administration and, in principle, a positive change. But it has costs. When targets are set hastily, administrations may take wrong decisions merely to meet formal milestones.



– *Monitoring and reporting*

The limits on spending capacity are inevitably mirrored by limits on monitoring and accountability. €237 billion dispersed across hundreds of thousands of projects in dozens of sectors are almost impossible to track. Moreover, Italy's administrations have long struggled to maintain functional, interconnected databases. As we write (January 2026), the NRRP has failed to create an up-to-date, comprehensive, reliable, and easily accessible database of projects. For instance, in the official government site of the NRRP, "ItaliaDomani", one cannot find a simple but vital piece of information like the percentage of funds actually disbursed at each point in time. In fact, most commentators who are interested in the quantitative aspects of the NRRP would use the website of a not-for-profit organization, "OpenPnrr" that publishes up to date, easily accessible and interpretable, and reliable data on the progress of the NRRP.

This is what OpenPnrr has to say: "Among the responsibilities assigned to the government was the development of a dedicated information platform (the Italiadomani.it portal), the release of a set of datasets in open formats, and the semi-annual publication of a report to be submitted to Parliament.

While all three instruments have been implemented, they exhibit substantial deficiencies. In particular, the open datasets do not adhere to widely recognized best practices in open data management and contain multiple data-entry and validation errors, which significantly undermine their reliability."¹¹

– *Formal vs. substantive control*

Even if monitoring and reporting were flawless, that would still amount only to formal compliance. Meeting the target of building a certain number of kilometres of railway does not automatically mean that those lines are the best use of public money. Spending billions to digitalise schools does not necessarily mean that this is the most effective way to help students. Yet, given the rush and dominant rhetoric, few have dared to question whether such investments are truly useful.

– *Lack of transparency and misleading information*

Because real-time monitoring of thousands and thousands of projects is practically impossible—except perhaps for a few senior officials—, the government enjoys wide discretion over which information to release. Successive administrations have often chosen to provide selectively positive data, sometimes even substantially misleading though formally correct. They were not challenged because the NRRP is so enormously complex that it is nearly

¹¹ <https://openpnrr.it/faq/#faq-3>



impossible to check the substantive truth in the government's information.

One feature in particular stands out: in all the case studies analysed below, the government has been successful in claiming that the targets have been met (albeit with some delay) only because in all instances the original targets have been cut (in some cases more than halved). In all these cases, many commentators of all political colours have celebrated the achievements of the NRRP, and we believe they mostly did so in good faith: it is impossible without an accurate study of each program to realise that the targets had been radically modified.

Take the change in December of 2023 of the target for the measures about the justice system (see Case study 1 below). This change was seemingly innocuous and certainly hard to detect, but it transformed a target that proved impossible to even remotely meet into a target that was impossible to miss. But the change in target was worded in such a way that it was practically impossible to understand its real implications.

In our view, this does not necessarily mean that changing the target was wrong. While the risk is that the review process will water down the original ambitions of the plan, at the same time we feel it is more constructive to take stock and recognize that a given target is unattainable. The real problem is, as we argue above, at the time of the definition of the targets: it is simply too tempting to inflate them to better sell the entire program to the public.

– *The future, maintenance, and continuity*

The rush to finalise the Plan, combined with the rhetoric of a radiant future that tolerated no doubts, led policymakers to ignore fundamental questions: What happens when NRRP funding ends? Who will pay for the maintenance and operating costs of the many new facilities and services created? How will continuity be ensured? This is also a reflection of the “investment fetish”: the notion that any capital expenditure is inherently good. Combined with haste and the seeming abundance of funds, it has led to a *de facto* abdication of cost-benefit analysis.

Case study 1: The justice system

Why the Justice System

Our first case study concerns the justice system. We do this because it was among the most publicised parts of the NRRP at the time of its approval, and it is among the most publicised purported successes now. We show that, instead, the interventions in the justice system do not seem to have yielded results so far in terms of measurable outcomes. In fact, all quantitative measures of the efficiency of the justice system *worsen* during the NRRP years. The reason why it is advertised as a success is that the targets were changed to the point of



making them toothless.

More generally, the NRRP measures in the field of justice summarise well the problems with the NRRP in general: inflated, unrealistic estimates of the benefits; over ambitious targets; poor implementation; misleading communication.

In the field of justice, the NRRP included three types of measures. First, the *reform of civil and criminal procedures*. This reform has been formally implemented, although there is still a heated debate about its actual effects. This report will not discuss this reform.

Second, the *digitalisation of the justice system*, with a target of 10 million digitalised case files by June 2026. In December 2023, this target was revised down to 7.75 million. No data are available on the number of files digitalised so far. The planned NRRP expenditure for this measure was €200 million.

Third, *19,000 new hires*, mainly technical staff, in the Office for Judicial Processes, for three years up to June 2024, at an estimated cost of €2.3 billion. This target was far from being achieved (as of August 2023, there were about 5,500 hires), hence in December 2023 it was revised down to 10,000 hires to be maintained until June 2026, for an unchanged total expenditure.

The expected effect of these hires was a drastic reduction in both the duration of trials and the *backlog of pending cases* ("backlogs" are cases pending for more than three years in first instance courts and more than two years in appeal courts). In this respect, the NRRP targets were extremely ambitious:

- By 2026, reduce the average time needed to resolve cases by 56% for civil cases (both in first instance and appeal courts) and by 28% for criminal cases, compared to 2019 levels;
- For civil cases, reduce the backlog compared to 2019 by 65% by the end of 2024, and by 90% by June 2026.

The change in target and the confusion

This report focuses on the most significant and debated target – the reduction of civil backlogs in first instance courts. In December 2023, this target was modified as follows:

Original version:

The number of backlogged cases as of 31 December 2024, must be at least 65% lower than the number of backlogged cases as of 31 December 2019.

Revised version (the change in *italics*):

The number of backlogged cases as of 31 December 2024, *that were already backlogged as of 31 December 2019*, must be at least 95% lower than the number of backlogged cases as of 31 December 2019.

We now show how the seemingly minor change in bold ("*that were already backlogged as of*



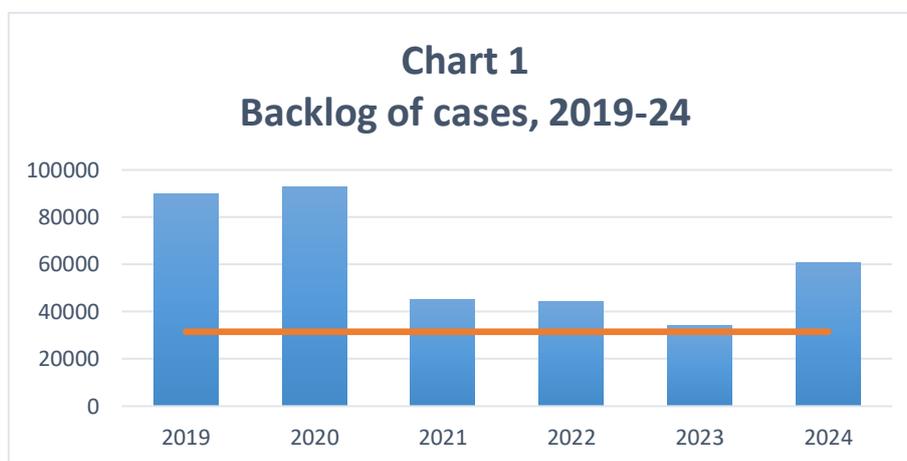
31 December 2019”) makes an enormous difference and renders the new target practically impossible to miss – while the original one would never have been achieved.

To understand this, two data points are useful. By December 2023, the same month as the revision, the reduction in backlogs compared to 2019 was only 20%, far below the 65% target for the following year.¹² Yet, by late 2024, many commentators, jurists, and academics celebrated the achievement of the target – the 95% reduction in cases already backlogged in 2019.

How was this possible? The answer is simple: the target had changed. And the change was dramatic. The new definition applies the reduction percentage only to cases that were already more than three years old as of 31 December 2019 (i.e., cases filed no later than 31 December, 2016). All cases that became more than three years old after 2019 (i.e., filed from 1 January 2017, onward) are excluded.

It is clear that this drastically reduces the number of cases that need to be resolved to meet the target. In fact, the target now concerns a fixed initial number of cases that can only decrease over time. Moreover, for a backlog on 31 December 2019 to be still a backlog at the end of 2024, it would have to last more than eight years – even in the slow Italian system, there are not many first-instance cases that long, with or without the NRRP.

Chart 1 shows the trend of backlogs from 31 December 2019 to 31 December 2024 (the data refer to the districts of Milan, Naples, and Rome – the three largest in the country).



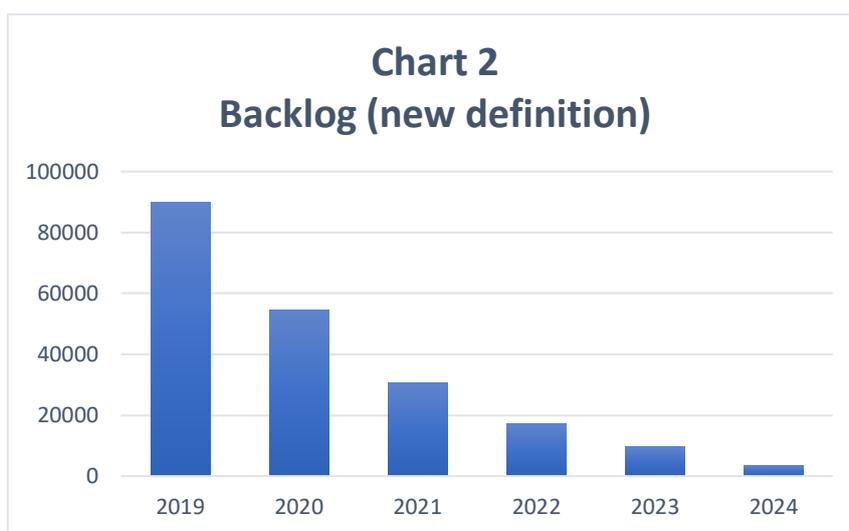
Source: Ministero della Giustizia, Direzione Generale di Statistica e Analisi Organizzativa, *Dati e statistiche della giustizia*, <https://dati statistiche.giustizia.it/page/it/monitoraggio-della-giustizia>

¹² Source: Ministero della Giustizia, Monitoraggio PNRR, “Pendenza per ufficio e anno”: <https://dati statistiche.giustizia.it/page/it/obiettivi-nazionali-riduzione-disposition-time#tab1-content>



The orange line indicates the original target, corresponding to 35% of the 2019 backlog. As shown, by 31 December 2024, the actual backlog was double the target. Moreover, the reduction from 2019 levels occurred in 2021 – when the NRRP had not yet started. Since the NRRP justice measures began gradually in February 2022, the backlog has actually increased, especially in 2024, the very year when reforms, digitalisation, and new hires were supposed to yield results.

Chart 2 instead shows the trend of backlogs under the new definition, i.e., only those already existing as of December 31, 2019. As shown, the reduction was dramatic – and the 95% reduction target was easily achieved.

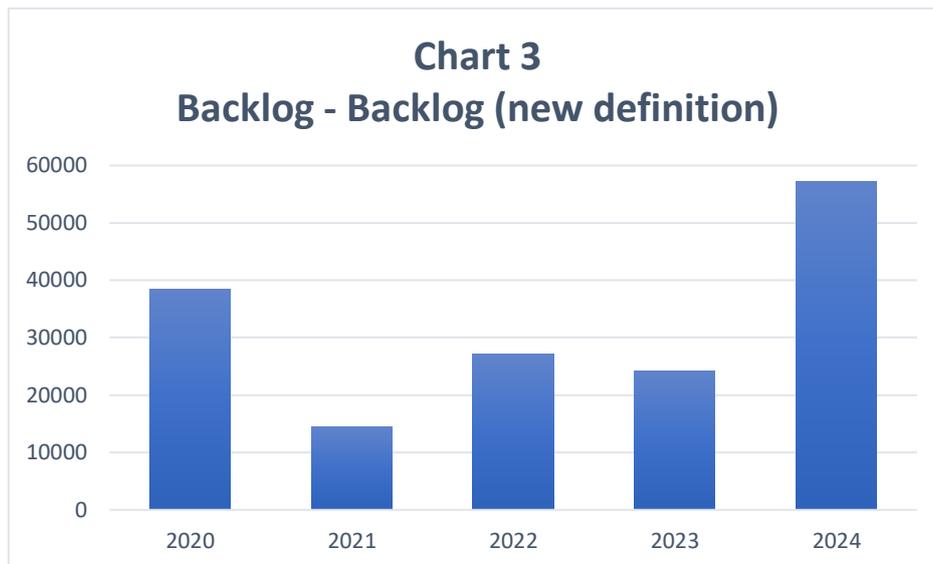


Source: see Chart 1

This reduction, however, was obtained by focusing all efforts in 2023-2024 on cases already backlogged in 2019, neglecting the much larger number of cases that became backlogged after 31 December 2016.

Chart 3 shows the behaviour over time of this latter group – the total backlogs minus those already existing in 2019. These cases not only failed to decrease, but increased steadily, especially in 2024, the very year when the NRRP should have been most effective.





Source: see Chart 1

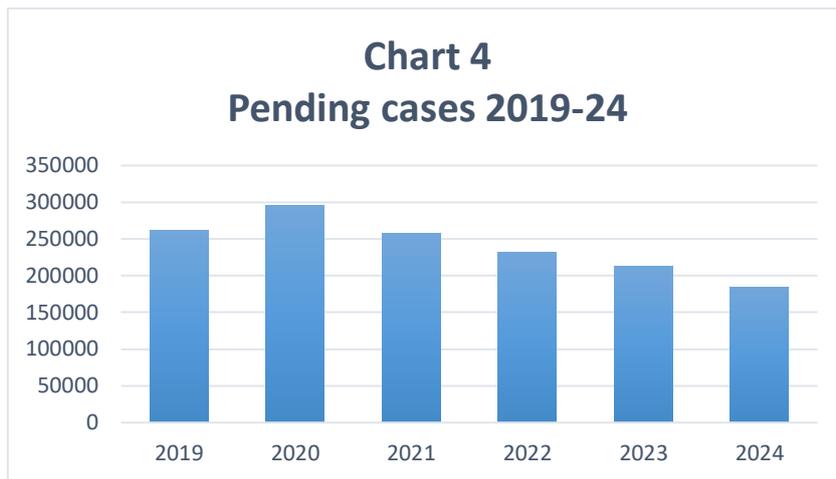
Flow measures

One might argue that the backlog figures for 2023–2024 were influenced by the 2020 slowdown, when courts handled fewer cases, leading to more cases becoming backlogged later. But there is a deeper reason why even these data and targets – including the original, more reasonable ones – may be of limited informational value. Consider all pending cases, regardless of age. The number of pending cases (defined as those that are more than one year old) at the end of a year equals:

total number of pending cases = pending cases at the start of the year + new cases filed – cases resolved.

Only the number of resolved cases depends on court efficiency (and therefore on the NRRP); the number of new filings is largely independent of NRRP measures. Thus, a better indicator of NRRP's impact on judicial efficiency is the annual flow of resolved cases. Chart 4 shows the trend of pending cases (cases pending for at least one year) in the districts of Milan, Naples, and Rome.

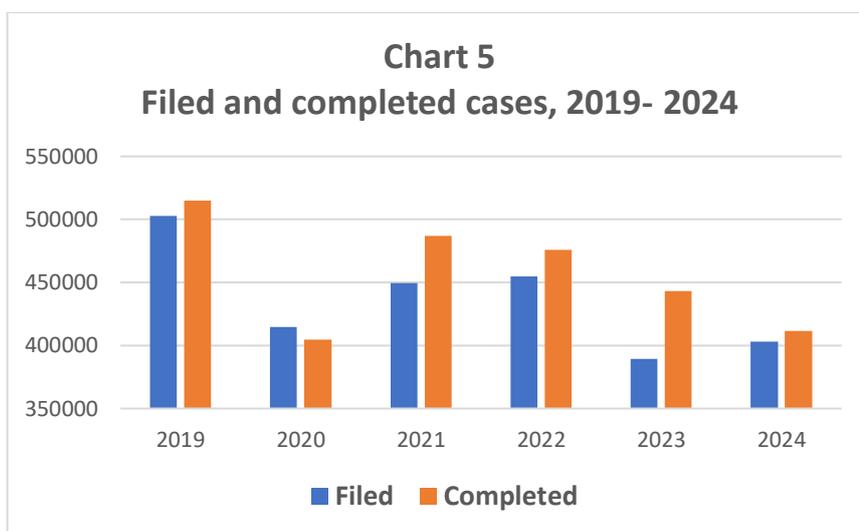




Source: see Chart 1

At the end of 2024, pending cases had decreased by about 30% compared to 2019 (a figure similar to that of backlogs). In particular, the reduction accelerated in 2023–2024 – more than 10 percentage points higher than in 2022 – seemingly confirming the NRRP’s full deployment.

But Chart 5 reveals a surprising fact: in the three years of the NRRP, the number of resolved cases (“completed”) actually fell. In 2024 there were 103,000 fewer resolved cases than in 2019, and 75,000 fewer than in 2021, the last pre-NRRP year.



Source: see Chart 1

So how can pending cases have decreased during the NRRP years despite fewer cases being resolved? Simply because fewer new cases were filed, and the number of new filings was consistently lower than the number of cases resolved. Notably, there was a sharp drop in new filings in 2023 – the only reason why pending cases decreased.

One could perhaps argue that this decline in new filings was due to the NRRP itself. We have heard arguments to the effect that the NRRP made filing new cases more difficult, or that it



facilitated the resolution out of court. If true, this is impossible to quantify. But even if it were the case, it remains true that the main indicator of judicial efficiency – the annual number of cases resolved – actually worsened during the NRRP years.

The estimates of the economic effects

It is also instructive to study the official estimates of the economic effects of all these measures, as envisaged in the original version of the NRRP. According to the April 2023 **Economic and Financial Document (DEF)**, a reduction in the average length of civil and criminal proceedings by 20% and 12.5% respectively is expected to increase Italy's GDP by 0.4% in 2026 and by 0.7% from 2031 onwards. This corresponds to an estimated GDP gain of approximately €8 billion in 2026 and €14 billion *each year* from 2031.

The NRRP, however, sets more ambitious objectives, targeting reductions in trial duration roughly twice as those assumed in the DEF. Assuming a linear relationship between judicial efficiency and GDP growth, this would imply GDP gains of €16 billion in 2026 and €28 billion per year from 2031, for a cumulative impact (the sum of all these annual gains into the future, suitably discounted at a rate of 5% per year) of around €600 billion.

Given a one-off expenditure of almost 3 billion¹³, these figures would represent an exceptionally high return. Moreover, considering that the state collects over 40% of GDP in taxes and contributions, an additional €16 billion of GDP in 2026 would yield about €6.4 billion in extra revenue, increasing gradually to €11.2 billion per year in 2031 and forever thereafter. If these were indeed the magnitudes involved, one wonders why one should have waited for the NRRP to start the process. After all, €3 billion are a minuscule investment, to be weighed against the enormous gains of the official estimates.

Case study 2: the education system

The education package included 6 reforms and investment totalling altogether €17.6 billion, including €9.6 billion for school buildings, €4 billion for digitalisation, €1.5 billion for technical institutes, and €2.5 billion for measures for inclusion and reduction of regional disparities¹⁴. It is a typical example of the flaws plaguing the entire Plan—haste, unrealistic goals, and insufficient governance.

¹³ This is the amount allotted by PNRR for all interventions related to the justice system: see <https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/page/it/pnrr>

¹⁴ Source: Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (2021), *Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza* <https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/PNRR.pdf>



The Italian NRRP envisaged six reforms of the education system (another four concerned universities), notably:

1. The reform of the teacher recruitment procedures, of initial and in-service training, as well as of career development;
2. The reorganization of the school system;
3. The student guidance in the choice of curricula and in the school to work transition;
4. The reform of technical and vocational institutes;
5. The introduction of a tertiary vocational education layer (ITS Academies);
6. The School of Advanced Training.

The first three reforms were the most important.

Teacher quality is decisive for social mobility and national productivity. The *reform of recruitment procedures* and career profiles was aimed at improving teaching quality via stronger incentives related to new systems of initial and in-service training, recruitment, and career development. International comparisons show that Italian teachers are poorly paid. In 2023, the average gross salary of an upper-secondary teacher was about €34,000, compared with €72,000 in Germany, and €67,000 in the Netherlands (at purchasing-power parity)¹⁵. Under such conditions, attracting talented graduates is nearly impossible. Even more problematic than the low starting pay is the very slow wage progression during the career: over 35 years, Italian teachers' salaries rise by only 55 percent, versus 105 per cent in The Netherlands. Pay increases are based solely on seniority, not on skills, effort, or additional responsibilities. In many European countries—such as France, the UK, Sweden, and Poland—teachers advance through different levels of responsibility and pay, contingent on professional development and periodic evaluation. The absence of such recognition in Italy discourages ambition and fails to reward quality teaching. A law approved in 2022 (law 79/2022) contained commendable ideas on recruitment and initial training, but it was weak on professional growth and continuing education as it avoided to reform career paths. In particular, the law required an additional year of university training for aspiring teachers, but its implementation decrees arrived only in March 2025 (DM 270, March 19, 2025) due to disputes between the Ministries of Education and of Universities. In practice, recruitment continued via temporary contracts and the regularisation of precarious teachers, undermining meritocracy. Selection standards were also diluted—introducing a single multiple-choice written test and reserving 30% of teaching positions for teachers with three years of experience (i.e., existing precarious staff). Hence, no genuine merit-based reform took

¹⁵ Source: European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). (2025). Teachers – Comparative information. <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/data-and-visuals/teachers-heads-salaries/comparative-teachers>



place as it was blocked by political and union resistance. The pay incentives being introduced were completely ineffective to foster teaching quality. The decrees that should have implemented the reform further reduced its innovative potential.

This is a typical example of the fact that to carry out a reform it is not sufficient to approve a law. Most crucial are the decrees implementing the reform.

Another key issue in the Italian educational system is the lack of mandatory in-service training. Teachers are not required to update their subject knowledge or pedagogy; those who do so act purely from personal commitment. In Europe, there are two main models: (1) compulsory training with a minimum annual credit requirement, or (2) incentivized training linked to salary increases or promotions. Italy's NRRP opted for the second model, but in an ineffective way. Teachers were supposed to complete 3 three-year training cycles; after each of these cycles, those who "passed" (under undefined criteria) were supposed to receive a small one-off bonus. Only after roughly ten years does the raise become permanent—at about €5,600 per year. The incentive is too delayed and too small to have any real impact. Moreover, the reform avoids the very question of career paths.

The reorganisation of the school system was also carried out only on paper. It should have grouped institutions and reduced class size, adapting structures to the demographic decline in the student population, but to date only a few mergers of institutions have been carried out. No systematic reorganization has been completed.

The reform of student guidance should have helped pupils to make informed choices about their curricula and career paths. Two ministerial decrees set out guidelines requiring 30 hours of annual orientation in secondary schools and introduced new "tutor" and "guidance teacher" roles. However, the key needs for orientation arise in the lower secondary schools (for instance vocational school profiles have to be chosen in the second year of lower secondary), and these are completely excluded from the reform, even though effective orientation at that stage is crucial to prevent dropouts.

In short, while formal obligations toward the EU (in terms of laws and decrees) have been met, the spirit of the main reforms—recruitment, training, guidance, and system reorganisation—has largely been lost.

Turning to the investment side, spending has been very slow. The sixth progress report to the Italian Parliament, published in July 2025¹⁶, fails to provide information as to the amount of actual spending and on the number of the new schools created. It confines itself to stating that

¹⁶ Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri – Ministro per gli Affari europei, le Politiche di coesione e il PNRR (2025). Sesta Relazione sullo stato di attuazione del Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR). Sezione II <https://www.strutturapnrr.gov.it/it/documenti/relazioni-al-parlamento/sesta-relazione-al-parlamento-sullo-stato-di-attuazione-del-pnrr/>



“the progress of the intervention in relation to the implementation schedule of the milestones and targets associated with the investment under examination is currently consistent with the timeframes dictated by the incumbent Administration”. According to the fifth progress report¹⁷, as of June 2024, less than 25% of the €20 billion allocated to education had been spent—slightly from 17% in December 2023. For measures directly under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Merit (schools and early childhood), spending reached only 26% of available funds. Some projects were lagging far behind. The *Extraordinary Program to Reduce Territorial Gaps* has spent 56.4% of its budget, and its targets have been radically revised. To give an example, the initial plan envisaged the mentoring of 50% of the students; the new target is to provide mentoring only to the subset of pupils at risk of dropout. The *Full-Day (Tempo Pieno) School Plan* (very important to favour employment of women notably in Southern regions) has so far committed about 20% of the budget. The *School-Building Replacement Program* (€1 billion) is at 30%, the plan to expand sport facilities in schools has so far allotted 33% of funds¹⁸. Concerning all of these investments, nothing is known about actual disbursements.

More than one-third of education funds were allotted to “digital transformation.” However, most Italian schools were already equipped with Wi-Fi, digital registers, and LIM boards. Despite this, over €4 billion were allocated to new “digital” projects—such as *Next Generation Classrooms* and *Next Generation Labs*—with vague objectives and heavy rhetoric about “on-life learning environments.” The Ministry’s own descriptions are nebulous, full of jargon but short on concrete pedagogical vision. The risk is the creation of “digital theatres”—expensive gadgets without educational value—rather than effective learning tools. Anecdotal evidence confirms that this risk is real. Many schools lack technical support for maintenance and updates, suggesting that this technological wave could fade rapidly once funds run out. It does not come as a surprise (actually, it is somewhat reassuring) that for most of these digital projects (e.g., the creation of 3 “teaching and learning centres”, and another 3 “digital education hubs”) expenditure allocations generally do not exceed 5-6% of their conferred budget.

The investment component of the plans for education shows how NRRP initiatives mix good intentions with structural weaknesses: unrealistic timelines, bureaucratic overload, political compromises, and digital rhetoric. The outcome is fragmented spending and little strategic coherence—a recurring pattern across the entire Plan.

¹⁷ Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri – Ministro per gli Affari europei, il Sud, le Politiche di coesione e il PNRR. (2024). Relazione sullo stato di attuazione del Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR). Sezione II <https://www.italiadomani.gov.it/content/sogei-ng/it/strumenti/documenti/archivio-documenti/quinta-relazione-al-parlamento-sullo-stato-di-attuazione-del-pia.html>

¹⁸ Source: OpenPNRR. (2024). OpenPNRR – Monitoraggio civico del Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza. <https://openpnrr.it/>



Case study 3: Early childhood services

The most problematic investment in the area of education concerned early-childhood services, especially nurseries, and deserves therefore particular attention also in light of its importance in affecting fertility decisions (at the historical minimum). Childhood services are emblematic of many of the problems we highlighted above: entirely unrealistic targets; severe delays; almost no information available along the way; and misleading information – the target will be reached, but only because it has been nearly halved and the completion time delayed.

The plan originally envisaged the creation of 228,000 new slots for children in kindergartens (children aged 0 to 3) and pre-schools (4-5). The target was clearly overly ambitious and yet it was increased in 2022 to 264.000 new slots. Calculating 7 square meters per child, as per typical regional regulations, we are talking about approximately 1,8 million square meters in two and a half years: a feat bordering on the impossible even in the best-case scenario.

By the December 2023 NRRP revision¹⁹, the target had been almost halved (from 264,000 to 150,000 new slots), the deadline was postponed from 2025 to mid-2026, and €1.3 billion in funding was withdrawn because some projects failed to meet EU criteria. In particular, as stated in a Ufficio Parlamentare di Bilancio (Italian Independent Fiscal Institution) report²⁰, the European Commission had not considered truly additional the slots envisaged by the plan as they were mainly related to measures of safety improvement and modernisation of the services. Resources were then brought back to 4.6 billion with national cofinancing. Even before the revision, the selection of local authorities proved difficult: calls for proposals had to be reopened several times, penalizing municipalities with weaker technical capacity—often in the South.

The main difficulty in implementing these investment lies in the reluctance of many municipalities, already facing financial constraints, to take on a future stream of management expenses.

In April 2024, the government launched a New Nursery Plan (about €730 million, half from unused NRRP funds) to help achieve the 150,000-slots goal. This time, resources were assigned

¹⁹ Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (2023). Relazione sullo stato di attuazione del Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR). Sezione II

<https://www.italiadomani.gov.it/content/sogei-ng/it/it/strumenti/documenti/archivio-documenti/terza-relazione-al-parlamento-sullo-stato-di-attuazione-del-pian.html>

²⁰ Ufficio Parlamentare di Bilancio (UPB). (2025). Piano asili nido e scuole dell'infanzia: stato di attuazione e obiettivi del PNRR e del PSB.

<https://www.upbilancio.it/focus-n-1-2025-piano-asili-nido-e-scuole-dellinfanzia-stato-di-attuazione-e-obiettivi-del-pnrr-e-del-psb/>



“from the top”: central authorities identified priority municipalities, which could then choose whether to participate rather than waiting for spontaneous applications.²¹

To date, according to Ministerial sources about 4,100 new “interventions” have been authorized, of which about 70% nurseries and 30% schools for children aged 4 to 6. When asked about the actual number of slots created to date or at least the number of slots associated with these “interventions”, we were told that this information is sensitive and not available. According to the Italian Independent Fiscal Institution²² only about 3% of the authorised projects had been completed at the end of 2024. In terms of spending, so far commitments are at about 26% of the budget allotted to this measure.

Detailed, project-by-project data on allocations and spending are systematically missing, as is information on the regional distribution of new places, in a sector already marked by deep inequality. According to the Ministry of Education, about 66% of the authorisations are for “interventions” in Southern regions, but again we do not know anything about the distribution of slots rather than that of “interventions”.

The sixth report to the Parliament fails to provide information on the number of new nurseries actually created and on the amount spent. What is sure is that the cost for nursery places skyrocketed as the target was almost halved and resources were increased. If initially a single place was supposed to cost, on average, about €17,400, in the revised plan it will cost twice as much, about €30,400, as can be estimated based on planned funding and number of nursery places.

Investing in early childhood services is a priority for a country experiencing a quite dramatic fall in fertility rates. Failure to achieve even heavily downscaled targets is due to a lack of consideration of running and maintenance costs of the nurseries. This discouraged many local authorities from undertaking these investments and focusing instead in restructuring existing schools. The targets have been nearly halved with respect to the original plan and yet we are very far from achieving them. There is a quite worrying lack of transparency about the actual realizations.

²¹Ministero dell’Istruzione e del Merito & Ministero dell’Economia e delle Finanze. Decreto interministeriale n. 79 del 30 aprile 2024. Nuovo Piano asili nido – accertamento economie e individuazione interventi. Ministero dell’Istruzione e del Merito. Avviso pubblico n. 68047 del 15 maggio 2024. Attuazione del Decreto Ministeriale n. 79/2024 – Nuovo Piano asili nido

²² Ufficio Parlamentare di Bilancio. (2025). Piano asili nido e scuole dell’infanzia: stato di attuazione e obiettivi del PNRR e del PSB

<https://www.upbilancio.it/piano-asili-nido-e-scuole-dellinfanzia-stato-di-attuazione-e-obiettivi-del-pnrr-e-del-psb/>



Case study 4: Student housing

The story of the NRRP and student housing is enormously complicated. The original target was 60,000 additional places in student housing. But the notion of “additional” was ill defined. Initially, the government claimed to have created several thousand additional places but the Commission disagreed. Several public tenders were not successful. Eventually, in December 2023 the target was, once again, halved²³. Still, we were not able to determine whether even this reduced target will be realistically met.

Case study 5: The reform of the labour market

This is the *most expensive reform* envisaged by the NRRP (initially €4.4 billion, increased to €5.5 billion in 2023). It focuses on the provision of active labour market policies (ALMPs)—the so called “Garanzia Occupabilità dei Lavoratori” (GOL)— to jobseekers. Its targets are:

1. 3 million beneficiaries of active labour market policies among the population receiving some sort of income support conditional to the unemployment status or to means-testing.
2. 75% of beneficiaries of ALMPs coming from vulnerable groups (individuals with long unemployment durations or particularly hard to place into jobs);
3. 800,000 jobseekers involved in training courses of which 300,000 specifically in digital training;
4. at least 80% of regional public employment services delivering minimum requirement active labour market policy services to jobseekers.

All of these targets should have been achieved by December 2025. As we shall see, some of these targets have been revised downwards as they proved unattainable.

Two decrees²⁴ (dated August 2023 and February 2025) allotted to all Regions (including those not having a functioning Public Employment Service) about €4 billion. Actually, the regions with a less efficient infrastructure providing ALMPs received more funds in proportion to the resident population. The algorithm providing the allocation was indeed based on regional

²³ Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. (2023). Relazione sullo stato di attuazione del Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR). Sezione II – Schede sull’attuazione delle riforme e degli investimenti

²⁴ See: Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, Decree of 24 August 2023, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2023/10/10/23A05511/sg> and Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, Decree of 11 February 2025, https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2025-04-15&atto.codiceRedazionale=25A02263



unemployment and non-employment rates which are especially large in the regions without a properly functioning Public Employment Service. The absence of an efficient delivery mechanism for ALMPs is, after all, explicitly acknowledged by the target concerning the 80% of regional public employment services delivering *minimum requirement* ALMPs active labour to jobseekers²⁵.

According to the Ministry of Labour, the **first target** has been more than achieved as about 3.9 million jobseekers had been “taken in charge” in the 4-years since the inception of the policy. However, there are two important qualifications to be made with respect to this target. First, this measure is mostly illusory, since “taking in charge” simply means listing someone in a database, not providing actual training or placement. Basically, GOL in this respect confined itself to standardise a procedure of registration of jobseekers that each public employment service was already carrying out even before GOL. Only about 66% of the persons taken in charge appear to have been involved in at least one active labour policy measure. Secondly, the potential applicant pool (hence the potential number of beneficiaries) was extended over time by allowing also persons coming from social assistance and all unemployed, independent of gender, age and unemployment duration, to qualify for GOL. This clearly increased the probability of meeting the target.

There is no information about the number of beneficiaries of GOL who are vulnerable, hence on the attainment of the **second target**. We only know that about 28% of those registered with GOL have unemployment durations longer than 12 months, and about 4% have characteristics defining them as vulnerable based on social and health and considerations. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 85% of the targeted vulnerable population has been reached so far, and the target is expected to be met by the end of 2025. However, the criteria used to define vulnerable individuals differ from the ILO definition adopted by Eurostat. In particular, with respect to unemployment duration, individuals are classified as “vulnerable” after six months of unemployment, rather than the twelve-months threshold used by the ILO. As a result, the population classified as vulnerable is broader than under the Eurostat definition, which explains the inflated coverage rate reported by the Ministry.

Concerning the **third target**, by the end of September 2025 about 510,000 jobseekers had been involved in some sort of general training, that is, we are about 40% below the target. It does not come as a surprise then that the initial target was revised downwards to 600,000, reducing the gap between targets and actual realizations to about 15%. By September 2025 about 160,000 individuals had received digital training (about 50% of the target).

²⁵ Linfante, G., Lupo, V., Orfei, F., Radicchia, D., Silvi, E., Stocco, P., & Toti, E. (2025). Focus INAPP – Monitoring Note No. 9. Implementation of the GOL programme
<https://www.inapp.gov.it/pubblicazioni/focus-inapp>



With regard to the **fourth target**, according to the Sixth Report to the Italian Parliament only 14 Regions (out of 21) at the end of 2024 did satisfy the minimum requirements to deliver ALMPs to jobseekers. This one third of Regions lagging behind in the provision of services display the highest unemployment rates in Italy. They have received so far about 25% of the total funds allotted with GOL, due to the allocation rules rewarding regions with the largest unemployment and non-employment rates independently of the effectiveness of their Public Employment Service.

What matters the most is the actual performance of GOL in increasing job finding probabilities of beneficiaries. According to a note of the Labour Ministry, about 1.5 million people “taken in charge” by GOL had found a new job by September 2025 within the four-year time window. This amounts to a bit more than one third of those involved in the program. We kindly obtained from INAPP (public research centre under the supervision of the Labour Ministry) data on actual placements of persons been taken in charge in the various regions.

The table below compares the percentage of people being “taken in charge” who found a job in the following 3 months in 2022 and 2025 in Regions where the minimum requirements to deliver GOL ALMPs are met and in Regions where these minimum requirements have not been met and presumably are not in a condition to fully implement GOL (Abruzzo, Basilicata, Molise, Puglia, Sicilia and Val d’Aosta). Job finding rates increase in both type of regions in line with a buoyant Italian labour market in this period. However, the regions without full implementation of GOL ALMPs do better than those in a condition to deliver GOL.

	2022	2025	Δ
Regions above GOL minimum requirements	21,6%	26,9%	5,3%
Regions below GOL minimum requirements	19,3%	29,3%	10,0%
ΔΔ			-4,7%

Achieving the ALMPs targets of GOL, and even more so spending efficiently in active policies 5.5 billion over a 4-year time span would have required an unprecedented capacity for design, staffing, and monitoring—none of which exist in Italy’s employment services, especially in the South. Structural deficiencies persist: lack of professional caseworkers, fragmented regional systems, and inadequate monitoring tools. Furthermore, implementation has been bureaucratic and output-oriented—focused on meeting numerical targets rather than real outcomes.

Overall, the labour component of the NRRP is an example of excessive ambition, poor coordination between ministries and regions, allocation of resources to regions that did not have the infrastructure to implement the plan and failure to address the lack of local human capital and professional capacity. It also suggests that targets can be revised downwards to make them attainable even at the last minute. This clearly reduces the commitment of public administrations to attain targets also in other domains.



Lessons

Which lessons can be learnt from the Italian experience with the NRRP?

We believe that the following eight are the most important.

1. Take into account administrative and planning capacity

Administrative capacity is a relative concept: a country's administration might be able to process a program of size X in 10 years but not a program of size 5X in 4 years. This also holds true for planning. It is one thing to plan new spending of size X in 2 years, and another to plan new spending of size 5X in a few months.

2. Don't rely on discrete changes in administrative capacity

If the success of a program rests critically on a discrete improvement in the administrative capacity of the public sector, then the program is taking on too much risk. Discrete, permanent improvements on a grand scale do not usually happen in real life especially when public administrations are concerned. They can adjust, but are slow to adjust.

3. Size matters

The NRRP can be characterized as a countercyclical program relying mostly on thousands of individual projects rather than a general tax cut or on increases in transfer payments. As such, it required an exceptional effort of identification of the programs, their development, and their implementation. Doing so for projects amounting to about 11 per cent of GDP is simply not realistic.

4. Revise over-optimistic expectations.

The easiest way to win society's and Parliament's approval for a program is to promise extraordinary returns from that program. Governments all over the world will always have an incentive to promise such extraordinary returns. At a minimum, the Commission should check the realism of the estimated returns, a necessary step to keep the debate grounded in evidence and facts as opposed to propaganda.

5. Set realistic targets

Targets too should be realistic. As we documented in this report, most of the targets were revised downwards. If targets are unrealistic, then these revisions are most welcome as they



increase the transparency of the plan and the European Council²⁶ allows for “Objective Circumstances” under which targets can be revised. Inflation has also made some initial cost estimates no longer attainable. However, there should be more attention in the formulation of the plans as there is a tendency of policymakers to establish very ambitious targets to sell the plan to the public opinion.

6. Reporting is crucial

A well-run, interpretable and informative system of reporting should be in place before the program starts. It is not enough to put in place a system of financial reporting, project by project. Even if it worked flawlessly, it would be too complicated for most commentators and for the general public. What is needed is a reporting system on the allocation and actual payments at a rather aggregate level, updated at short intervals. This should be a condition imposed by the Commission for the payments. It is a matter of transparency, of democratic control, but also a condition for supranational authorities to effectively supervise the implementation of the plans.

7. Think of the post-program

Exceptional bursts of expenditure generate exceptional needs for maintenance. But the political support for maintenance after the programs have ended is orders of magnitude lower than the political support for the initial expenditure. This is another reason why size is critical.

8. Skewed priorities

The need to plan and execute a large expenditure fast might force policymakers to focus on types of expenditures that are not the societal priorities, but that are easier to plan and faster to disburse.

²⁶ Council of the European Union, Council Implementing Decision amending the Implementing Decision of 13 July 2021 on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan for Italy, ST 12259/23; ST 16051/23; ST 15114/24; ST 9587/25.



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