



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.
 Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development Index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development Indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

In 1998, economic and social development in Italy was shaped by Italy's compliance with parameters set out for joining the European Monetary System (Euro). In the course of the year, Italians, especially the poorer classes, were asked to make extraordinary efforts. This demand on the people of Italy was only possible because of the system of mutual consent and social agreements put in place by the moderate left wing government.

SOCIAL COHESION

The long-term effectiveness of government choices will depend on sustaining compliance with the terms set out at Maastricht. In other words, it depends on the continuity of economic development that has, among its goals, the reduction of public debt and a significant cut in public expense. Hence, development policies in Italy will be affected by these factors for a long time to come. This implies confrontation with consequences of two kinds: a) increasing GNP will not necessarily bring about more employment; and b) the goal of reducing public expenditures will be attained mainly by cutting the welfare system.

Meanwhile, a trend is gaining strength at government level to focus on increasing quality employment, and also on granting rights of social citizenship since these are essential for maintaining livelihood and social cohesion at acceptable levels. Debate in Europe is also concerned with harmonising economic development with equity, as these are fundamental elements for the building of a new model of social development.

THE YOUNG, THE ELDERLY

There are no immediate solutions to these challenges, especially if we take into account employment and demographic trends in Italy: last year's data show an increase in the number of unemployed people (most of them young) on one hand, and confirm a demographic tendency toward near-zero birthrates and progressive ageing of the population on the other. The job market and welfare services are heavily conditioned by these factors.

The job market is directly affected by these «generational scissors»: on one hand, young people (qualified and unqualified) find it increasingly difficult to find employment in a highly specialised market characterised by atypical and precarious jobs; on the other hand, older workers remain in the active job force for longer since the retirement age was raised and the social security rules made stricter.

Regarding welfare services, demand has increased for social and health services for the elderly and for public support to families. Since the policy of reducing public expenditures has left (and will leave) such demand unanswered, the immediate consequence will be (as it has been in the past) an increase in

the burden of home nursing, especially at the expense of women. The government responded to this situation through the Financial Act with policies that favour poor families and employment (extension of tax relief in the South, three-year tax exemptions for new employees, reduction of improper charges, and increase of employment funds).

An analysis of employment and social welfare data shows a territorial imbalance between the north and the south of the country. Social bodies and «third sector» organisations that concern themselves with human and social development as well as with economic problems are actively working, sometimes in direct confrontation with the government, to pass measures consistent with human development. They also have their own system of «social enterprise» in defence of social groups that are at risk. An example is the system of social cooperatives that, while it widens the range of employment and provides an answer to young people's demand for qualified jobs, it also supports people otherwise condemned to social exclusion, such as handicapped people, elderly people who live alone, young people at risk and so on.

The commitment to fight against social exclusion in Italy also extends to other organisations and local bodies with available economic and human resources. This very fact leads us to underline any positive experience and the need to follow the path of territorial agreements whose aim is to promote employment and the creation of a «municipal» welfare system.

Data and analysis show that the gap between poverty and wealth, between social exclusion and inclusion in Italy, may be characterised as a generational gap that is at risk of becoming a generational «conflict». At present, primary solidarity structures such as family, local community, and volunteer workers are left to deal with this problem. They are often unable to cope or to find satisfactory and permanent solutions, however, and they suffer from the excessive burden of responsibility. Tensions within families and communities, growing social disease among young people, and elderly abandonment and loneliness, are assuming frightening proportions as elements of a progressive crisis of social cohesion, which, in time, may turn into a crisis of democracy.

CHILDREN

In the last two years, Italy witnessed the beginning of an important debate on children. This was prompted by worrying phenomena such as: the recruitment of minors by organised crime for exploitation as drug pushers or even as killers; the growing number of children of some social groups who drop-out of compulsory school-linked to growing exploitation of child labour; and child rape. This serves as a background to the growing sense of precariousness felt by parents when thinking about the future of their families in a social context conditioned by unemployment and welfare crisis.

In April 1997, the Italian parliament passed the National Plan for Childhood and Youth (Turco Law). Implementation began in early 1998 with the allocation of 3 billion Italian lire for three

years to promote and strengthen social services for families and children. The law refers to the role of local institutions (regional bodies) and to the world of private social structures as essential to the protection of children and the definition of strategies based on the totality of children's needs.

Associations and trade unions promoted a national campaign to support the global march against child labour that ended in Geneva on May 30th 1998. Their aim was to awaken public opinion and institutional interest in a worldwide phenomenon that also concerns Italy, **where 300 thousand cases of child labour exploitation have been reported.** Pedo-pornography, also on the Internet, exists in our country. A new law (Law No. 269 on «Sexual Tourism») addressing this problem was passed in August 1998 thanks to the action of Ecpat-Italia, a group of associations committed to children. The new law makes many offences such as child prostitution, and production, marketing and possession of pedo-pornographic material crimes punishable by law.

FROM EMIGRANTS TO IMMIGRANTS

In the last few years, and especially in 1998, another factor has come to the centre of political and social attention, a factor which is considered by many a further element of social destabilisation. This is the flux of immigrants from the east and south, which see Italy as a bridge connecting their native countries, through the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas, to modern, wealthy Europe. Often, these immigrants do not come to Italy to settle down permanently; they consider their stay only as a «first stop». Many are in search of jobs and of better living conditions, but there are also many (and this happens more and more often), that ask for political asylum, since they usually come from countries where war and/or violation of human rights made life impossible. **Hence Italy, formerly a land of emigration, is turning into a land of immigration, and the development of policies for the reception and social integration of immigrants and people seeking asylum represents a test for Italy's level of social development and its capability to create social cohesion.**

In March 1998, Parliament passed a new law (Law No. 40/98) that, while aiming to regulate immigration systems and admission of foreign citizens in Italy, traces new paths for social integration. This law, which was supported by civil society organisations who deal directly with immigrants, requires that these very organisations take an active part in its implementation. A similar measure, aimed at regulating requests for political asylum, is under Parliament's scrutiny. This law is also attracting the interest and commitment of volunteer associations and organisations.

Temporary or permanent reception and social integration of immigrants in Italy, even in large numbers, does not represent a threat to social stability and unity, provided that it is carried out in a rational and organised fashion, and provided it is not left to exploitation by criminal organisations. Immigration should be considered a resource, as proof that Italy has achieved a high-level civilisation, and as a test of Italy's capability to be open to changes and challenges.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION¹

International cooperation in Italy is currently characterised by debate on a new law that should promote the reform and the re-launching of official development aid (ODA). There has been a general reduction in the international financial commitment by OECD countries (their investment was USD 47 billion in 1997). Italy occupies the eleventh position among donor countries and prefers «multilateral» channels: the European Union, international institutions, and UN agencies (65% of total Italian ODA in 1996 went to these three channels).

Although forecasts for the years 1998–2000 show Italian ODA remaining at today's level (0.15 of GNP), there are some interesting and positive trends in the quality of cooperation policy. These are:

- concentration of ODA in some areas and in «priority countries» (Mediterranean area receives 48% of total bilateral support and sub-Saharan Africa 31%, with 12 countries in these areas receiving 80% of total help), thus avoiding the risk of ineffectiveness due to geographic dispersion;
- development of social programmes with the aim of reducing poverty;
- consolidation, though not in organic and structured terms, of the approach that sets human development as a crucial factor

in the fight against social exclusion;

- experimentation (in some significant programmes) with decentralised forms of cooperation based on the connection between territory (place) and community and on the activities of municipal governments and citizens to promote development. This approach is in line with the the OECD Development Assistance Committee's «Shaping the 21st Century» document, in terms of its commitment to reduce poverty, but also because it promotes especially conceived programmes for bettering the social environment, improving primary education, and empowering women.

The question is whether the new law on cooperation will provide positive answers and solutions for ODA by means of a progressive increase of required resources together with a good coordinating policy. In addition to providing economic help, the policy should provide for development of commerce and investments, maintenance of social peace, control and regulation of emigration, and defence of human rights.

- Coordination of member organisations of Social Watch in Italy. The Italian chapter was written by Francesco Petrelli, Marina Ponti, Silvia Stilli and Soana Tortora.

¹ The data on development cooperation are taken from Marco Zupi and Louis Rhi-Sausi, authors of the Italian chapter in: «The Reality of Aid 1998/1999», An independent review of poverty reduction and development assistance, Earthscan, London 1998.