

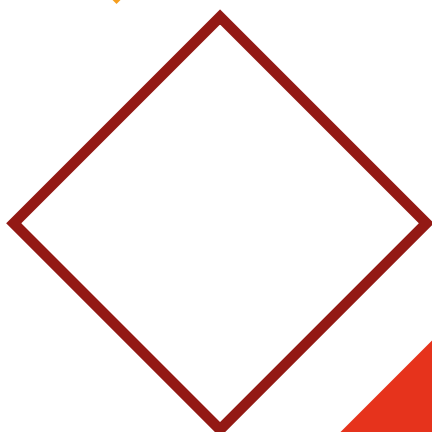
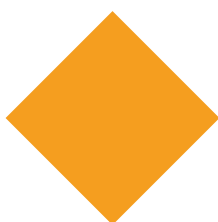
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# CITIZENSHIP AND LIFELONG LEARNING MONITOR 2021

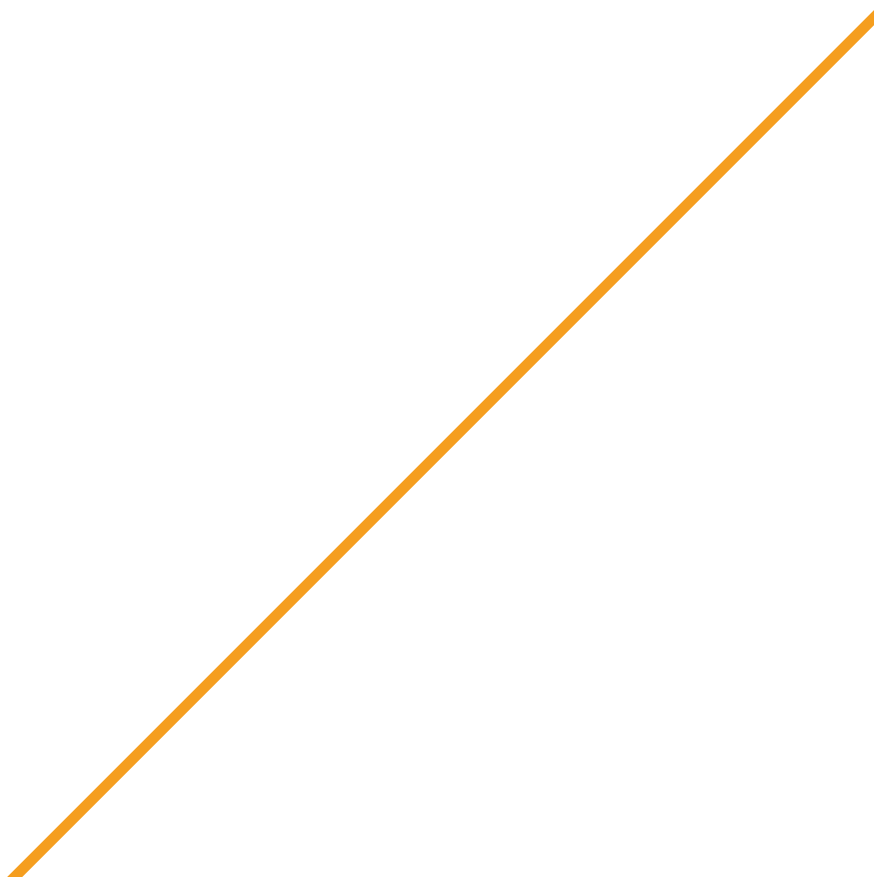
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## ABSTRACT

The following report is one of eleven national case studies building up the 6th edition of the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor. The purpose of the Monitor is to analyse and investigate the changes undertaken in formal, non-formal and informal education in Italy in regard to their relationship with the state of the civic space in the country. The Italian report is focused on two main topics: Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) in the frame of Global Citizenship Education (GCE), and the narrowing civic space, together with the interconnectedness and cross-border solidarity among Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to counter such narrowing. The report accounts for the comprehensive architecture of policy documents focused on EES and GCE in Italy, while emphasising the fact that Italy is the only country in Europe to have made mandatory a certain amount of hours in formal education dedicated to EES. However, the report looks also into the way these strategies are implemented, considering that public investment in education is terribly low, considering that educational inequalities between North-based learners and South-based ones persist, and considering that the wealth of examples of informal and

non-formal education does not seem to have been adapted for formal education or for collaboration among various types of education professionals. The report will then look into the situation of the civic space, considering how this is required for learners to exert their green competences and to build up the potential for collective action in finding common ways to fight the climate emergency. The situation of the civic space in Italy is problematic, as the space has been narrowing down in the past years. Attacks against journalists, especially in the form of the wiretapping scandal engulfing Italy now, far-right protests and violence targeting CSOs and trade unions, tensions with populist politicians and the fact that CSOs are being less and less included in decision-making processes are some of the aspects that will be presented in the report and that have contributed to the shrinking civic space. Good practices from SOLIDAR Foundation members and partners in Italy will be presented for both sets of challenges, while the report will conclude with a set of recommendations to address the challenges presented and to boost the mainstreaming of EES and GCE as well as a vibrant civic space in which these competences can be exerted freely by all learners.



## INTRODUCTION

The report begins by analysing the provision of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) and Global Citizenship Education (GCE), outlining the landscape of policies underpinning such a concept as well as of the stakeholders working on the topic. It will look at all three types of education for this, formal, informal and non-formal, presenting examples of good practices beyond some remaining tasks to be addressed the full mainstreaming of the topic. It will then look into the shrinking of the civic space, considering that this is an essential space for all learners to put in practice the green competences acquired through EES, GCE and ESD. Based on the findings in these

two fields, the report will provide good practice examples from the SOLIDAR Foundation membership to reveal work that can be upscaled to address the challenges or that still exists in spite of challenges. After this, it will conclude with a set of recommendations for how to address the identified challenges and ensure that EES and GCE can be mainstreamed in education in a lifelong and lifewide learning fashion, while also protecting the civic space in which the learners have to exert their competences so that they can push decision-makers to take action regarding the climate emergency and so that they are capable to influence the social, political and economic life of their community.

# EDUCATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY (EES) IN A POST PANDEMIC WORLD

## EES IN FORMAL EDUCATION

The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic became a catalyst for a reflection on how the education is preparing the current learners to adapt to the 21st century society. Education must foster reflections that expand learners' possibilities for action that support sustainable ecosystem at local and global level. In this context, the previous edition of the SOLIDAR Foundation Monitor insisted on the idea that Italy was ahead of these debates when already requiring climate change education in formal education in 2019. The outcome was the implementation of this in September 2020, with each subject in formal education contributing to implementing EES, totalling 33 hours of EES at all levels in formal education for all learners<sup>1</sup>. Beyond this aspect, Italian public authorities placed EES and ESD within their proven commitment to GCE. This is enshrined in the [National GCE Strategy](#), adopted in 2018, which aims to be a key tool to ensure multi-stakeholders' cooperation on Italy's commitment to citizenship, peace, sustainability, equity, human rights and diversity. ESD is a key

element of GCE that develops the knowledge, skills, values to promote sustainable living and to understand the connectedness between natural systems and human actions. The main document which outlines the planning, implementation and evaluation of ESD in formal, non-formal and informal education is the [National Strategy for Sustainable Development](#), which incorporates the objectives of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and develops guidelines to translate the SDGs into concrete actions at national level. The strategy, published in 2017, was developed in collaboration with a working group coordinated by the [Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development](#) (AvSis), which gathers 270 civil society institutions and networks. The document encompasses the promotion of ESD as a key element for the realisation of [SDG 4](#) on quality education and purports to mainstream ESD in formal and non-formal education, with a lifelong learning approach<sup>2</sup>. ESD is referred to as a “sustainability vector” defined as cross-cutting areas of action and key levers for initiating, guiding, managing and monitoring the integration of sustainability into national policies, plans and projects, while addressing the integration of sustainability in school buildings, promoting the designing of actions for energy efficiency and sustainability of school structures, involving the students themselves. The system of mainstreaming GCE, ESD and EES is comprehensive in Italy, while the way in which the strategies have been developed included many CSOs and provided to be a cooperative process. SOLIDAR Foundation appreciates positively these developments in Italy though it remains vigilant in monitoring the actual implementation.



1 Frank, Andrei (2021). *Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2020: Italy National Report*. SOLIDAR Foundation. Pp.4-5. Available at: [https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/314/original/CLLL\\_Monitor2020\\_National\\_report\\_Italy.pdf?1617694931](https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/314/original/CLLL_Monitor2020_National_report_Italy.pdf?1617694931). Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

2 Italian Ministry of the Environment and Protection of Land and Sea (2017). *Strategia Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile*. P.51. Available at: [https://www.mite.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio\\_immagini/Galletti/Comunicati/snsvs\\_ottobre2017.pdf](https://www.mite.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio_immagini/Galletti/Comunicati/snsvs_ottobre2017.pdf). Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

As required by Article 34 of Legislative Decree No 152 of 2006<sup>3</sup>, following the approval of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, the Regions have been called to adopt a comprehensive sustainable development strategy, coherent with the national Strategy from a policy perspective<sup>4</sup>. Every region has a statute that serves as a regional constitution, determining the form of government and the fundamental principles of the organisation and the functioning of the region<sup>5</sup>. [Each Region](#) therefore, developed Strategies encompassing several environmental and social elements, among which environmental and sustainability education. Some regions have even developed Regional Systems of Information, Training and Environmental Education specifically designed for the provision of environmental education, as was the case in Tuscany, Liguria and Marche. This represents a first step into the implementation that needs to be monitored, and it is worth mentioning that the current divergence in how each region has been developing said strategies is worrisome. The concern is derived from the well-documented academic achievement gap along the North-South division<sup>6</sup>. This remains an issue, and the regional inequalities cannot be closed without insufficient targeted support towards all the regional strategies for education.

Further initiatives have been developed to promote EES in educational environments, such as the [School Re-Generation Plan](#) (Piano Ri-Generazione Scuola) which aims to reinforce the role of schools to restore intergenerational relationships and promote awareness of the

intergenerational dimension of sustainable development. In support of the Plan, a Sustainable Schools Week has been established to offer a wide range of initiatives to help schools. To this end, a Green Community comprising institutional, national and supranational public partners has been set up at the Ministry of Education to implement the Plan. Further the plan purports to systematise existing activities, replicate good practices already carried out by some schools, offer training resources for teachers, devote resources to sustainability education activities and create educational links with recognised partners<sup>7</sup>. The Ministry of Education has allocated €2 million for projects promoting schools' green and cultural transition as part of the Plan. Linked also with funding, Law 92/2019, and more specifically article 6.1, foresees €4 million per year for teacher training on transversal teaching of civic education, which covers EES and ESD as well<sup>8</sup>. At the same time, as of 2015, the education institutions have been supported in implementing the topic by the publication of the reviewed version of the [Guidelines for Environmental Education and Sustainable Development](#) which cover a number of thematic issues (e.g., biodiversity, food, climate change, transport, water, cities) differentiated for each learning level.

For the moment, the policy commitments related to GCE and EES are encouraging in Italy, with AvSis also reporting that a multi-stakeholder group has been established in May 2021 by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) on Education for Global Citizenship (ECG) with the purpose to

3 Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana (2006). *Norme in materia ambientale*. Decreto Legislativo 3 aprile 2006, n. 152. Available at: <https://web.camera.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/06152dl.htm>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

4 Regional Administration of Liguria (2018). *Strategia Regionale per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile*. Available at: <https://www.regione.liguria.it/homepage/ambiente/sviluppo-sostenibile/strategia-regionale-sviluppo-sostenibile.html>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

5 Italian Senate (1947). *Constitution of the Italian Republic*. Art. 123. Parliamentary Information, Archives and Publications Office of the Senate Service for Official Reports and Communication: Rome. P.34. Available at: [https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione\\_inglese.pdf](https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf). Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

6 European Commission (2021). *Analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Italy*. Accompanying the document Proposal for a COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING DECISION on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan for Italy {COM(2021) 344 final}. Pp.12-13. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0165&from=EN>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

7 Italian Ministry of Education (2020). *RiGenerazione Scuola*. Available at: <https://www.istruzione.it/ri-generazione-scuola/index.html>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

8 Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana (2019). *Introduzione dell'insegnamento scolastico dell'educazione civica*. Legge 20 agosto 2019, n. 92. Available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2019/08/21/19G00105/sg>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.



elaborate an implementation Plan for the GCE Strategy<sup>9</sup>. The continuation of this implementation process is essential, and the funding strands earmarked for the mainstreaming of the topics help, but it must be highlighted that the current investment in education overall, in Italy, is abysmal. Reaching 3.9% of the GDP in 2020, investment in education has been on a descending slope compared to the rises in GDP since 2010. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) for Italy aims to address some of these lack for investment in education, but there is no reference made to GCE or EES within<sup>10</sup>, which is surprising given the two priorities for green and digital transitions. It is though important to acknowledge that the NRRP dedicates €30 billion for education, with clear targets into combatting education poverty and including the third sector, or the CSOs, in the work to address education poverty in Italy<sup>11</sup>. **SOLIDAR Foundation member, ARCI, has been raising awareness for years on the topic of education poverty<sup>12</sup>, clarifying how important it is that the Italian public authorities have finally included this on**

**their agenda.** By using this investment to address the existent structural issues, the expectation is that this will ensure a more smoother implementation of the other education reforms.

## EES IN INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Formal education cannot be sufficient to prepare learners for the global 21st century challenges. The need to extend learning in all contexts of life, in a lifelong and lifewide manner, requires the reliance on non-formal and informal learning. To this end, it is essential to assess how EES and GCE are promoted in these learning environments and also to focus on adult's participation in such learning considering that to combat the environmental crisis, all learners, regardless of age, must be prepared to hold adequate green competences.

The NRRP<sup>13</sup> and the [National Strategy for Sustainable Development](#) acknowledge<sup>14</sup> the importance of facilitating networks and collaborations between sustainable development education stakeholders, insisting on the role of the CSOs in delivering complementary education. However, SOLIDAR Foundation member, [ARCI](#), reports that there are still significant challenges in the recognition of informal and non-formal education provided by CSOs. In 2015, the Italian government has introduced Provincial Centers for Adult Education (CPIA) - an ongoing initiative that is structured as an autonomous educational institution<sup>15</sup>. The CPIAs are divided into territorial service networks structured on three levels: administrative unit, didactic-teaching unit, and training unit and according to the latest survey of the Ministry

9 ASVIS (2021). L'Italia e gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile. ASVIS Report 2021. P.98. Available at: [https://asvis.it/public/asvis2/files/Rapporto\\_ASviS/Rapporto\\_2021/Rapporto\\_ASviS\\_2021.pdf](https://asvis.it/public/asvis2/files/Rapporto_ASviS/Rapporto_2021/Rapporto_ASviS_2021.pdf). Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

10 European Commission (2021). *Analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Italy*.

11 Ibid. Pp.32, 94-103.

12 ARCI (2019). *Arci Educational per sconfiggere la povertà educativa*. Available at : <https://www.arci.it/arci-educational-per-sconfiggere-la-poverta-educativa/>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

13 European Commission (2021). *Analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Italy*. P.36.

14 Italian Ministry of the Environment and Protection of Land and Sea (2017). *Strategia Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile*. P.100.

15 European Association for Education of Adults (2021). *Italy Country Report 2021*. Available at: <https://countryreport.eaea.org/italy/italy%202021/Developments:%20ALE%20has%20no%20priority%20in%20pandemic%20times>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

of education, there are 130 CPIAS distributed across the country. The National institute for documentation, innovation and educational research (INDIRE) has carried out a monitoring on 126 CPIAs with reference to the school years 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. The monitoring shows that in school year 2016/2017 adults enrolled in various courses were 108.539 (+18.4% compared to 2015/2016). The number foreign adults enrolled in first-level courses (compulsory education) has increased from 12.542 to 14.312 (+14.1%), while those enrolled in second-level courses has registered +16.9%<sup>16</sup>. In spite of all these efforts, the rate of adult participation in education, in Italy, is one of the lowest in Europe, with only 25% of adults being part of non-formal education<sup>17</sup>. Such numbers cannot ensure that the entire Italian population is ready to respond to the climate crisis, or that is even aware of the crisis occurring. The way the NRRP was devised, seems to be a missed opportunity for addressing these gaps considering that there are little mentions made towards using the investment to boost adult learning, and the few references made connect very much the adults with the needs of the labour market rather than with adapting them for the urgent global challenges that impact their lives beyond the labour market<sup>18</sup>.

In the country, CSOs also work extensively on adult learning, community, youth and voluntary activities, however, there often appears lack of connection and little synergy between non-formal and informal learning institutional providers and the civil society ones. This should represent an opportunity to empower CSOs to mainstream ESD and foster the capacity-building of education stakeholders through the provision



of comprehensive training and awareness-raising workshops. Campaigning can further serve as a tool to promote informal learning and education. SOLIDAR Foundation member, [ARCI](#), offers support to grassroots environmental and climate campaigners, by providing them with opportunities to exchange on the topics of their work and to create synergies as well as supporting them with setting up global strikes, as they are part of networks working on climate protection such as Coalizione Clima, ASviS, NeXT, Rinascimento Green. The various ways in which learning is provided by CSOs can be best illuminated by case studies, considering that their work on the ground is many times developed in ad-hoc manners, based on the needs of the local community. Therefore, below there are a few case studies that emphasise the usefulness of CSOs, but they also draw an alarm signal for the fact that CSOs are insufficiently relied upon when considering the mainstreaming of EES and GCE in the Italian society.

16 Eurydice (2022). *Italy: Adult education and training*. Available at : [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-39\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-39_en). Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

17 OECD (2021). *Provincial Centres for Adult Education: What they are, how they function and who use them*. Pp.14-15. Available at : [https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/skills-and-work/adult-learning/CPIA\\_What\\_how\\_who.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/skills-and-work/adult-learning/CPIA_What_how_who.pdf). Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

18 European Commission (2021). *Analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Italy*.





## CASE STUDY

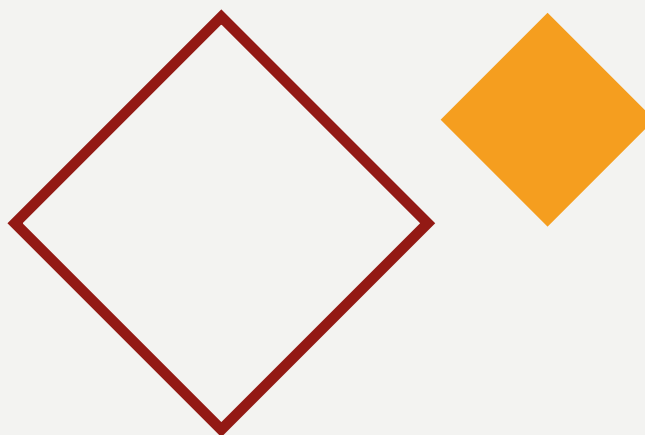
SOLIDAR Foundation member, [ARCI](#), took part in the organisation of the Eco-Social Forum, which took place in the context of the Climate Open Platform during the [Youth4Climate/PreCOP 2021](#). The YouthCOP saw the participation of 400 young people aged between 15 and 29 from 186 countries, who met to address the main urgencies and priorities of climate action. During the Forum, GCE was a key topic of discussion, particularly in relation to its environmental dimension and basis in support of the climate justice cause. The Forum took place from 28 September to 1 November in Milan and saw the participation of several campaigning organisations committed to environmental to climate justice, from Fridays for Future Italy to workers' organisations like SOLIDAR Foundation member, [CGIL](#). The Forum represents the commitment of ARCI in ensuring that their belief in the

indivisibility of climate justice and environmental sustainability with social justice is reflected in their work. The involvement of CSOs in such high-level discussions and in advocacy on the topic is essential to understand the perspective of organisation that deal on the ground with the impacts of the climate crisis, but it also is essential from the perspective that it serves as an informal education experiences for the beneficiaries of ARCI. They have been made aware of these processes existing, bringing their youth closer to the decision-making arenas and making them aware of what can be done to protect the environment and how their eco-anxieties can be heard. For the capacity of CSOs to join such actions and networks, they should be better connected with formal education to exchange on the ways in which learners can put in practice their competences.

## CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [ARCI](#), is one of the organisers of the campaign [Clean Up the World \(Puliamo il Mondo\) campaign](#), in collaboration with the green NGO [Legambiente](#). The campaign entails an organised, voluntary collection of abandoned waste in nature that becomes an avenue to spark discussions also on social issues. In 2021, the topic of the campaign was [Let's clean the world from prejudice](#) and was implemented together with 39 organisations working on integration and migrant rights, from 24 to 26 September. The overarching aim of the campaign was to spark reflection on how making the planet cleaner means also to wipe out - along with the waste - any preconceptions and mechanisms that feed marginalisation, injustice, abuse. The campaign further aimed to represent how the collective reappropriation of spaces is the key to rebuilding social

relations, using the climate crisis as an opportunity to promote dialogue and intercultural exchange and relaunch the theme of inequalities. The events have been organised in various communities, accounting for a practical challenge experienced in the community, and enriched by adding a global perspective to them. This type of learning is exactly what currently is missing from formal education in many European countries and it shows how easy it is to reach to a multitude of learners and support them to connect with the world around them by resorting to informal and non-formal learning methods. For this reason, such cases should be upscaled and better connected with formal education to ensure that all learners, regardless of age and background, can benefit from these discussions and from this practical learning, effectively benefitting from GCE.



# SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

## SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN PANDEMIC TIMES

In the context of the importance of EES and ESD, the civic space has a central role as well as it provides a place for learners to actualise their green competences, but also a place in which they can understand the global phenomena and considering collective actions and solutions for the global challenges in a way that fosters collaboration with others. To this end, a healthy and thriving civic space is paramount, as it enables citizens to organise, participate and express their views to influence and shape the political, economic and social life of their societies<sup>19</sup>. Across the world, governmental responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have included introducing wide-ranging, necessary

and temporary restrictions on people's fundamental human rights, including restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly<sup>20</sup>. Italy has not been spared from that, especially considering how devastating the impact of the pandemic was there compared to other countries in Europe<sup>21</sup>. The pandemic contributed to the civic space in Italy being classified as narrowed by **CIVICUS** due to the restrictions in freedom of assembly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has been accompanied by unprecedented restrictive measures that have sparked a public debate on legality, democratic legitimacy, and states of emergency and a growing number of initiatives by social movements, civil society, and ordinary citizens<sup>22</sup>. The **Transnational Institute** reported that the political battle between the government and those regions led by representatives of the main opposition party have led to the adoption of a multitude of decrees and ordinances that somehow form a patchwork of regulations and prohibitions, that make it harder to ensure proportionality and accountability and leave broad discretion to public officials<sup>23</sup>. The Decree n.8 tackling urgent measures to contain the emergency from COVID-19, established measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 in certain areas of Italy designated as "red zones", including by limiting individuals' travel and movement, prohibiting all public and private meetings or other gatherings, and instituting surveillance of individuals who have had contact with confirmed coronavirus case<sup>24</sup>. During the pandemic, SOLIDAR Foundation



Caserta, Italy (June, 2020): Italian army soldiers garrison in front of the red zone of the former Cirio palaces during a new outbreak of infection with COVID-19.

19 Martone, Francesco (2020). *Italy, democracy and COVID-19*. The Transnational Institute. Available at: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/italy-democracy-and-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR0Tqg8oRNqgY263-8zLhny-Phb4JKVKrAiTqJFa0icmzkE9xAPQvLal7nk>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

20 European Center for Not-For-Profit Law (2020). *Protest in a Time of Pandemic*. P.1. Available at: <https://ecnl.org/sites/default/files/files/Protest-in-a-Time-of-Pandemic.pdf>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

21 Horowitz, Jason; Bubola, Emma and Povoledo, Elisabetta (2020). *Italy, Pandemic's New Epicenter*. The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/21/world/europe/italy-coronavirus-center-lessons.html>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

22 Martone, Francesco (2020). *Italy, democracy and COVID-19*.

23 Ibid.

24 Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana (2020). *Ulteriori disposizioni attuative del decreto-legge 23 febbraio 2020, n. 6, recante misure urgenti in materia di contenimento e gestione dell'emergenza epidemiologica da COVID-19*. Decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri 8 marzo 2020. Available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/08/20A01522/sg>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

member, ARCI, informed that the Government - both the one chaired by Giuseppe Conte and then the one led by Mario Draghi - acted following the state of emergency scheme: therefore, measures were taken in the form of the DPCM (Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers), which the Parliament could not discuss, despite repeatedly calling for a broader discussion, also in compliance with the prerogatives of the Italian Constitution. The political debate therefore took place only outside the institutional headquarters and mainly in the press, thanks to the fact that the same sessions of Parliament were suspended during the hardest period of the pandemic. SOLIDAR Foundation member, ARCI, reports that **the space for participation has been severely impacted, despite the work led by CSOs in cooperation with the government in providing social services during the period of the pandemic. During the crisis, Civil society transformed itself into a “commune”, and its members into commoners, that collectively organised to foster the respect and pursuit of common goods and rights, such as the right to food, care, solidarity<sup>25</sup>.**

As civil society fought to promote solidarity, it must be reported that, in these times of crises, on many occasions humanity was forgotten and people, unfortunately, were not able to see beyond their situation. This applies to what has occurred in the Italian detention system. Observing hygiene and physical distancing has been difficult in detention systems worldwide, even if restrictions were placed to protect the detainees and the staff members against loss of life. Once this happens, mental health is in turn at risk, as visits were completely banned for detainees, as preventive quarantining was implemented, especially for the newcomers, as time granted for outside visits and prison transfers were also significantly reduced. This has led to a multitude of revolts inside the correction facilities in Italy, which has led to the death



of several prisoners and the injury of prison officers. This has brought with it an international outcry and a request to review the system of early releases, especially in light of the sanitary crisis. In October 2020, Italy allowed special leaves from prison with detainees serving sentences under 18-months long serving them from home until 31 December 2020, while being monitored with electronic bracelets, to avoid further infections<sup>26</sup>. This case might not be directly related to the state of the civic space, but it is very much focused on human rights and on a failure to consider the rights of those in dire situations during times of crisis. For all the good that CSOs have been doing, it must be clarified that EES and GCE would help learners become more aware of the suffering experienced by their peers. **This awareness is crucial for the capacity to build solidarity in the civic space and to think of participation in the civic space as something that fosters collaboration and collective action.**

Even if CSOs have been working hard to foster solidarity in the Italian communities during COVID-19, their capacity to act has been severely hit and weakened, with many small organisations - including many of ARCI's chapters - having to shut down. The Italian authorities put in place several measures to

<sup>25</sup> Martone, Francesco (2020). *Italy, democracy and COVID-19*.

<sup>26</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2021). *The Coronavirus Pandemic and Fundamental Rights: A Year in Review*. Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg. P.32. Available at : [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2021-fundamental-rights-report-2021-focus\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-fundamental-rights-report-2021-focus_en.pdf). Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

support CSOs during the Covid-19 emergency<sup>27</sup>. The Law-Decree No.18 of 17 March 2020, introduced some emergency measures to support civil-society organisations in coping with the negative backlash of the pandemic. These included the possibility for the employees to benefit from the redundancy fund and the temporary suspension of tax payments. Moreover, additional EUR 100 million were earmarked for 2020 to be destined to the Fund for the projects and activities of the third sector (Fondo per il finanziamento di progetti e di attività di interesse generale nel Terzo settore)<sup>28</sup>. While the effort of the government to support CSOs with targeted funding is positive, there are still many challenges to be addressed in relation to the civic space in Italy, namely, around the complexity of the registration process for NGOs and delays in the implementation of the law harmonising rules on the non-profit sector<sup>29</sup>.



### SPOTLIGHT: SELECTIVE ACCESS TO DECISION-MAKING AND THE CASE OF REDUCED MEDIA FREEDOM



Over the recent years, the Italian authorities have increased efforts at improving consultations with the civil society. For example, the Ministry of University and Research opened up its draft multiannual National Research Programme to public consultation for the first time. Another initiative of the Italian government was to establish a consultative body for CSOs to promote the rights of LGBTQ+ community in May 2020<sup>30</sup>. Also, recently the Italian authorities concluded a reform of the Third Sector,

with changes in terms of the tax benefits and the budgeting that could be more favourable to CSOs<sup>31</sup>. The issue though is that the reform has been insufficiently explained to CSOs, with a significant amount of them being unaware how the reform is affecting them<sup>32</sup>. **Poor communication on the reform and poor support of CSOs in this context are not signs that reveal a healthy relationship between the government and the CSOs. Moreover, consultation with the civil society has not been the case for the [National Recovery and Resilience Plan \(NRRP\)](#), which was approved by the European Commission in June 2021 and represents the key tool to face economic and climatic crises. Given these examples, the situation in Italy seems to be a case of ‘one step forwards, two steps backwards’.** Such inconsistent responses cannot contribute to building up a strong civil society that can maintain a vibrant civic space and can upscale its good practice examples of mainstreaming EES and GCE given that its voice is not taken into consideration in policymaking.

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [ARCI](#), reported that that despite the long tradition of social

27 Italian Chamber of Deputies (2021). *Riforma del Terzo settore*. P.12. Available at: <https://www.camera.it/temi/documentazione/temi/pdf/1105128.pdf>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

28 Capesciotti, Marta (2021). *Legal environment and space of civil society organisations in supporting fundamental rights: Italy*. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. P.4. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/franet\\_italy\\_civic\\_space\\_2021.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/franet_italy_civic_space_2021.pdf). Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

29 European Commission (2020). *2020 Rule of Law Report: Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Italy*. Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. P.16. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0311&from=EN>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

30 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2021). *Protecting Civic Space in the EU*. Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg. P.50. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2021-protecting-civic-space\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-protecting-civic-space_en.pdf). Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

31 European Fundraising Association (2021). *One in three Italian nonprofits unclear on Third Sector reform changes*. Available at: <https://efa-net.eu/news/a-third-of-italian-nonprofits-unclear-on-third-sector-reform-changes>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

32 Ibid.

dialogue and the improving situation with the civil society organisations' involvement in the government's decision-making procedures, a lack of participation in the preparation of the NRPP was registered. Both the Italian governments which dealt with the drafting of the Plan – in February 2021, a new government had to be formed following the fall of the previous one – did not open any formal consultation with civil society<sup>33</sup>. Caritas Italia reported that a real consultation process specifically devoted to the NRPP did not take place. Caritas Italy published two reports on the NRPP, the first one in April 2021 and the second one in June 2021<sup>34</sup>. In particular, it is underlined that the mechanisms of institutional governance foreseen for the implementation of the plan do not take into account that both the Third Sector Code and the Constitutional Court have acknowledged the general interest mission of CSOs, including in co-planning and co-design processes, which seem not to be reflected in the plan<sup>35</sup>. The spaces of participation are not always recognized and often it happens that these are only opened in following strong pressure from civil society itself<sup>36</sup>. Despite the lack of an organised consultation, thanks to the unprecedented mobilisation, CSOs have been proactive in organising debates and sending proposals to the government. Ultimately, CSOs did not receive official feedback on their proposals and many reported receiving more information about the Plan from the news than from official sources<sup>37</sup>.

The situation with CSOs' capacity to influence decision making has implications on the structure of the civic space and the protections that can be ensured for the civic space. Another action that contributed to the erosion of the civic space in Italy has been the attacks on media freedom. The most flagrant such attack was the

wiretapping of journalists which have occurred over the year 2016. Prosecutors in Trapani had been investigating any potential links between sea rescue NGOs and migrant smugglers, and in doing so have been secretly recording conversations between dozens of Italian and foreign journalists in relation to this, while gaining access to their sources. To ensure the recording of this information, the cellphones of journalists had been bugged and the recordings were stored until March 2021 when the public prosecutors decided to bring charges against Médecins sans Frontières and Save the Children, among other NGOs<sup>38</sup>. The National Federation of Italian Press and the European Federation of Journalists have asked for an investigation in the tactics used by the Trapani prosecutors<sup>39</sup>, but, nevertheless, this remains an attack on NGOs and media which has a significant chilling effect. The possibility of journalists to safely converse with sources has been thrown up in the year by the outrageous actions of the public prosecutors, while NGOs have been prevented from being able to perform essential work which was leading to the salvation of numerous lives. The situation is extremely worrisome, and SOLIDAR Foundation together with its members will monitor the developments.



33 Civil Society Europe (2021). *Civil Society & the National Recovery and Resilience Plans: A Reality Check*. P.20. Available at: <http://civilsocietyeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/CSOs-NRRPs-A-Reality-Check.pdf>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

34 Ibid. P.21.

35 Ibid. P.20.

36 Chiodi, Luisa; Mat, Fazila and Epis, Serena (2021). *La società civile italiana: da bersaglio ad antidoto alla crisi della democrazia?*. Coalizione Italiana Libertà e Diritti civili. P.57. Available at: [https://cild.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/OBCT\\_ReportCivitates.pdf](https://cild.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/OBCT_ReportCivitates.pdf). Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

37 Civil Society Europe (2021). *Civil Society & the National Recovery and Resilience Plans: A Reality Check*. Pp.18-21.

38 CIVICUS (2021). *Wiretapping of Journalists Raises Red Flag for Press Freedom*. Available at : <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/05/12/wiretapping-journalists-raises-red-flag-press-freedom/>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

39 Ibid.

## CIVIL SOCIETY STRIKES BACK

Civil society has been protecting the civic space against the above changes, mitigating their impacts and working towards ensuring the maintenance of the rights and liberties in the civic space. SOLIDAR Foundation member, ARCI, has worked specifically on the issue identified above with relation to what solidarity meant for all people during a pandemic in which each was in danger and each was isolated. ARCI leaned into this exceptional disruption that the pandemic was and is to better support learners in their communities to understand what

solidarity means and to actualise it. Solidarity was viewed as the only solution for survival, as ARCI realized what the implications would be for the civic space if the pandemic would boost individualism and if communities would stop aiding those most disadvantaged. Therefore, through popular education, campaigning, education on GCE, raising awareness among people, ARCI has been performing a bottom-up reshaping of people's approach towards participation in the civic space, aiming to protect the civic space by educating all learners. The example below explains how this work was done in the pandemic.



### CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [ARCI](#), has been championing the role of culture in society for social inclusion and progress, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic. The 2021 edition of the [Strati della Cultura festival](#) that [ARCI](#) organises annually, took place in December, in Parma, Italy, aiming to promote a restart of the society through renewed attention provided to culture. Over three days, associative circles, cultural NGOs, public and private actors rejoined to assess avenues for the cultural actions to maintain active participation in the public life, and breathe new life into the post-pandemic civic space. Topics approached ranged from urban regeneration to the new cultural centres that [ARCI](#) has been launching but also to the link between culture and welfare and the indispensable nature of culture in supporting all learners to take an active role in society and to be socialised towards collective action.

Beyond the raising awareness on the importance of culture and the brainstorming of how this can be employed to create renewed interest in the civic space, [ARCI](#) recognised the crucial nature of

funding for all the organisations operating to protect, enlarge, maintain the civic space while empowering people to participate. CSOs have been deeply affected by the pandemic in terms of the sustainability of their operations, and for this, [ARCI](#) launched the [CURIAMO LA SOCIALITÀ campaign](#) in 2020, calling people to protest against COVID-19 measures used maliciously to limit the capacities of CSOs and against the inconsistent implementation of measures and restrictions among CSOs on one side and commercial ventures on the other. The campaign revolved around actions such as flash mobs, peaceful street demonstrations, restricted meetings in the [ARCI](#) circles, or the organization of meetings with the prefect or with the mayors to deliver a text of an appeal to their actions which was drafted by [ARCI](#). In these moments of disruption, [ARCI](#) has strived to ensure that the CSOs are not left behind while also finding creative ways to engage people to fight for their rights in the civic space, and especially to fight on behalf of the CSOs that are providing the much needed supportive environment for the functioning of the civic space.

The importance of a strong population of engaged learners is how the civil society in Italy reacted to the most recent attacks on the civic space. A clear example of this is also connected with what happened in October 2021, when the Roman headquarters of SOLIDAR Foundation member, CGIL, which is also the biggest and oldest trade union in Italy. The attack culminated anti-vax and anti-COVID-19 restrictions protests, while the attack on the headquarters was orchestrated by violent members of the far-right Forza Nuova<sup>40</sup>. The damage of the headquarters, the injury of 38 police officers and 12 arrests of protesters have been the outcomes of this anti-vax protest<sup>41</sup>, but more insidious has been the fact that far-right agents have specifically targeted the union, engaging into violence and censorship to advance their point, which is attacking the fabric of what a free and vibrant civic space should be. This becomes even more serious given how the national authorities seem to not be able to find ways to prevent such acts that damage the very foundation of what a civic space should be and create a state of insecurity amongst all learners and citizens in Italy. This uncertainty of what to do next is anchored also by some Italian politicians considering the option of banning Forza Nuova by means of the Scelba Law, which prohibits the rebuilding of a fascist party in Italy<sup>42</sup>. The answer provided by the people of Italy, by CSOs in Italy, but also in a cross-border fashion was solidarity. If 10.000 people joined the anti-vax protest, and a small minority of them ravaged the headquarters of CGIL, then the response of CGIL and its partners was to reunite 100.000 people in a protest against fascism and against the bullying that far-right organisations do in a bid to limit the civic space and espouse control<sup>43</sup>. SOLIDAR

Foundation has launched a campaign to stand in solidarity with CGIL during these trying times, and its members have further showed support. This is essential as it recognises the fact that the extremism and chauvinism pushed forward by the far-right movement are representative in all the countries of the EU, and they do not represent an isolated incident in Italy. Societal polarisation in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and the austerity measures undertaken by governments and in the aftermath of the pandemic is on the rise and appears at odds with the civic space<sup>44</sup>. For this, it is essential for CSOs and learners to unite across borders and come up with a response. This example in Italy shows the power of solidarity and the possibility to obtain results via collective action, but especially to show to all learners that participating in the civic space should not be something they are afraid of or something dominated by lack of tolerance, but rather it is all about being passionate for achieving a better future together. This civic space is what will be conducive towards learners finding common avenues to exert their green competences and protect the environment.



40 European Public Service Union (2021). *Massive support for CGIL and Italian unions – Never again fascism #Maipuifascismi*. Available at: <https://www.epsu.org/article/massive-support-cgil-and-italian-unions-never-again-fascism-maipuifascismi>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022. ; Stefanello, Viola (2021). *Italy mulls dismantling far-right movements*. Available at : [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/italy-mulls-dismantling-far-right-movements/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/italy-mulls-dismantling-far-right-movements/). Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

41 Stefanello, Viola (2021). *Italy mulls dismantling far-right movements*

42 Stefanello, Viola (2021). *Italy mulls dismantling far-right movements*

43 European Public Service Union (2021). *Massive support for CGIL and Italian unions – Never again fascism #Maipuifascismi*.

44 SOLIDAR (2021). *#SOLIDARityWithCGIL: Fascist and violent actions have no place in a democratic country!*. Available at : <https://www.solidar.org/en/news/solidaritywithcgil-fascist-and-violent-actions-have-no-place-in-a-democratic-country>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.



## CONCLUSION

The Italian situation reveals a more forceful initiative towards mainstreaming EES in formal education. This is the case due to the recent policies and legislative changes to the law of education that now set it pretty clearly how EES should be implemented, while providing key strategic anchor points in terms of how education professionals will be trained, in terms of how EES competences will be evaluated, and in terms of the education stakeholders involved in the mainstreaming of the topic. At the same time, CSOs and other such informal and non-formal education providers were consulted with regards to the development of strategies focused on GCE and ESD, showing an understanding of the Italian authorities of the fact that learning for these topics must be lifelong and lifewide, while the expertise of these education providers can be essential for the adequate implementation of the recent strategies. However, an issue linked to investment in education remains significant in Italy just as the challenge of closing academic achievement gaps between the learners in the North and the ones in the South. Moreover, the Monitor presents a list of good practices from the informal and non-formal education providers, but these methodologies are not yet fully taken on board by the formal education sector just as more partnerships between formal, informal and non-formal education providers are required. For the moment, it seems that more needs to be done to meet the commitments by the

Italian authorities, but nothing can start without adequate investment in education which is not yet the case. The possibility for informal and non-formal learning in a lifewide manner is also stunted by the current situation of the civic space in Italy. The pandemic has had an impact on the possibility of CSOs and learners to gather, but this has been exacerbated by the logistical and administrative difficulties imposed by the incomplete or contradictory communications regarding the COVID-19 measures. Furthermore, this has been deepened by two trends observed in Italy. First, the fact that CSOs are not fully engaged in the formal decision-making processes is problematic, especially since the recent strategies in education, as well as the NRRP for Italy, foresee the fact that CSOs perspectives will be taken into consideration. Second, the attacks on media freedom are creating a chilling effect and are putting into questions whether the public authorities are genuinely wishing to engage with CSOs and other stakeholders that protect the civic space. In this context, it is difficult to hope for a meaningful EES and GCE to be provided to learners, since the informal and non-formal aspect of this would be key and also since such competences must be put into practice in the civic space if they are to have an impact on the protection of our societies. SOLIDAR Foundation's recommendations for the Italian authorities regarding the mentioned hurdles can be found below.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Materialise the implementation of the current Education for Environmental Sustainability and Global Citizenship Education policy documents by setting up more partnerships amongst formal, informal and non-formal education providers and by taking inspiration from the methodologies used by informal and non-formal education providers
- ◆ Increase public investment in education to address the structural issues (such as academic achievement gaps, infrastructural issues) that prevent a smooth implementation of Education for Environmental Sustainability and Global Citizenship Education
- ◆ Ensure adequate structural funding for informal and non-formal education to raise awareness of sustainability and promote the skills needed at the individual and community level, especially given that the funding for these organisations was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic
- ◆ Ensure the meaningful involvement of CSOs as relevant stakeholders in the implementation phase of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and improve the existing frameworks for stakeholder consultations
- ◆ Involve CSOs in the monitoring and adjustment of the NRRPs and create monitoring mechanisms to evaluate such involvement
- ◆ Create more institutionalised processes for CSOs to participate in the decision-making process and be consulted considering their experience on the ground when it comes to education and the protection of the civic space
- ◆ Follow through adequately on the investigation of wiretapping in the case of journalists
- ◆ Set up more procedures to ensure the safety of the journalistic profession, especially in an effort to improve the currently strained relationships
- ◆ Take meaningful action to prevent the far-right parties from assaulting and abusing other participants to the socio-economic and political life in Italy.

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