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**For Sarkari School G20 Youth Summit**

My country is known for many things but you'll hardly hear of Italy as a nation where life for young people is easy. In my opinion, the life of a young person is not easy anywhere, but there are programmes that administrations and non-profit organizations could activate to favor access to education, work and physical and mental health.

I turned 25 a few days ago and I am living the dream of working in youth policy. A job that coincides with my life and community goals. which I discovered ten years ago. I am from southern Italy, from a beautiful land called Bari and known to the world for its beaches and cliffs. Yet the south has always been seen as a cart to be pulled, all too heavy because of poor education. This is not a perception: in 2021 in southern Italy only 38% of young people had a diploma. In general, there are 517,000 young people in Italy who left school early. These figures make Italy far from the European benchmark on education set by the Europe 2020 Strategy.

[In Italy, the school system works as follows.](#)

- Children between the ages of 3 and 6 can go to a pre-school, which is not mandatory.
- Then there is the beginning of compulsory schooling, i.e. the first cycle of education with five years of primary school and three years of secondary school.
- After that, there is the second cycle of education of 5 years, i.e. high school. From here, the specializations of the children change. There are different addresses that change the subjects to be studied, divided into technical institutes, vocational institutes and high schools. The [main differences](#) between the three types of schools are that high schools are focused on subjects that serve to study society and science, while in technical colleges one studies subjects that are useful for the economic and productive development of the country, and finally in vocational colleges one learns a trade. In some regions there are programmes lasting 3-4 years that replace the high school years, which are specifically for vocational placements. Compulsory schooling ends at the age of 16.

In Italy, school is open from September to the beginning of June and the subjects and curricula are chosen by the Ministry of Education and Merit. This means that apparently all schools in Italy with the same address will study the same things.

The school hours are in the mornings, each type of school has a number of hours to be covered. [For example](#), for the science-oriented high school the school hours are between 27 and 30 hours per week, distributed over 5 or 6 days per week.

Laboratory activities could be activated, depending on the individual school, with the exception of vocational schools where laboratories are more common as they are preparatory to learning a trade. In other schools it is by far more common that lessons are one-way: a teacher speaking and students listening to the lecture, taking notes, and carrying out questions and tests.

The school places great importance on grades: each test or question must be given a grade on a 1-10 scale. The grade is chosen on the basis of the correctness of the information given; the test is insufficient if it has a grade below 6. When a child repeatedly gets

insufficient marks in a subject, he or she risks failing that subject and having to pass summer tests in order to continue with the next grade. If a child has insufficient marks in more than four subjects, then he or she will fail the whole year, so he or she will have to repeat the year again, if still in compulsory schooling.

Honestly, it is difficult for me to speak well of the Italian education system, especially hearing about the ones of other countries.

The importance given to grades is so big that it causes psychological distress in students. A rhetoric of merit is increasingly spreading in Italy, so much so that the Ministry of Public Education itself has changed its name to 'Ministry for Merit and Education'. One in four children suffers from [anxiety disorders](#), and [it is known](#) that one of the main causes of teenage suicides in Italy is school failure. In order to maintain high school standards, children are forced to study for hours in the afternoons and evenings, giving up other activities that can be better for their mental health.

I think it is a complete mistake to base a school career only on grades instead of learning based on improving on mistakes. From my memories of school, the syllabuses were so dense that there was no time to work on mistakes in class assignments. You either succeed or fall behind. That's not fair.

Fortunately, someone in Italy has realized this and is changing the method. [The Morgagni high school in Rome](#), for example, has for the past few years created a 'no grade' section, meaning that numerical grades are avoided during the two-year high school period. This has not eliminated failures altogether but has made those involved grow in terms of self-assessment, the ability to understand what is happening, without fatalism, without feeling predestined and without identifying with the grade. In short, it has improved the mental health of the students.

Another flaw of the Italian school system, which some schools are independently remedying, is the lack of relevance of the subjects studied.

To give an example, the history syllabuses are stuck on the Second World War, while the events of the Roman empire are repeatedly reviewed, and thus students know little about the dynamics of current political and economical phenomena.

Fortunately, there are 11 schools that have decided to change their curricula. The idea came from a professor in my region in southern Italy, who decided to set up [four-year courses](#) for secondary schools with a self-entrepreneurship theme. Innovation depends above all on the methodologies used: no longer one-way lectures but debates, workshops, foreign language conversations and creativity gyms. A big step forward in our school system.

It is good practice to find schools that adopt innovative teaching methodologies and that are public. In Italy, most schools and universities are public, but it happens that the best educational institutions are private. Public schools allow students to attend classes, but rarely provide them with discounts on textbooks or school trips. In public universities, fees are based on family income, but in Italy we are still far from granting the right to study.

In fact, as the ISTAT 2021 report shows, only 1 in 4 young people have a university degree. The obstacles that a young person has to overcome to obtain a university degree are social and economic. The recent crisis has led to an increase in the cost of living: a student who does not have university in his or her home town is faced with a huge outlay in order to be able to afford to study, with costs that include accommodation and the costs of living in another city that are rarely covered in full by regional scholarships. Although the income

threshold below which university is free has recently been raised, it still does not cover middle-income families, who thus become the most disadvantaged when it comes to education. Advocating for free university means protecting the right to study and ONU's Sustainable Development Goal 4, but indirectly also Goal 8 on decent work.

The moment of training-work transition is one of the most sensitive: in Italian universities and schools there are no customized orientation activities, and therefore it often ends up that the course of study or the job that supposedly will guarantee you a secure salary wins out.

The lack of ability to make students think about their future through customized career guidance leads to students being completely disoriented once they leave school or university. In practice, these young people who have not had the opportunity to reflect on their future will often find themselves doing a fallback job that will cause them great levels of stress. To make up for this shortcoming, traineeships have been set up during school years for some years now. Yet, the choice of apprenticeships depends on the agreements that individual schools make with companies, not on the will of the students. This was an attempt to bring the school closer to the world of work, but without giving the students the opportunity to reflect on what they wanted to do. On top of that, some companies do not protect the students in the internship: there is no reimbursement of expenses for them and safety at work is not always protected. Between January and May 2021, [three boys](#) died during school internships, and many others were injured.

I find the reason for this in the lack of capacity of the environment to respond to the real needs of the new generations. It is not only family, friends and school or university that need to take care of young people, but also the whole educating community. Formal education is part of the education process, but if we think that is all, we become blind to the needs of young people. If access to university is not easy, neither are the other possibilities for educational growth in less formal contexts. For a young person living in peripheral areas, and especially in southern Italy, it is difficult to have opportunities to learn anything other than school subjects or easily accessible jobs. Workshops that provide transversal skills or sports are not easily accessible, schools that provide opportunities for self-directed workshops are in the minority in those areas, and vocational training courses are difficult to access. In Italy, some non-profit organizations are setting up community education centers, with funds from foundations and private citizens but rarely from the State. These centers often fill the gaps in the education system. It is mistakenly believed that [learning poverty](#) is only about school drop-outs and difficulties in finding work. Nothing could be more false: educational poverty is loneliness in a community that does not consider you a priority.