

## **The experience of poverty from a life-course perspective: the trajectories of the Italian Reddito di Cittadinanza's beneficiaries**

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As already extensively illustrated in the literature, the experience of poverty represents a complex process shaped by several dimensions, ranging from specific individual factors to the way in which people are embedded within the main spheres (i.e., state, market, family) of social regulation.

The way these dimensions interact can change over time and may vary considerably depending on the specific context in which people live. As far as the Italian case is concerned, the experience of poverty has traditionally been shaped by specific factors characterizing the Italian poverty regime, including the long absence of a universal minimum income scheme at the national level.

Italy has recently addressed this longstanding gap by introducing – first in 2017 with the Inclusion Income (Reddito di Inclusione – ReI) and then in 2019 with the Citizenship Income (Reddito di Cittadinanza – RdC) a new, non-category based, national minimum income scheme. Although there are differences between ReI and RdC, they share important features such as promoting a close connection between monetary support and territorial projects that support social inclusion and labor market integration for beneficiaries. One major difference is the fact that the combined effect of the (unprecedented, in Italy) large size of resources allocated to the measure and the definition of entitlement criteria has produced an unprecedented number of beneficiaries. Thus, "new" profiles of recipients, who had never received social assistance support and/or been in contact with social services before, are now beneficiaries, together with more "traditional" profiles of recipients, who have had a long relationship with local social services and with local social assistance. In addition to that, RdC is usually combined with further policies in supporting the households in the break of the "vicious circle" of poverty and shaping their trajectories.

Against this background, the aim of the paper is to investigate from a life-course perspective: a) the main factors behind the RdC beneficiaries' personal history that resulted in a condition of need and vulnerability. which include also, but not only, the employment trajectories and the various risks that hinder labour market participation; b) the "trigger" events which have led to the request of the RdC; 3) how the specific policy of RdC shapes their experience of poverty, but also their long-term goals and life projects.

The analysis is based on an empirical study conducted within the national research project "CoPInG – Contrasting Poverty through Inclusive Governance".

30 semi-structured/biographical narrative interviews were carried out between September 2021 and August 2022 with RdC beneficiaries in three local contexts in the Lombardy region, i.e. Milan and the Social Areas of Vimercate and Lomellina, selected in order to analyse how the experience of poverty may also change according to different contextual conditions. The three local cases, in fact, vary in terms of urban size, living costs, economic attractiveness, labour market performance, local welfare approaches and governance patterns.