

A Decade of Anti-Poverty Policies in Italy: Powering Without Puzzling

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"Over the past decade, Italy has undergone epochal transformations in its approach toward anti-poverty policies, transitioning from a historically fragmented and inadequate system to a more comprehensive and targeted approach, and more recently, witnessing notable retrenchment. Remarkably, after sixty years of institutional inertia, three major reforms have been introduced within a short decade: the Inclusion Income (Reddito di Inclusione), which was quickly replaced by the Citizens' Income (Reddito di Cittadinanza), and the Inclusion Allowance (Assegno di Inclusione). Additionally, the pandemic crisis and its dramatic social consequences prompted the introduction of a temporary and residual measure, the Emergency Income (Reddito di Emergenza).

Against this backdrop, this paper first describes key policy developments and offers a systematic review of the academic literature on the strengths and weaknesses of the various instruments introduced. It then explores the main features of the public discourse on minimum income through a systematic analysis of news media data. The objectives are to identify, first, the positions of different political actors on both the demand and supply sides regarding minimum income; second, the policy aspects these actors have focused on; and finally, the frames that have dominated anti-poverty policy in Italy over the past decade.

The results reveal a discrepancy between the expert and the political debate on anti-poverty policy in Italy, highlighting how powering dynamics have overshadowed puzzling dynamics. In this context, contentious and competitive credit-claiming dynamics initially led to expansive, path-breaking reforms. However, the formation of an anti-minimum income coalition, spearheaded by Meloni, ultimately resulted in retrenchment and the reintroduction of categorization and fragmentation in the field."