

## 5. Social relationships<sup>1</sup>

Family, friendships and, more generally, relational networks are an essential component of individual well-being because they represent a fundamental part of people's social capital. In Italy, they also make a significant contribution to collective well-being, because family, friendship and associative solidarity networks are a traditional strong point that counterbalance for the shortcomings of public services.

Within these networks, human and material resources are mobilised to ensure support and protection both in everyday life and in critical moments.

In Italy, the levels of satisfaction with relations with family and friends are traditionally very high, as is the possibility of counting on a network of help made up of non-cohabiting friends and relatives. The same cannot be said for the wider society, towards which emerges, instead, a strong distrust from the population, which does not feel safe and protected enough outside family and friends networks.

In the regions of southern Italy, all forms of social networks appear weaker than in the rest of the Country, and associations and volunteer work are less widespread, despite the fact that the needs are more serious. The disadvantage of the South and Islands also remains for social, civic and political commitment, testifying not only to different traditions, a legacy of ancient historical-cultural differences, but also to more unfavourable socio-economic conditions, which hinder the growth of social and political participation.

In 2020, in Italy, family and friends networks confirmed their positive role, helping to alleviate the difficulties of a very delicate phase such as the lockdown, characterized by sacrifices and concerns. In fact, the population's levels of satisfaction with family and friends relationships have remained high.

The particular situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic has fostered greater interest in political and social issues: there has been a significant increase in the proportion of the population that have carried out civic and political participation activities and the proportion of the population that claims to have contributed to the financing of associations has risen. The analysis of the indicators of the Social Relations domain is organised into three main areas: individuals' satisfaction with family and friends relations; trust in others, social activism in volunteering and financing of associations; civic, political and social participation.

### Satisfaction with family and friends relations is stable

In Italy, families represent a fundamental support network both in carrying out normal daily activities and in critical moments. Even in the face of unexpected and sudden difficulties such as the lockdown, families have represented a source of serenity, making sustainable such a delicate phase, characterised by disorientation, worries and sacrifices<sup>2</sup>.

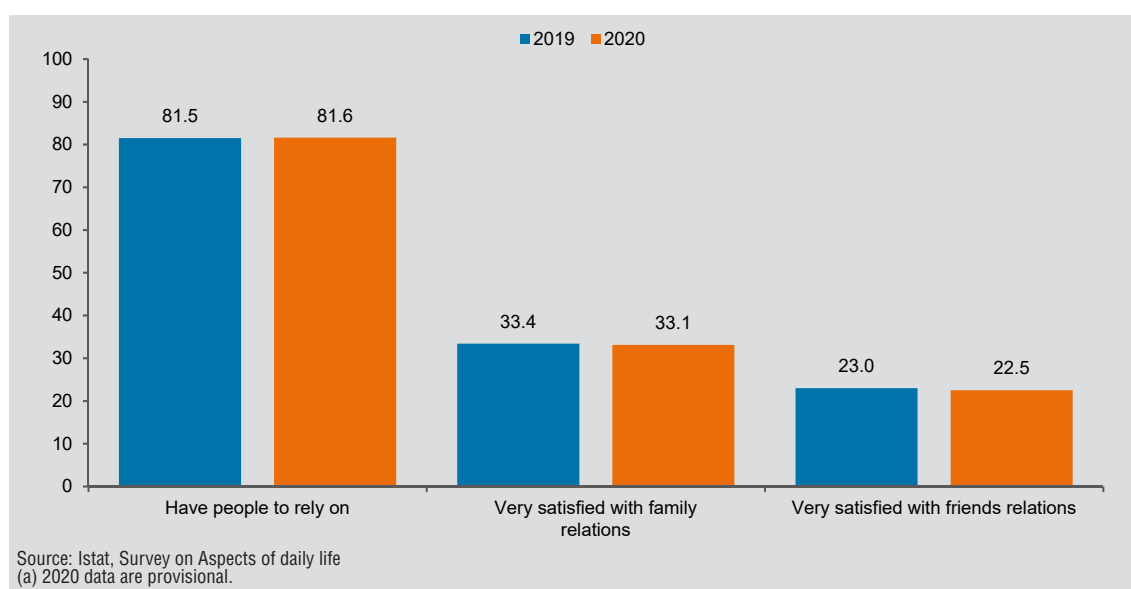
In 2020, one-third of people aged 14 and over say they are very satisfied with their family relationships; if those who say they are fairly satisfied are also included, the overall share

<sup>1</sup> This chapter was edited by Miria Savioli, with contributions from: Lorena Di Donatantonio, Romina Fraboni, Massimo Lori and Sabrina Stoppiello.

<sup>2</sup> Istat, Reazione dei cittadini al lockdown. 5 aprile-21 aprile 2020. Fase 1: un Paese compatto contro il COVID-19, <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/243357> (in Italian)

of the satisfied population reaches 89.8%; both levels of satisfaction remain stable over the past year (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. People aged 14 and over that have people to rely on and people aged 14 and over that are very satisfied with relations with family and friends. Years 2019 and 2020 (a). Per 100 persons aged 14 and over**



Satisfaction with family relations is expressed in a similar way by men and women; it is highest between the ages of 14 and 34 (where the proportion of the very satisfied reaches 37%), declines in subsequent age groups, and then rises again among those aged 65 and over (just over 30%). The lowest levels of satisfaction are among single individuals (28.6%) and, in particular, among men (24.5%).

The share of those very satisfied with relationships with friends is 22.5%, a figure lower than that reached by family relationships. If we also consider those who declare themselves fairly satisfied, the overall level of satisfaction reaches 81.8%. In this case, too, both levels of satisfaction have remained stable over the last year (Figure 1).

Satisfaction with relations with friends also does not show significant gender differences and the percentage of very satisfied is higher among young people (more than 36% in the 14-24 year-old population), who usually have a wider network of friendships.

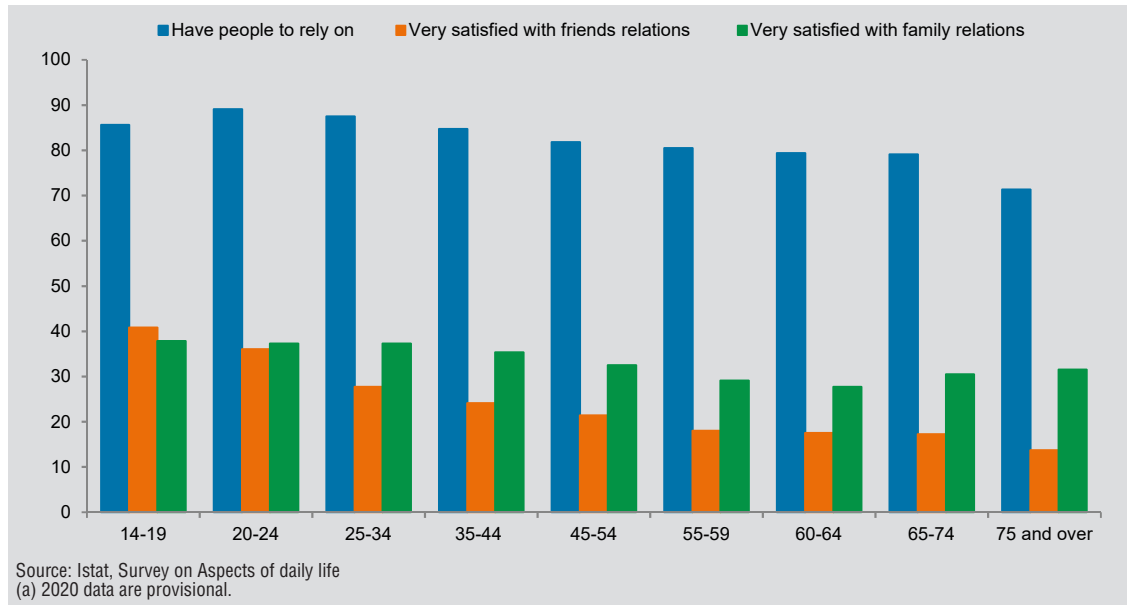
Satisfaction with the network of friends decreases as age increases, reaching its lowest value in the oldest population (13.7% among the population aged 75 and over).

In Italy, the network of relations with non-cohabiting relatives and friends continues to play a fundamental role in the supply of aid on which individuals and families can count.

In 2020, the share of the population reporting that they have relatives, friends, or neighbours they can rely on continues to be very high and stable compared to 2019 (81.6%) (Figure 1).

The availability of an extended network of support people can rely on decreases as age increases: it is highest among the 14-44 year old population (over 84%), then decreases and hits its lowest value among people aged 75 and over (71%). The differences between age groups, however, are less marked than those found for the satisfaction with friends' relations (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. People aged 14 and over that have people to rely on and people aged 14 and over that are very satisfied with relations with family and friends by age group. Year 2020 (a). Per 100 persons aged 14 and over**



### Trust in others and voluntary activity are stable, association funding is increasing

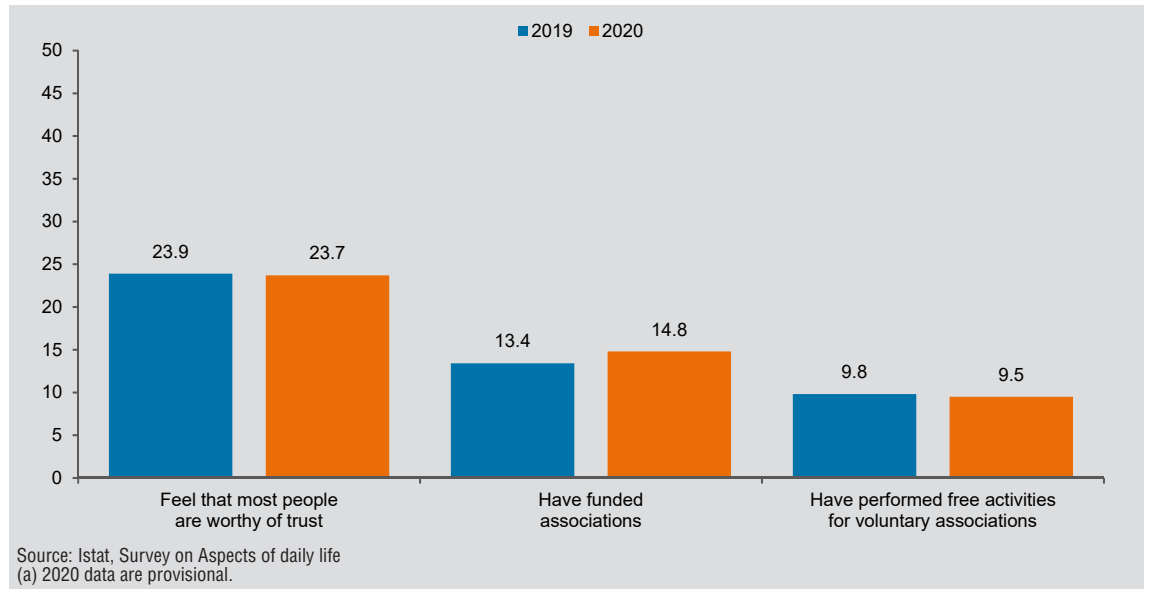
One of the main indicators of social cohesion and civic sense of a community is “generalized trust”, i.e. the degree of trust that people are willing to place in their fellow citizens. Trust in others is of fundamental importance in the economic, political and social life of a country: in fact, where mutual trust is high, society functions better, is more productive, more cooperative, more cohesive, opportunistic behavior is less widespread and the level of corruption is lower.

If in Italy the levels of satisfaction with family and friends relations are very high, the opposite is true for the wider society, towards which emerges a strong distrust from the population, that does not feel safe and protected enough outside the networks of family and friends. Trust in others continues, in fact, to be very low, even if in recent years it appears to be growing slightly.

In 2020, 23.7% of people aged 14 and over feel that most people are worthy of trust (Figure 3). This figure, one of the highest values of the last decade, confirms the growth recorded in the last 2 years (it was 21% in 2018), due in particular to the increase detected in the Centre and the South and Islands.

The percentage of those who express trust in others is higher among men (24.7% vs. 22.7%), increases with age up to 64 years (27%), and then decreases to 18.6% among people aged 75 and over. Gender differences, non-existent in the middle age groups, emerge among young people under 24 and people aged 65 and over: in both cases, women exhibit lower trust in others than males.

Figure 3. People aged 14 and over that feel that most people are worthy of trust and people aged 14 and over that have funded associations or have performed free activities for voluntary associations in the last 12 months. Years 2019 and 2020 (a). Per 100 persons aged 14 and over



In 2020, after years of stability, the share of people that have funded associations shows a slight increase (14.8% vs. 13.4% in 2019); this is probably also the result of the numerous information and awareness campaigns spread during the lockdown, especially in support of research and medical or health organizations (Figure 3). Despite this increase, the value still has not returned to the 2010 levels, when it had reached 17.6%. The percentage of the population that, in 2020, have performed free activities for voluntary associations is stable (9.5%). For both these indicators, no significant gender differences emerge, while differences by age and level of education are observed.

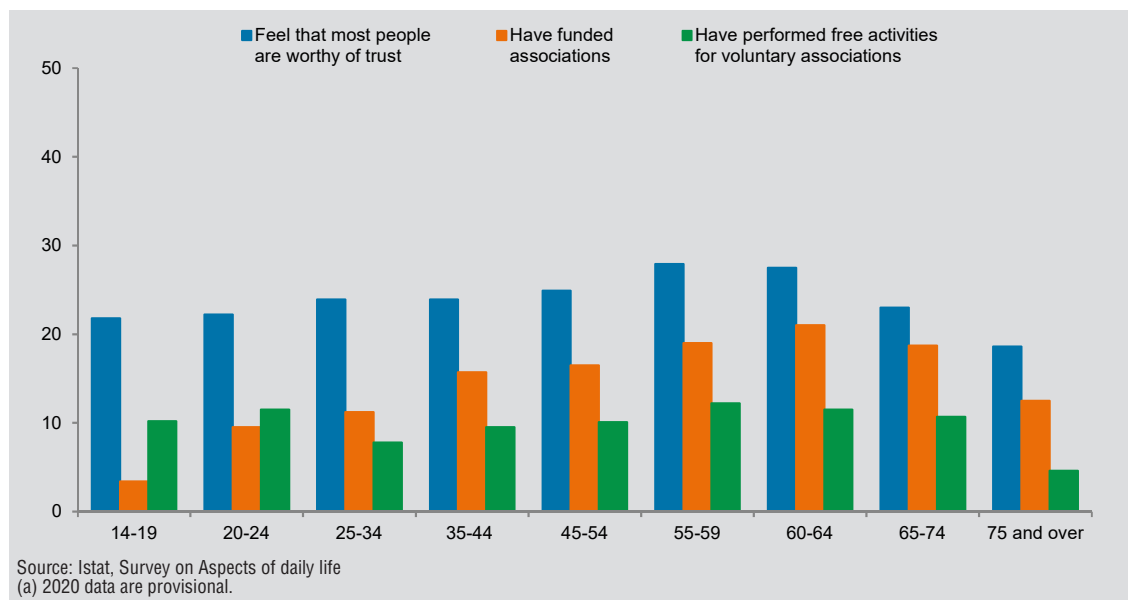
The making of monetary contributions to associations, which is not very common among young people due to their limited economic capacity, reaches its maximum among people aged 60-64 (21%) and among university graduates (28.7% compared with 8.2% of those with at most a lower secondary school diploma).

For participation in voluntary activity, age-related differences are modest: young people aged 14-24 and adult aged 45-74 show the highest levels of involvement (more than 1 in 10 individuals).

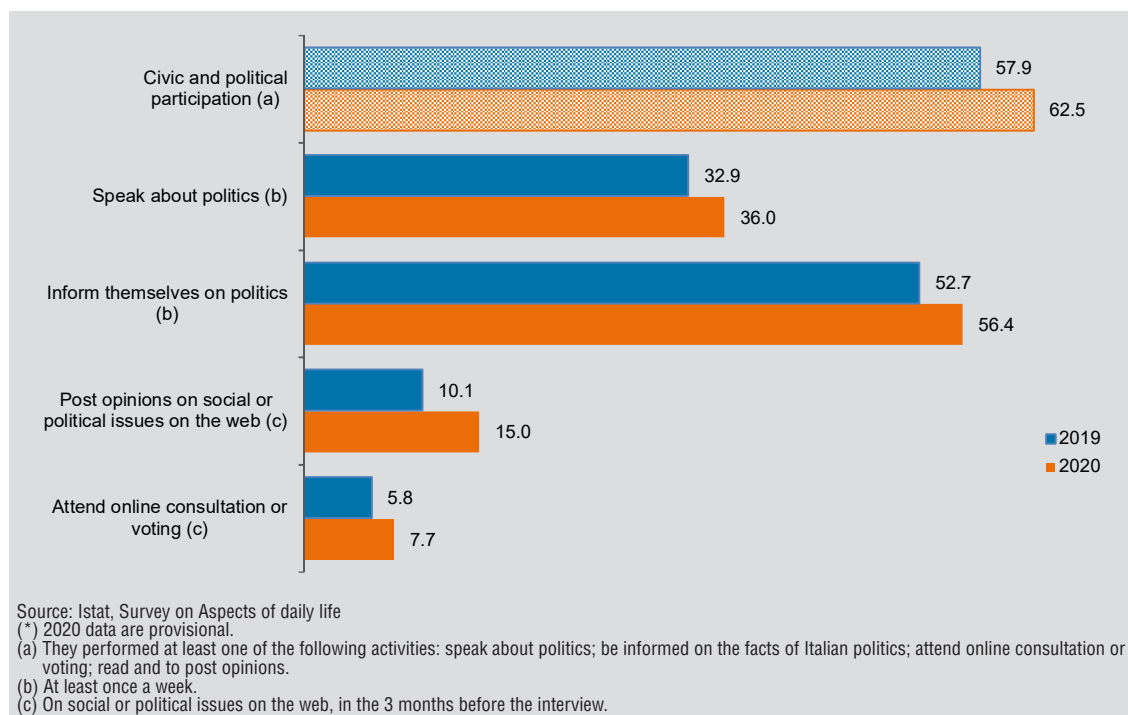
Differences are amplified when considering the level of education: 15.5% of university graduates are involved in voluntary activity, more than twice as many as those with at most a lower secondary school diploma (6.2%).

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**Figure 4. People aged 14 and over that feel that most people are worthy of trust and people aged 14 and over that have funded associations or have performed free activities for voluntary associations in the last 12 months by age group. Year 2020 (a). Per 100 persons aged 14 and over**



**Figure 5. People aged 14 and over who perform activities of civic and political participation. Years 2019 and 2020 (\*). Per 100 persons aged 14 and over**



## Increasing civic and political participation, social participation is stable

In 2020, 62.5% of the population aged 14 and over performs activities of civic and political participation (“talking about politics”, “getting informed”, “participating online”).

This figure increased sharply comparing to 2019, when it stood at 57.9% (Figure 5). This increase can be attributed to the need to track the evolving arrangements put in place to counter the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic at the national and local levels. It is therefore interrupted the negative trend, which began in 2014, that in 5 years brought to a decrease of 10 percentage points in the percentage of population involved, denoting a growing disinterest of the population especially towards talking and getting informed about politics.

Interest in civic and political issues has increased above all in the central-northern regions (around 6 percentage points more, compared with 2 in the southern regions), among females (+6 percentage points compared with 3.1 for males) and among young people.

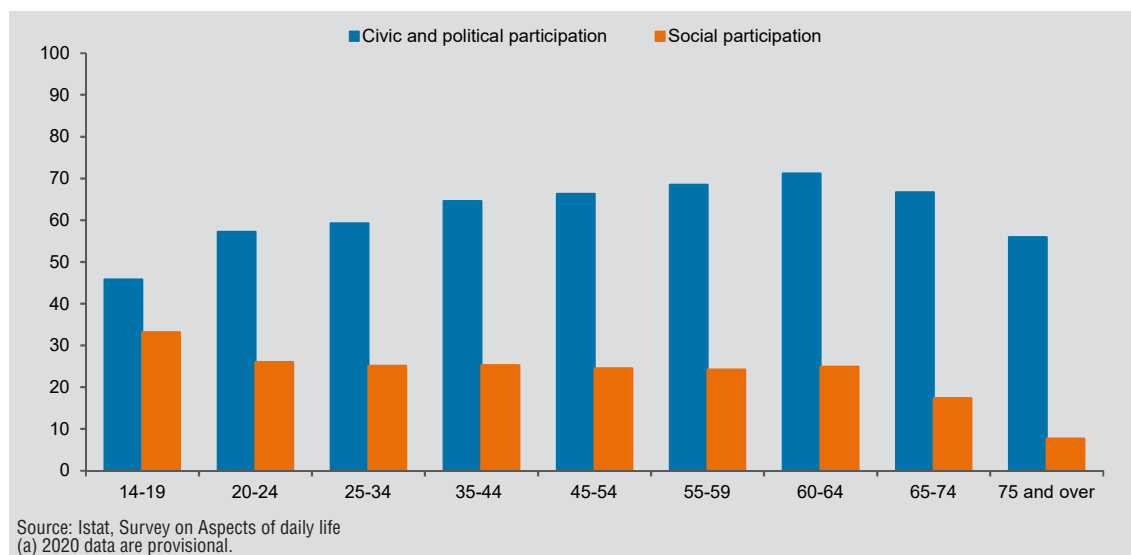
In particular, between 2019 and 2020, there is an increase in the share of population posting opinions on social or political issues on the web (+4.9 points) and in the share of the population getting informed on politics (+3.7) and speaking about politics (+3.1).

Civic and political participation peaks in the 60-64 age group (71.2%), then decreases to 55.9% among the 75+ age group, even though the elderly remain well above the level found among the 14-19 age group (45.8%) (Figure 6). The share of the population involved in forms of social participation is lower, in fact, less than a quarter of the population aged 14 and over (22.3%) claims to have participated in the activities of associations of a recreational, cultural, civic and sporting nature. Unlike civic and political participation, social participation has remained unchanged over the past year.

Social participation is highest among young people, remains stable and just above the average value up to the age of 64 (1 person out of 4), and then falls to its lowest value among the population aged 75 and over (7.7%).

Strong gender differences emerge for social, civic and political participation, with higher percentages among men. The gap is greater for civic and political participation (11.6 percentage points more for men in 2020) while it is smaller for social participation (6.3 points).

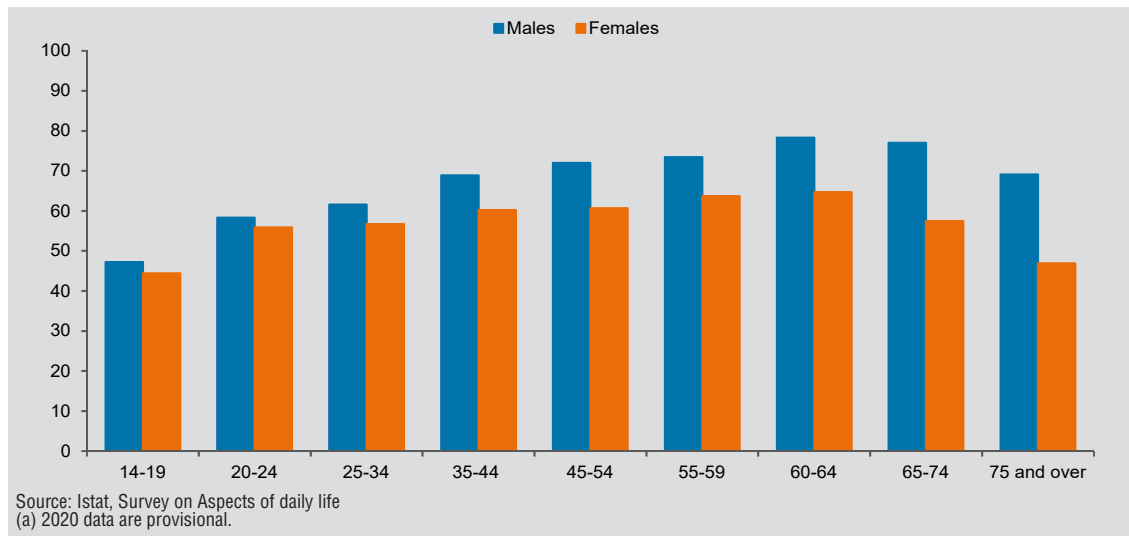
**Figure 6. People aged 14 and over who perform activities of social, civic and political participation by age group. Year 2020 (a). Per 100 persons aged 14 and over**



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The gender gap is minimal among young people and greater among the elderly. Specifically, for civic and political participation, the gap is zero among young people aged 14-24, remains approximately around 10 percentage points in favour of men in the 35-64 age group, and exceeds 20 percentage points among the population aged 65 and over (Figure 7).

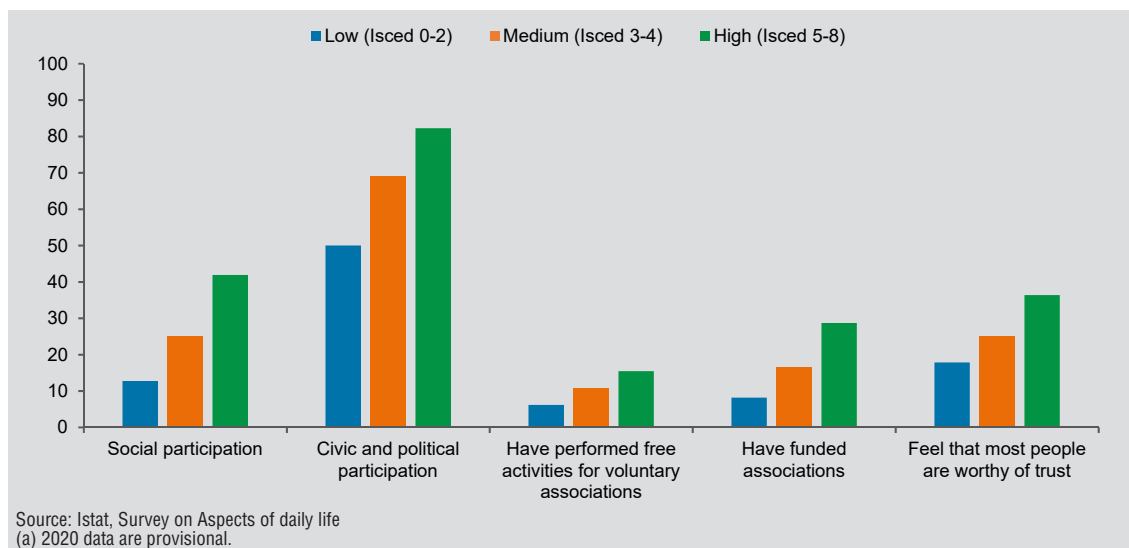
**Figure 7. People aged 14 and over who perform activities of civic and political participation by gender and age group. Year 2020 (a). Per 100 persons aged 14 and over**



Wider gaps emerge by educational level. 41.9% of university graduates are involved in social participation activities, compared with 25.1% of upper secondary school graduates and 12.7% of those with no more than a lower secondary school diploma.

As far as civic and political participation, the gap is even wider: 82.2% of university graduates engage in civic and political participation activities, compared with 69% of upper secondary school graduates and 50% of those with no more than a lower secondary school diploma (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Social Relationship domain indicators by level of education. Year 2020 (a). Per 100 persons aged 14 and over with the same level of education**



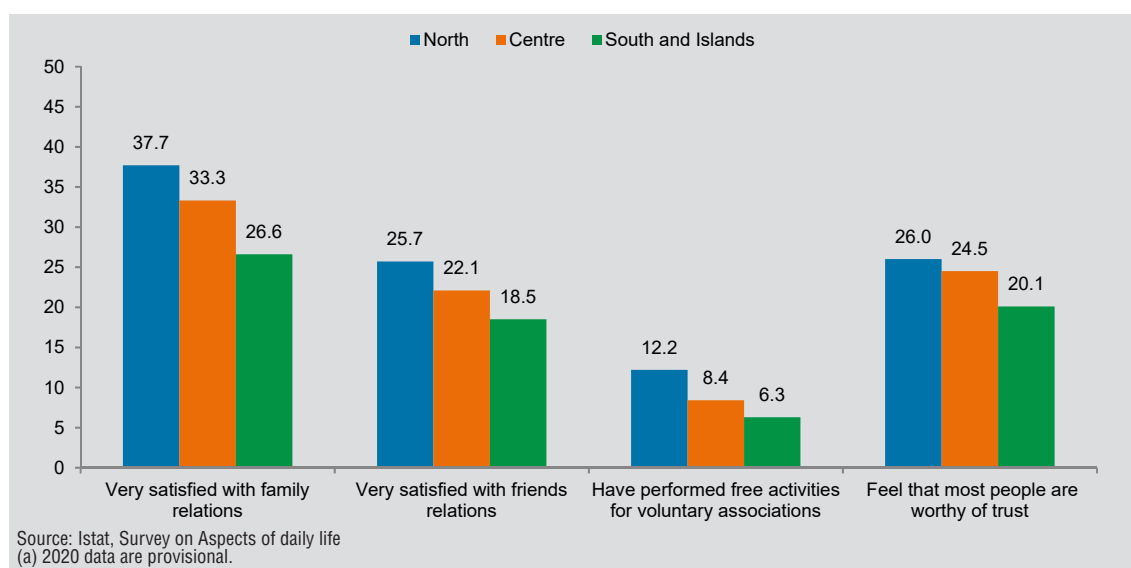
## The disadvantage of the South and Islands is confirmed

In southern Italy, all forms of social networks appear less strong than in the rest of Italy. In fact, family and friends relations, which could in part compensate for the greater difficulties experienced by the population of southern Italy, show in these areas the greatest weaknesses. This finding is not new and has also been noted in previous years.

Satisfaction with relations with friends, which in southern Italy stands at 18.5%, exceeds 25% in the North. The gap widens when family relations are considered: the percentage of the very satisfied in the South is 26.6%, 11 percentage points less than in the North. Only the possibility of counting on relatives and friends in case of need is equally widespread throughout the territory.

The trust in others also records the lowest levels in the South and Islands, where 20.1% of the population aged 14 and over believes that most people are trustworthy, while in the North the level, although still low, rises to 26% (Figure 9).

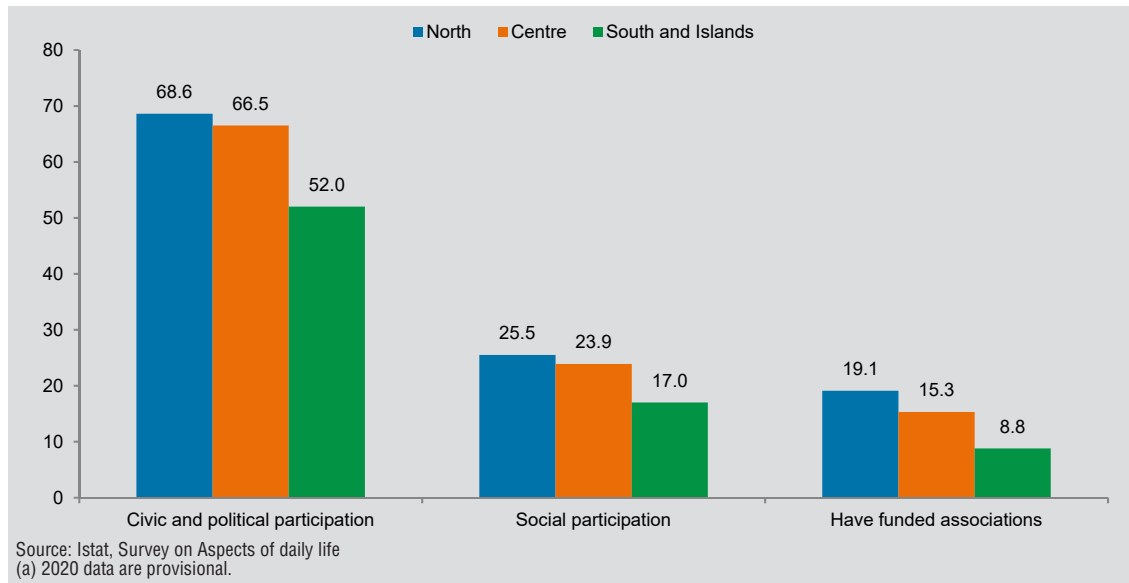
**Figure 9. People aged 14 and over that are very satisfied with relations with family and friends, that feel that most people are worthy of trust, that have performed free activities for voluntary associations in the last 12 months by geographic area. Year 2020 (a). Per 100 persons aged 14 and over**



The disadvantage of the South and Islands also persists with regard to associations and volunteer work: in the North, the percentage of the population that claims to have contributed to the financing of associations is more than double that of the South and Islands (19.1% compared with 8.8%). Voluntary activity is also more widespread in the North, where the percentage is almost double than in the South and Islands (12.2% compared with 6.3%). Territorial differences are also confirmed in terms of social participation: while in the Centre-North a quarter of the population aged 14 and over has declared that they carry out activities of social participation, in the South and Islands the percentage drops to 17% (8.5 percentage points less).



**Figure 10. People aged 14 and over that have performed activities of social, civic and political participation or have funded associations or by geographic area. Year 2020 (a). Per 100 persons aged 14 and over**



For civic and political participation, the territorial gap is close to 17 percentage points: 68.6% in the North compared with 52% in the South (Figure 10). In addition, in the last year, the gap between North and South has widened further, because political participation has increased more in the Centre-North, where levels were higher.

### Nonprofit institutions on the rise, more widespread in the Centre-North

In 2018, there were 359,574 active nonprofit institutions in Italy (equal to 60.1 per 10 thousand inhabitants), which employed 853,476 people (Figure 11).

Their number is growing at constant average annual rates over time (around 2%), while employees, whose increase had been 3.9% between 2016 and 2017, in the two-year period 2017-2018 record a growth by 1%.

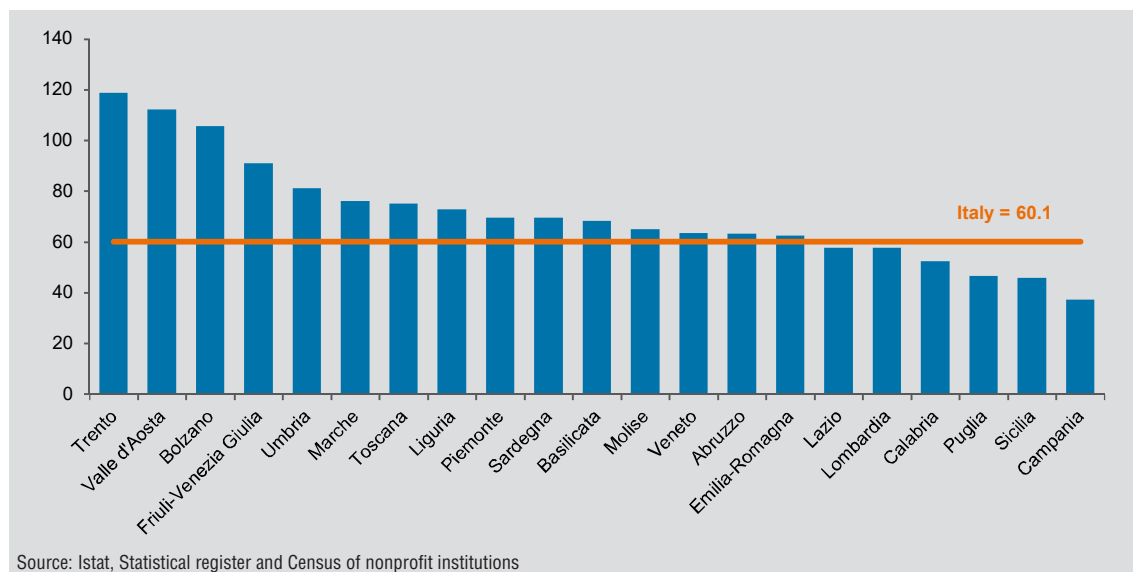
Although institutions are growing at a faster rate in the South and Islands, their territorial distribution remains quite concentrated, with more than 50% of active institutions in northern regions, compared to 27.1% in the South and Islands. In the South, however, the nonprofit sector is expanding: between 2017 and 2018, the number of institutions increased from 45.2 to 48 per 10 thousand inhabitants.

Between 2017 and 2018, employees at nonprofit institutions grew most in the North-East (+2.6%) and in the South (+1.4%), while they declined in the Islands (-1.2%). The concentration of employees is even greater than that of institutions: more than 57% of them work in institutions based in the North.

In 2018, the distribution of nonprofit institutions by economic activity remains unchanged from the previous year. The culture, sports and recreation sector gathers almost two-thirds of the units (64.4%), while the others are represented by much lower shares: social assistance and civil protection (9.3%), labour relations and interest representation (6.5%), religion (4.7%), education and research (3.9%) and health (3.5%). The distribution of employees is also concentrated in a few sectors, however distributed with a different order,

indicating a plethora of organizations operating without paid employees, as in the case of the culture, sports and recreation sector, compared with the more structured realities of the social welfare sector: social assistance (37.3% of employees), health (21.8%), education and research (15%) and economic development and social cohesion (12%).

Figure 11. Number of nonprofit institutions per 10,000 inhabitants by region. Year 2018



### Indicators

- 1. Satisfaction with family relations:** Percentage of people aged 14 and over that are very satisfied with family relations on total population aged 14 and over.  
Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life
- 2. Satisfaction with friends relations:** Percentage of people aged 14 and over that are very satisfied with relations with friends on total population aged 14 and over.  
Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life.
- 3. People to rely on:** Percentage of people aged 14 and over that have relatives, friends or neighbors (besides parents, sons, siblings, grandparents, nephews) they can rely on, on total population aged 14 and over.  
Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life
- 4. Social participation:** People aged 14 and over that have performed at least one social participation activity in the last 12 months on total population aged 14 and over. The activities in question are: participation in meetings of associations (cultural/recreational, ecological, civil rights, peace); participation in meetings of trade union organizations, professional or trade associations; meetings of political parties and/or performance of free activities for a party; payment of a monthly or quarterly fee for a sports club.  
Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life
- 5. Civic and political participation:** People aged 14 and over who perform at least one of the activities of civic and political participation on total population aged 14 and over. The activities in question are: The activities in question are: to speak about politics at least once a week; to inform of the facts of Italian politics at least once a week; to attend online consultation or voting on social issues (civic) or political (e.g. urban planning, sign a petition) at least once in the 3 months prior to the interview, to read and to post opinions on social or political issues on the web at least once in the 3 months preceding the interview.  
Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life
- 6. Voluntary activity:** Percentage of people aged 14 and over that have performed free activities for voluntary associations or groups in the last 12 months on total population aged 14 and over.  
Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life
- 7. Association funding:** Percentage of people aged 14 and over that have funded associations in the last 12 months on total population aged 14 and over.  
Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life
- 8. Nonprofit organizations:** Number of nonprofit organizations per 10,000 inhabitants  
Source: Istat, Statistical register and Census of nonprofit institutions
- 9. Generalized trust:** Percentage of people aged 14 and over that feel that most people are worthy of trust on the total population aged 14 and over.  
Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life

## Indicators by region and geographic area

REGIONS AND GEOGRAPHIC AREAS	Satisfaction with family relations (a)	Satisfaction with friends relations (a)	People to rely on (a)	Social participation (a)
	2020 (*)	2020 (*)	2020 (*)	2020 (*)
Piemonte	34.6	22.9	80.0	23.0
Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste	36.1	25.4	85.2	23.6
Liguria	39.2	24.3	84.4	23.7
Lombardia	37.6	25.6	80.3	24.3
Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol	43.6	32.6	87.9	34.2
<i>Bolzano/Bozen</i>	<i>44.5</i>	<i>34.3</i>	<i>87.7</i>	<i>35.4</i>
<i>Trento</i>	<i>42.8</i>	<i>30.9</i>	<i>88.1</i>	<i>33.0</i>
Veneto	38.9	26.3	82.3	27.3
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	39.5	27.1	81.3	27.2
Emilia-Romagna	37.2	26.3	83.2	26.5
Toscana	37.5	24.4	83.1	24.2
Umbria	35.3	22.2	83.8	24.1
Marche	28.9	19.8	78.5	19.7
Lazio	31.5	21.2	83.2	24.8
Abruzzo	31.0	21.3	83.1	21.9
Molise	26.8	17.0	85.7	20.6
Campania	24.6	18.6	80.9	15.3
Puglia	24.8	18.0	77.5	20.0
Basilicata	28.5	19.9	86.9	19.7
Calabria	28.7	17.8	81.0	13.1
Sicilia	27.8	17.6	79.8	14.7
Sardegna	28.1	20.4	85.5	20.8
North	37.7	25.7	81.7	25.5
Centre	33.3	22.1	82.6	23.9
South and Islands	26.6	18.5	80.8	17.0
<b>Italy</b>	<b>33.1</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>81.6</b>	<b>22.3</b>

(a) Per 100 persons aged 14 and over;

(b) Per 10,000 inhabitants;

(\*) Provisional data.

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Civic and political participation (a)	Voluntary activity (a)	Association funding (a)	Nonprofit organizations (b)	Generalized trust (a)
2020 (*)	2020 (*)	2020 (*)	2018	2020 (*)
69.5	11.2	16.8	69.5	24.3
59.9	10.4	16.2	112.2	28.8
69.1	10.8	15.6	72.8	25.3
66.5	11.7	19.5	57.6	25.3
67.7	19.0	28.8	112.3	37.9
68.5	15.4	28.7	105.7	40.6
66.9	22.4	28.9	118.7	35.4
70.5	13.3	18.9	63.5	26.3
70.5	11.2	20.0	90.9	28.5
69.9	12.3	19.2	62.4	25.4
67.2	9.5	19.7	75.1	25.9
69.1	10.2	14.9	81.2	18.4
61.0	9.4	15.0	76.0	21.6
67.2	7.2	12.6	57.7	25.2
63.3	8.1	11.5	63.2	25.2
61.0	8.2	13.2	64.9	19.9
48.9	5.8	7.7	37.1	20.6
54.7	6.2	10.0	46.5	22.3
53.6	9.6	13.9	68.2	21.4
43.8	5.7	6.8	52.4	23.4
50.1	5.8	6.4	45.7	13.9
59.8	7.9	14.4	69.5	23.4
68.6	12.2	19.1	66.0	26.0
66.5	8.4	15.3	67.2	24.5
52.0	6.3	8.8	48.0	20.1
<b>62.5</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>60.1</b>	<b>23.7</b>