

Foreword

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Bes project: an initiative that has not only constantly ensured an accurate and qualified monitoring of citizens' well-being and its determinants and trends, but has also progressively won a relevant place at the highest policy-makers' table.

The historical phase in which this anniversary takes place brings with it profound transformations linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is no doubt that the exceptional nature of the moment, for which no one was prepared, has led to the emergence of new needs, while exacerbating both old and more recent inequalities.

The sudden change in context made it necessary to enrich the conceptual framework for the collection and processing of statistical data. There have been changes both in the sources, with new questions in the surveys providing the material to support indicators, and in the timeliness of updates, with the choice of more responsive measures with respect to short-term changes.

The interaction between our researchers and experts in the field has also led us to add some indicators to the traditional framework, while replacing others. Of the 152 indicators making-up the new set, 33 are new and integrate eight of the twelve domains of the Bes. This revision has been made with particular care and coherence with the fundamental lines of the #NextGenerationEU programme.

In this new edition of the Report, the information landscape has been enriched on issues with the greatest impact on citizens' well-being today: health and health services, digital resources, climate change and human capital, the latter in terms of both training and productive potential. The thematic enhancements and insights have been constructed to offer objective references to guide the policy action with which Europe intends to implement its strategic vision for inclusion and growth.

Ten years after the start of the project, the proposed indicators clearly show how changes in the profile of well-being in Italy have been many: in the direction of progress as much as in the persistence of critical areas, even severe ones.

As a result of continuous cuts throughout the decade, our health system has fewer beds, older doctors on average, and blocked staff turnover, with the overall effect of greater inequality in access to care. There are still too few children enrolled in nursery schools and too few young people graduating from university, and the education gap with Europe keeps widening.

The gap with other European partners is not narrowing either in terms of investment in research and development, which remains too low, or, despite progress, in the incidence of knowledge workers. At the same time, the number of young people not in education, employment or vocational training programmes (NEETs) has increased.

The quality of work in Italy remains critical, and the incidence of absolute poverty, which for seven years had remained double than in 2009, only in 2019 shows, for the first time, a slight decrease, before increasing again in 2020. As for digitalisation, internet use has been growing, but the disadvantage of the South and Islands, women and the elderly remains. Investment in the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage and cultural activities, already historically inadequate, is decreasing.

On the environmental front, there are many warning signs: water resources are increasingly critical, air quality remains alarming, land consumption is advancing and illegal building is returning to alarming levels in southern Italy.

The pandemic represented a slowdown, or even a setback, in more than one area. The Bes indicators have recorded particularly severe impacts on some of the progress achieved over ten years on the health front, reversed in just one year. The health emergency had a significant impact on an already poorly dynamic and segmented labour market and forced a halt in cultural participation. In this context, citizens' fears about their future situation are understandably on the rise and the proportion of people who are very satisfied with their lives remains low.

On the good news side, after years of decline, citizens' interest in civic and political matters has shown signs of recovery and their sensitivity to climate change continues to increase. The presence of women in decision-making places has progressed, albeit slowly. Crime has been progressively reduced. Some environmental indicators, such as those monitoring waste management, have shown a favourable trend.

This Report therefore presents a complex picture that is at once rich and contradictory. It shows a country in great distress, which nevertheless retains reserves of hope. The commitment of the institutions and the extraordinary resources made available by the #NextGenerationEU programme represent an unprecedented opportunity to intervene in a substantial, and not merely emergent, manner, for healing and recovery. In this sense, the Bes proposes to offer, today more than ever, a targeted, sensitive and reliable tool for accompanying and guiding decisions and for evaluating the results of the resulting policies.

The President of Istat
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