

# The Institutional Context of Humanitarian Helping in Contemporary Italy

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# THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF HUMANITARIAN HELPING IN CONTEMPORARY ITALY

Adriano Pedrana, Lisa Ann Richey and Maha Rafi Atal  
3 May, 2021

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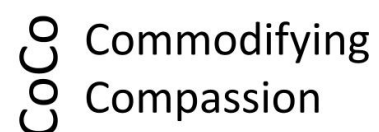
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## About the project

'Commodifying Compassion: Implications of Turning People and Humanitarian Causes into Marketable Things' seeks to understand how 'helping' has become a marketable commodity and how this impacts humanitarianism symbolically and materially. An international team of researchers funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research (2017-2022) will examine ethical consumption intended to benefit humanitarian causes from the perspectives of consumers, businesses, NGOs and recipients. This is the first project to include the cause 'beneficiaries' regimes of value as an important component in understanding the ethical dilemmas of 'helping.' The research will produce a better understanding by humanitarian organizations and businesses leading to more ethical fundraising, donors weighing consumption-based models as part of more effective aid, and consumers making more informed choices about 'helping' by buying brand aid products. Commodifying Compassion explores the dynamics of consumption for a humanitarian cause in three different contexts where humanitarianism has been a realm traditionally dominated by the state (Denmark), the church (Italy) and the market (United States).

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# The Institutional Context of Humanitarian Helping in Contemporary Italy

Adriano Pedrana, Lisa Ann Richey and Maha Rafi Atal

Italy was itself a recipient of foreign aid and has now become a donor engaged in multiple forms of humanitarian helping abroad and at home. The institutional context of humanitarian helping in Italy is constituted by a moving constellation of relationships between the state, the church, and the nonprofit sector. As we see the changing institutional context for Italian nonprofits with decreasing public solidarity, negative discursive framing, and the need to diversify fund-raising channels, Italian businesses are being sought out for partnerships between profit and nonprofit actors (De Marchi and Martinez 2020). As in other donor countries, there has been a weakening of public trust in the traditional aid sector of Italian nonprofits combined with recently decreasing national funding for humanitarian helping abroad. These trends have led to an increasing need for nonprofits to pivot their fund-raising campaigns toward individuals and social networks such as Facebook (De Carli, 2019c). Today, the interface for “helping” brings together government legislation, state bodies, for-profit organizations, nonprofit organizations, the church, and individuals. To begin to understand the interface of humanitarian helping and the trends in Italy today, this working paper documents and explains the history of Italian cooperation for development and humanitarian helping. The next section will explore changes in perceptions of non-state helping and doing good. The third section will turn to government-based helping in contemporary Italy to understand the formal structures shaping humanitarianism and international development. The fourth section examines the institutional organization of the contemporary development cooperation system that links actors in helping interventions. Within this, we examine the public funding trends for development helping. Section five then examines the private funding available. Finally we conclude with some reflections on what this institutional context suggests for the mix of public and private helping abroad.

## **“The Criminalization of Solidarity”: Decreasing Public Trust in “Buonisti”**

The Italian nonprofit sector has been facing several issues and challenges in recent years. First, Italy has seen a change in popular attitudes toward NGOs and the nonprofit world as linked to anti-migration sentiments. The journalist Daniele Biella has referred to this shift in politics and discourse as “the criminalization of solidarity” (Biella, 2019). While Amnesty International does not list Italy among the fifty countries where nonprofit organizations face formal constraints (Amnesty International, 2019: 2), Italy has not been spared by the wave of changing global opinion. In recent years there have been a series of attacks on NGOs in Italy, in particular those involved in rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean (Info Cooperazione, 2017). The populist politician Matteo Salvini, who was until August 2019 the deputy prime minister, has joined in these attacks, suggesting that NGOs are working in symbiosis or collaboration with human traffickers. For example, he has indicated a correlation between the existence of NGOs and human trafficking (ironically calling the absence of rescue ships and an alleged lack of migrant deaths at sea “a coincidence”) [Salvini 2019a] or clearly stating that NGOs help traffickers making money [Salvini 2018a]. He has also put the *scafisti* (migrant traffickers—this word literally depicts the drivers of boats carrying immigrants) and NGOs on the same level as enemies for the state to fight against (Salvini, 2019b). Salvini has also heavily criticized Caritas and other nonprofit organizations that have provided care and services to migrants in Italy who

receive public funds (Salvini, 2019c). Salvini's co-deputy, and current foreign minister, the populist Luigi Di Maio, has similarly referred to NGOs as "Mediterranean sea taxis" (Di Maio, 2017). This critique of NGOs falls within the wider xenophobia of these politicians and their movements, who came to power following the 2018 elections, promising that "the bonanza is over," that they would deliver "closed ports," and that they would govern by the mantra of "Italians first." Opponents of this agenda are labeled with the derogatory term of *buonisti* ("do-gooders"), comprising not just individuals but organizations that "do good" for migrants, including nonprofits.

A second major change has been a public discourse that discredits the charity sector, raising concerns over ethics and corruption. Nonprofit organizations are increasingly perceived as inefficient, non-transparent middlemen absorbing resources or, worse, stealing that money. This perception has been driven in part by reporting of scandals in the nonprofit sector, some of these distorted or fabricated. Widely circulated rumors that funds collected by a phone campaign for earthquake relief were being used for other purposes (Protezione Civile, 2017), or that the Italian branch of Unicef was rerouting money to a top politician implicated in scandal (Unicef, 2018) undermine popular trust in the nonprofit sector. At the same time, these stories have fed a "do-it-yourself" attitude among donors and corporations, who increasingly create their own foundations to support social causes instead of donating to existing organizations (Alvaro, 2018).

The overall impact of decreasing public trust on the nonprofit sector is unclear. For example, a 2017 survey found that just 29 percent of the people who considered "volunteering" a positive word also had a positive attitude toward NGOs (Demos, 2017), which could indicate a separation of these two concepts, and that their destinies are not intertwined. Recent data from 2017 on donations to nonprofit organizations, through the tax system and otherwise, seem to show few practical effects of this change in attitude (Info Cooperazione, 2019a; Vita, 2019a, Arduini, 2019). However, these statistics do not take into account the effects of the 2018 change in government and the new government's agenda towards nonprofits.

The relationship between electoral politics and funding for development and humanitarian aid has been shifting in Italy, with significant increases in support and funding throughout the 2010's being thwarted by more recent political priorities. The OECD Peer Review summarized:

Italy's ODA saw a sharp increase from 2012 to 2017, even when excluding in-donor refugee costs. However, this positive trend is not likely to continue, as ODA decreased in 2018, and Italy is not meeting its commitments for mobilising 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) as total ODA and allocating 0.15% of GNI as ODA to least developed countries(OECD 2019b).

It is not yet clear whether the new government of 2021 will re-chart the course of the decline. However, we do know that Italy also delayed its development policy and its plans for overseas development assistance, even though Italian law provides for an annual three-year plan. Informal statements suggest a retreat in ambition. A 2019 report prepared for Oxfam Italia denounces a U-turn in 2019 budget law for official development assistance, with a decrease in allocated funds to 5 billion euro in 2019, 4.654 billion euro in 2020, and 4.702 billion euro 2021 (Openopolis, 2019: 5), which takes the official development assistance to the same levels as in 2016 (Openaid, 2020b). This would bring the ODA/GNI ration well below the 0.3 percent threshold, which is an intermediate target set out in 2030 Agenda. Donor countries like Italy are committed to ultimately achieve annual aid spending of 0.7 percent of GNI. Moreover, a significant portion of Italy's ODA has recently gone to helping refugees in Italy, something that Oxfam defines as "inflated aid," as it does not bring more

resources to less-developed countries (Openopolis, 2019: 9). At the same time, Oxfam notes—and denounces—that even with this migration aid, Italy has increased its investment in border controls at the expense of fundamental services such as water, food, and education. Such policy shifts have proven effective in reducing migration (Openopolis, 2019: 11).

These changes have been a source of frustration for Italian development professionals. In April 2019, Emilio Ciarlo, a senior official at AICS, the Italian development agency, denounced the subjugation of ODA to foreign policy consideration, which undermined his agency's previous autonomy from and bargaining power with the foreign ministry (Info Cooperazione, 2019b). This complaint is consistent with Salvini's own declaration during the April 2019 G7 summit in France, in which he promised to pursue "trade and cooperation agreements only with those countries which ensure a control on [migrants'] departures and readiness to deportations, rewarding those which show to be cooperative" (Salvini, 2019d). Hence, we see increasing subjugation of humanitarianism and development aid to suit the agenda of domestic politics.

There has been considerable pushback against the criminalization of solidarity, including a new movement called the Assisi Manifesto, which links trade unions with corporations and private citizens to produce "an economy on a human scale against the climate crisis." This movement is drawing on the encyclical letter "Laudato Si" by Pope Francis to mobilize a citizen-based movement. The official statement (English translation) states:

The **challenge of climate crisis** can be an opportunity to set our country in motion for the sake of a common and better future. However, we will work along these lines as much as we can, leaving no one behind, leaving no one alone. An Italy that makes Italy, starting from our finest traditions, is vital to this challenge and can give a significant contribution in trying to build a **civilised, kind world** [emphasis in the original].<sup>1</sup>

Because this movement was so new at the time of our research, it was not yet clear what kind of an impact, beyond the discursive, it would have on Italian nonprofits and global helping.

## **International development cooperation activities of the Italian government**

Italian development cooperation is regulated principally by legislation passed in 2014, which aimed to bring Italian practice in line with the best international and European Union practices. The law defines cooperation for development as "the international cooperation for sustainable development, human rights and peace" (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2014: 1) and as an "integral and qualifying part of Italy's foreign policy" (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2014: 1).<sup>2</sup> Among its stated policy objectives are the eradication of poverty, the reduction of inequalities, the promotion of gender equality and democracy, and support for peace-building and reconciliation processes. Notably, the law promotes domestic as well international development initiatives. These include shared migration policies, which also involve migrant communities in Italy (Farnesina, 2019b), and education, awareness, and civic participation in international cooperation and sustainable development measures, both in Italy and abroad (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2014: 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Assisi Manifesto downloaded from <https://www.symbola.net/manifesto/> last accessed 28 Oct. 2020.

<sup>2</sup> This government document and other sources for this paper are published exclusively in Italian. Translations of quoted material into English are by the first author.



## Historical background

After the Second World War, Italy was a net recipient of foreign aid, mainly through the Marshall Plan for postwar reconstruction (Carbone, 2008:60) and for the economic development of the rural southern regions (Lorenzini, 2017: 462). Italy's limited outgoing foreign "aid" was linked to the Italian administration of Somaliland as a United Nations trust territory between 1950 and 1960, along with funding to Italian colonists in Libya (Veen 2011:67) and to reparations owed to Ethiopia and Yugoslavia (Carbone, 2008:60). Eager to retain political influence in international fora, Italy was a founding member of the International Development Association and the Development Assistance Group (Calandra, 2019: 365) but maintained an official "cooperation non-policy" (*la "non politica" della cooperazione*) with respect to its own spending (Isernia, 1995: 76).

Several factors pushed Italy toward greater cooperation, including lobbying by religious associations, pressure from international partners, and national interest in ensuring sales from domestic companies to developing countries. These factors led to a 1966 law allowing Italians to replace compulsory army service with volunteering activities in developing countries (Calandri, 2019: 368) and new spending focused on neighboring states in the South Mediterranean and Latin American states with a large proportion of Italian migrants (Carbone, 2008: 60). In 1971, Italy adopted its first development policy, with a law on "technical cooperation with developing countries" (Law 1222- ) that provided for technical assistance and volunteer workers (Carbone, 2008: 61; Gasbarri, 1982: 216). The technical cooperation that this policy provided for, however, was kept completely separate from direct financial aid (Isernia, 1995:79) until the 1977 creation of the Interministerial Committee for Foreign Economic Policy (CIPES- *Comitato Interministeriale per la Politica economica Estera*). These years also saw an increase in the resources given to multilateral cooperation, which ended by absorbing 80 percent of all aid (Isernia, 1995: 89).

The 1971 legislation represented a political compromise between the Christian Democratic Party (DC) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI), made in a context of international *détente* during the Cold War (Calandri, 2019: 370). This period also saw the foundation of the Institute for the Third World, later renamed the Institute for Relations between Italy and the Countries of Africa, Latin America, and the Middle and Far East, or IPALMO. This think tank had broad membership, including representatives of the three main political parties, the Communist Party among them. The PCI, which had never been part of any governing coalition, gained political clout through their involvement in IPALMO (Calandri, 2019: 370-2). It allowed the party to operate as a quasi-state delegation, supporting the party's own interests but also the Italian government agenda: "The PCI adopted a government-like attitude and began to act not only as member of the Communist international movement, but as a parallel Italian political leadership" (Calandri, 2019: 373), with connections to large state-owned industrial conglomerates. This reorientation was significant for the party, as its access to outside funding from the USSR had been cut following criticism of the Soviet repression of the Prague Spring. It also opened a new "politicization of development," in which bureaucratic struggles slowed the new organizational infrastructure, which soon proved understaffed and torn between conflicting ministries (Isernia, 1995: 93-98). These years also saw a shift from the multilateral to the bilateral, with bilateral aid increasing from 7 percent to 43 percent of quotas between 1979 and 1982. (Gasbarri, 1982: 220).

During the 1980s, development became an increasingly mainstream topic in Italian society, in part due to the action of Italy's Radical Party (PR), which launched a public campaign against malnutrition and starvation with an urgent call to action for the general public, coupled with international pressure

from the newly founded European Parliament (Isernia, 1995: 100-103). The PR campaign made an “ambiguously clear” (Isernia, 1995: 102) link between problem and solution, which translated into support for draft legislation in 1982 to set up a 3,500 billion lira (6.2 billion euro) which was to feed at least three million people (Camera dei Deputati, 2020). The Italian Aid Fund (FAI) was voted into law in March 1985 and operated through February 1987, during which time the fund managed to spend all its resources and became the subject of several mismanagement and corruption cases (Carbone, 2008: 61).

Shortly before the FAI expired, the Italian Parliament approved the “new legislation on the cooperation between Italy and the developing countries,” which inaugurated a third phase in Italian development history, the “institutionalization stage” (Isernia, 1995: 119). This reform explicitly included cooperation for Italy’s foreign policy and widened its scope to humanitarian, social and political targets. It also provided a framework for measures in case of catastrophes and emphasized integration with the policies of the receiving country (Isernia 1995: 119). Much of the infrastructure of the 1979 law was confirmed, but the new legislation instituted a consultative committee with nongovernmental organizations (Normattiva, 2020: 8). This reflected the growing popularization of development during this period.

Over the years, this policy apparatus was compromised and ultimately dismantled. Foreign aid was used as a tool for contingent political and economic needs, sprinkling interventions on a vast number of countries and sectors, while the division of competencies between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (in charge of bilateral initiatives and contributions to the EU budget) and the Ministry of Economics and Finance (handling contributions to the European Development Fund and to international banking institutions) undermined efficiency and coordination (Carbone and Quartapelle, 2016: 50-51). In 1992, the *Mani Pulite* (“Clean Hands”) judicial investigation uncovered a widespread, deep-rooted political corruption scheme across the Italian political establishment, including the ODA sector, undermining its overall credibility (Pedini, 1994: 376; Rhi-Sausi & Zupi 2005: 336). In the aftermath, the Italian political establishment was reconfigured, resulting in a sudden drop in funding for development. This coincided with the end of the Cold War and the subsequent heavy cuts in international aid for political purposes (Carbone, 2008: 62). Since the late 1990s, Italy’s status in the European Monetary Union, and subsequently in the eurozone, has necessitated heavy cuts in state expenditure. Meanwhile, new international rules limited the ability of donor countries to tie their aid—as Italy and others had previously done—to projects that promoted their own industry over the donor countries’ (Rhi-Sausi and Zupi, 2005: 337; Veen, 2011: 19).

Together these factors contributed to a declining interest in foreign aid policy from across the Italian political spectrum. Between 2001 and 2006, for example, no vice-minister for development was appointed and instead development functions were shared among four other under-secretaries (Carbone, 2008: 63-4). There were several unsuccessful attempts to reform the legal framework of development, with struggles over the independence of the new aid agency relative to Italian diplomatic and foreign policy objectives. Finally, in August 2014, Italy adopted its present development cooperation policy in Law 125/2014.

## Countries Targeted by Italian Foreign Aid

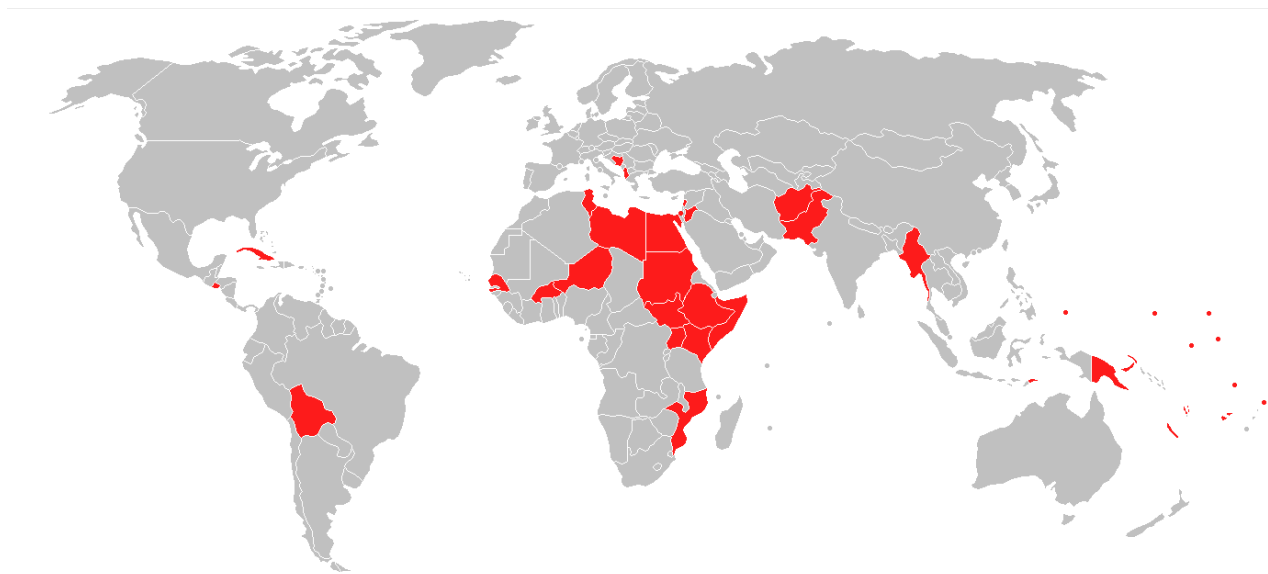


Fig. 1 - Countries receiving Italian foreign aid ([AICS, 2017], [AICS, 2018b])

### The current institutional framework for international cooperation

The development activities of the Italian government are currently overseen by five overlapping bodies.<sup>3</sup> First, cooperation for development is part of Italy's foreign policy, and as such falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, or MAECI (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2014:3), within which there is a vice-minister responsible for cooperation (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2014:11). The ministry prepares three-year policy-planning documents (Camera dei Deputati, 2018) as well as an annual report. These documents must be approved by the Council of Ministers and so are subject to parliamentary scrutiny. MAECI shares responsibility for development activities with the Interministry Committee for development cooperation (CICS). This committee comprises the prime minister and representatives of nearly all ministries and representatives of local (i.e., regional, provincial, and city) authorities when there are discussions on matters that pertain to them.

Second, the implementation of cooperation initiatives, as set out in the three-year plans, is the remit of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), headquartered in Rome and Florence, with twenty offices abroad to allow for "monitoring, implementation and on-site analysis of the development needs of partner countries"<sup>4</sup> (AICS, 2019b). Established as a public body with a public interest (AICS, 2018: 3), it is responsible for the preliminary investigation, setup, financing, management, and control of cooperation activities.

The AICS is autonomous in matters in such as administration, regulation, and budget, but still within the purview of MAECI, with the third body, MAECI-AICS Joint Committee for Development Cooperation, which approves, among other things, initiatives worth more than two million euro and defines annual programs (Farnesina, 2019). The relationship between the ministry and the AICS is

<sup>3</sup> For an organizational diagram see <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/f11192cc-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/f11192cc-en>

<sup>4</sup> "monitoraggio, l'implementazione e l'analisi sul terreno delle esigenze di sviluppo dei Paesi partner"

regulated by a three-year agreement, and the performance of the AICS is assessed against this agreement. The AICS operates mainly through partnerships with other state and nonstate actors in “Italian Development Cooperation System” (see below). Moreover it can give technical support to other bodies of the public administration that work in development cooperation, implement programs from the EU or other international bodies, and promote cooperation with private actors (AICS, 2018: 4).

Fourth, coordination between public and private actors is typically the responsibility of the National Council for Development Cooperation (*Consiglio Nazionale del Terzo Settore* - CNTS), an advisory body with representatives of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. This council meets at least once every year and serves as a tool for general participation, where proposals linked to this sector can be put forward.

The fifth and final body, the *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti* (CDP), is the financial institution for development cooperation, acting as development bank (Camera dei Deputati, 2018). The CDP is a joint stock company where the majority stakeholder is the Ministry of Economics and Finance. Its aim is to “foster the development of the Country [i.e., Italy], using responsibly national savings in order to support growth and boost employment, leveraging on innovation, business competitiveness, infrastructure and local development” (CDP, 2019).

## **The Contemporary Italian Development Cooperation System**

In addition to the government bodies responsible for development, the 2014 reform also defines the system for coordination between state and nonstate bodies. This section sets out the roles of these respective sectors.

### **State administrations, universities, public bodies**

The first category includes state administrations, universities, and public bodies, including chambers of commerce. In this category, universities in particular are called upon to promote capacity building using technical expertise. This might include institutional partnerships with universities in developing countries, joint training and study programs, and research and teaching on sustainable development. The aim of such efforts is to transform academia into a development agent by “training the ruling class of the future” (AICS, 2018b: 8-9).

### **Local authorities**

The second category, local authorities, is one of the more original and peculiar elements of the Italian cooperation system (AICS, 2015: 18) and dates back to a 1987 law permitting local and regional authorities to conduct their own international development programs with oversight by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Maeci, 2004). Since the 1990s, it became permissible for local authorities to use up to 0.8 percent of city budgets for international cooperation initiatives (Rhi-Sausi and Zupi, 2005: 341). Meanwhile, such decentralized cooperation has gained international momentum, with recognition at the EU level (Stocchiero et al., 2001: 3).

While the EU recognizes local authorities alongside civil society organizations, the Italian legal framework gives local authorities several unique roles. These include the ability to cultivate direct political and technical relationships with local authorities in recipient countries, and the capacity to involve local social capital—such as cultural, scientific, or other types—in their programs. Moreover, local authorities’ development efforts carry political meaning. When a city council commits to a project of international aid, every citizen becomes involved in international helping (Stocchiero et al., 2001: 3-5).

Local authorities play a particularly significant role in relation to migration, an increasingly important area in international aid because of the remittances sent by migrants to their originating countries, and the philanthropic initiatives of migrant associations, both of which affect investments (Zupi, 2015: 38-46). Local authorities implement initiatives supporting global citizenship, work with associations of migrant communities, and make direct interventions in target countries (AICS 2018b: 7-8). These initiatives can be financed through local authorities’ own funds, coordinated with public and private bodies, or co-financed with resources from AICS. For example, in 2020, the national association of municipalities launched the “Cities without Borders” campaign in direct cooperation with fellow municipalities in receiving countries.

This unique arrangement reflects the centrality of civic awareness and global citizenship education to the Italian government’s development objectives, as discussed above. In other words, “[T]he presence in the forefront of regional and local authorities is not only useful for the partners in the developing countries, but it also promotes a stronger awareness and responsibility of our communities towards the world around us” (AICS, 2015: 18).

### Civil society organizations (OSC) and Third sector organizations (Enti del Terzo settore - ETS)

The Italian nonprofit sector has grown dramatically in recent years, with half of the country’s 343,432 nonprofit institutions founded since 2005. The sector employs just over 800,000 people, of whom two-thirds are women, but these are concentrated in a small number of large organizations. The vast majority of nonprofit organizations rely exclusively on unpaid volunteers (ISTAT 2016). International activities represent a small portion (1.2 percent) of the organizations in this wider sector.

In 2017, the sector underwent a significant reform, with new legislation that defines twenty-six fields of action “of public interest” for nonprofit organizations (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2017: 5). Organizations must fall within one of eight types.<sup>5</sup> The new typology eliminates a category of “socially oriented nonprofit organizations” (*Organizzazione non lucrativa di utilità sociale—Onlus*),” which had previously been the most widespread type of nonprofit in Italy, requiring these organizations to conform to one of the new types. The reform also creates a single comprehensive national registry of nonprofits, and only nonprofits in this registry can receive public funding or private funding through public campaigns (Camera dei Deputati, 2019).

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<sup>5</sup> These are volunteer organizations (*Organizzazioni di volontariato—ODV*); social promotion associations (*Associazioni di promozione sociale—APS*); philanthropic organizations (*Enti filantropici*); social enterprises (*Imprese sociali*); networks of organizations (*reti associative*); mutual aid societies (*Società di mutuo soccorso—SOMS*); religious organizations recognized by law (under conditions); and formal or informal associations, foundations and private law organizations—other than companies—pursuing civic, solidarity and social goals with volunteer work, grants, donation of goods or services, mutual aid, or the production or exchange of goods and services (Ministero del Lavoro, 2019b).

Separately, the AICS has an ongoing list of civil society organizations (OSC) of six types<sup>6</sup> that are entitled to apply for grants and to take part in tenders and other forms of collaboration. In order to be listed, these organizations have to follow the principles of the 2014 development policy law and adhere to commonly adopted social responsibility standards, environmental regulations, and a code of ethics. Organizations on this list, which currently comprises 215 accredited organizations, cannot rely solely on public funding, with a 5 percent minimum of overall income from private sources (AICS, 2018e: 6). This is important and suggests a universal, if minimal, privatization of all nonprofit organizations.

What about the NGOs? The 1987 reform had a recognition process through an ad hoc commission. The requirements to become a recognized NGO included: (1) a nonprofit status, (2) infrastructure, and qualified personnel, (3) at least three years' experience, and (4) "having as an institutional objective that of carrying out cooperation for development activities, in support of populations of the Third World" (Normattiva, 2020d:28). Article 32 of the 2014 reform indicates that already recognized NGOs that also comply with Onlus status can enter the then valid Onlus registry (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2014:32) and are automatically registered in the national registry of nonprofits (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2017:89). They can also be included in the AICS list stated above.

## For-profit bodies

The involvement of for-profit companies in development cooperation policies dates back to the 1950s and 1960s, when they represented an important tool to implement government infrastructure projects (Zupi 2015, 13–14). Since the 2014 reforms, for-profit companies have been considered "fundamental for the new [model of] cooperation" (AICS 2019d) and their internationalization a tool that can be leveraged for development in targeted countries and populations (Camera dei Deputati 2018). Promoting synergies both between the public and private sectors, as well as between the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, can create consistency in cooperation activities across sectors and a leverage effect that increases private financing. The AICS (2019d) echoes the language of "Committing Billions and Investing Trillions" (Kituyi 2015), previously a buzzword of the 2015 UN Conference on Trade and Development in Addis Ababa. The AICS similarly nods to the UN 2030 Agenda (UN 2015a), which "underlines the private business activity, by defining international trade as the 'engine for an inclusive economic growth'" and calls for private bodies to "apply their 'creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges'" (AICS 2019e). By partnering with the private sector, the agency aims to build business models that respect the UN Goal 12 for Sustainable Development, "ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns," and take into account the social and environmental impacts on populations in receiving countries (AICS 2019e). The European Commission (2014) makes a distinction between "private sector development" (in developing countries and "the

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<sup>6</sup> This category includes the following entities (AICS, 2018e:3-4): (1) NGOs specialized in humanitarian help and development cooperation; (2) nonprofit organizations (ETSS) working in development cooperation and in international solidarity; (3) organizations operating in fair trade, ethical financing within international development cooperation; (4) Migrant communities (over two thousand in Italy [AICS, 2018b:6]) and organizations working with originating countries within cooperation and development either directly or through suitable organizations; (5) social cooperatives, trade unions, foundations, ODVs, APSs, when they operate within cooperation for development; and (6) organizations based in Italy with an advisory status for at least four years in the UN Economic and Social Council.

engagement of both local and European businesses for tangible and positive development outcomes on the ground” (European Commission 2014, 16). The role of the private sector is clearly described:

“Having a decent job is widely recognised as the best way out of poverty. The private sector provides some 90 per cent of jobs in developing countries, and is thus an essential partner in the fight against poverty” (ibid., 1).

Moreover, the European Commission recognizes the necessity of the private sector “as an investor in sustainable agricultural production” and its “major role to play in the transformation towards an inclusive green economy” (ibid.). The AICS also refers to the “experience of Italian SMEs, aggregated in networks and organized with shared services to foster economies of scale [as] a model to export in partner countries to contribute to the growth of their private sector” (AICS 2019i, 2).

In order to cooperate with AICS, for-profit bodies have to adhere to specific standards, some of which are identical to those for nonprofit organizations, but the law also explicitly excludes those working in the armaments industry, who are listed in a separate national registry (Gazzetta Ufficiale 2014, 27; 1990, 3). For-profit companies are entitled to receive resources through a revolving fund, which can be used also to finance joint venture projects in partner countries (Gazzetta Ufficiale 2014, 27). This funding can also be applied to initiatives consistent with general cooperation programming and that follow the ultimate aims of cooperation (AICS 2019e). The CDP development bank also has the capacity to blend aid and credit to leverage private investment and to match funds collected through public funding (Zupi 2015, 31; AICS 2020b).

Finally, AICS makes direct contributions to the private sector through public tenders for development projects in the sectors of industry, services, agriculture, fish, and aquaculture. The latest tender (AICS 2020c, still ongoing) is divided into three parts:

- *Nuove idee “A”* is for business initiatives not yet implemented in partner countries for cooperation;
- *Nuove idee “B”* is for identical financial initiatives but is reserved for start-ups (i.e., companies established up to two years before the tender date);
- *Idee mature* is for business initiatives already applied in one or more countries.

For the admitted countries, the tender makes explicit reference to the DAC List of ODA Recipients published by OECD (2020).

The first such invitation, in 2017, received twenty-five applications (TED 2017; Del Debbio 2018). After the selection process, thirteen projects were chosen and financed with a total sum of 1,556,557.07 euro (AICS 2018d). A 2018 invitation to tender saw forty applications, divided into three categories (projects yet to be implemented, projects yet to be implemented from start-ups, and ongoing projects), and in July 2019, twenty-two projects were approved. Two later withdrew which brought the total sum to 2,312,273.00 euro (AICS 2019h) out of the five million euro initially allocated (AICS 2019f). Apparently, half of the sum was not assigned because a lack of proposals received/approved and because funding is capped for every project (AICS 2019i, 4). The remaining sum will be used for monitoring and setting up the following tender (AICS 2019h).

## Public funding for development

The OECD defines official development assistance (ODA) as “government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries” (OECD 2019a, 1). The MAECI collects data on official assistance from over 130 Italian administrations (ministries, universities, regional and local authorities, as well as the AICS), and reports them to the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) for validation (Esteri 2019a). Military aid and the promotion of the donor country’s security are excluded from such tallies, as are trade measures, such as export credits (OECD 2019a, 1). Once approved, these data are published online by **OpenAID**, a platform set up by the Italian Department for Public Administration with the aim of “[s]trengthening the national consensus on political decisions regarding Italy’s commitment in international cooperation. This consensus must be based on full transparency and accountability of strategies, programs, activities carried out, funds paid and results obtained by Italian Cooperation” (Funzione pubblica 2018). This platform is part of Open Government Partnership, an international initiative with one hundred members, including seventy-eight national governments, “to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to improve governance” (OpenGov 2016).

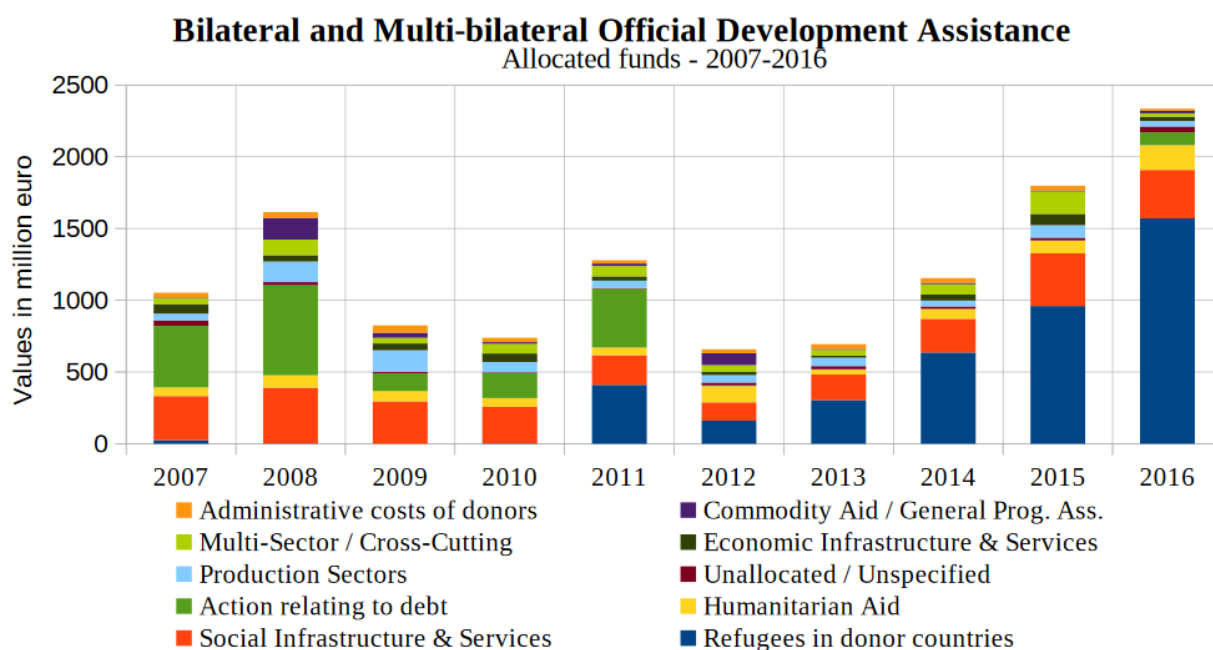


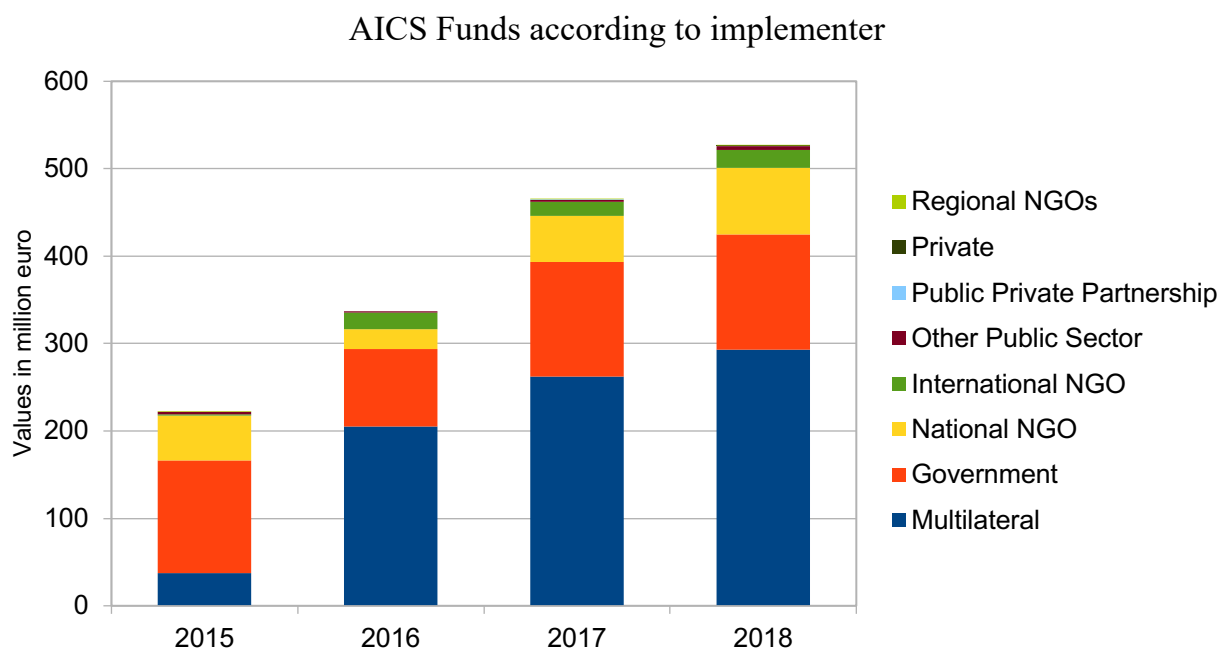
Fig. 2: Bilateral and multi-bilateral official development assistance, Allocated funds, 2007–2016 (elaboration of data taken from OpenAID [2019a])

The graph in figure 2 shows the data from 2007 to 2016 of the funds committed for bilateral and multi-bilateral ODA, which tripled since 2013 (from 694 to 2,334 million euro). However, it is important to note that this vast increase is mainly because the expenses linked to refugees within Italy have increased tenfold (from 160 to 1,570 million euro). In 2016, the expenses linked to refugees counted for 67 percent of the total ODA, virtually all of which had been spent for reception and protection of asylum seekers and refugees (OpenAid, 2019b).



This breakdown does not include Multilateral Official Development Assistance. To clarify, multi-bilateral funding is allocated through an organization to a specific country and project, whereas multilateral funding goes to an institution and the recipient multilateral institution pools contributions so that they lose their identity and become an integral part of its financial assets.<sup>7</sup>

In 2016, multilateral aid was roughly equal to the total amount of bilateral ODA (2,381 million euro). Three-quarters of these funds go to EU institutions, 12 percent to regional development banks, and the remainder to the UN and other international agencies. Overall, total ODA has doubled as a percentage of GNP since 2012, reaching 0.3 percent in 2017 (Openpolis, 2019).



*Fig. 3 AICS funds according to implementer 2015 - 2018 (Elaboration of data from OpenAID, AICS, 2019a)*

The AICS also publishes its own OpenAID data (OpenAid – AICS, 2019a) on a quarterly basis, although at the time of writing, data from 2019 remain provisional. As figure 3 shows, resources allocated to AICS have seen a consistent increase, from 223.1 million euro in 2015 to 607.15 million euro in 2018, primarily due to an increase in funding for multilateral organizations. Funds to NGOs have doubled since 2015, reaching 96.7 million euro in 2018, with the most dramatic growth among international NGOs. Private implementors and public-private partnerships receive a small portion of overall funding (180,000 euro and 1 million euro, respectively).<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the recent reform of nonprofits in Italy has introduced a public fund to finance nonprofit bodies for projects and activities of public interest (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2017: 72). Each year, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies defines the priority areas, broadly informed by the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (Ministero del Lavoro 2018b: 8). In the latest (2018) guidelines, total funding was 61.96 million euro, divided between national projects (23.63 million euro), local projects

<sup>7</sup> For further clarification and data see <http://openaid.esteri.it/en/>.

<sup>8</sup> Figures in this paragraph indicate funds that have been used and not the commitments.

(28 million euro), purchase of ambulances and other vehicles and tools for health activities (7.75 million euro), and specific formerly public charity institutions (2.58 million euro) (Ministero del Lavoro 2018a: 4).

## Private funding for helping, including development

This section considers the role of private funding, from individuals, foundations and companies, to nonprofits in Italy. According to the Italy Giving Report, which makes estimates based on tax declarations, donations from individuals in the 2016 tax year amounted to 5.367 billion euro, an increase of nearly 10 percent from the previous year (Arduini, 2019), compared to 873 million euro from companies (of which 200 million euro came from corporate foundations) (FIS, 2019c: 43). This total is the estimate of the private donations, and this estimate is linked to the tax rebates asked in the tax declaration: in short, people and companies get a discount in taxes paid based on how much they donate (as explained in earlier sections). This official data is then used to estimate the overall donations, trying to include those donations for which the donor does not or cannot ask for any tax rebate. It should be clear that the "estimates based on tax declarations" are based on the concept above and that the donation through taxation (*otto per mille* etc.) is another type of donation and is not included in this estimate.

Overall, funds for nonprofit organizations saw an increase over previous years' fund-raising, while funds for religious organizations remained stable, and funds for NGOs fell (Arduini, 2019).

## Donation through taxation

Each person subject to direct revenue taxation in Italy can choose to allocate part of the tax amount due to a specific association or body. The main difference from an ordinary donation is that the taxpayer does not have to disburse any extra sum above their tax obligation. There are three different types of such optional donations.

The *otto per mille* provision was introduced in 1985, following an agreement between the Holy See and the Italian government. As the title of the 1985 law indicates ("Provisions on ecclesiastic organizations and properties in Italy and on the support of Catholic clergy at the service of the dioceses"), originally this measure was limited to the Catholic Church, with the aim of giving a salary to its ministers. These salaries were meant to replace a previous wage integration under the 1929 Lateran Pact. Since then, the *otto per mille* has been gradually extended to other religious bodies, with twelve currently eligible (Governo, 2019). The scheme allows the taxpayer to assign 0.8 percent (in Italian *otto per mille*, or 8 per thousand) of the total taxes paid by all taxpayers nationally to a religious organization of their choosing. Each individual choice contributes equally to the final allocation of the *otto per mille* funds. This choice is not compulsory and 55–60 percent of tax declarations do not contain any indication, but the taxes paid by individuals who do not choose an *otto per mille* option still contribute to calculating the overall 0.8 percent to be donated (MEF, 2019). The latest data, for fiscal year, 2014, are shown below:

Beneficiary	Amount (in euro)
Catholic Church	997,725,597

Government	175,632,294
Waldensian and Methodist Protestant churches	32,683,533
Italian Buddhist Union	8,789,890
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy	4,456,845
Union of Italian Jewish Communities	3,961,640
Orthodox Archdiocese	1,733,218
Union of Seventh-day Adventist Church	1,609,416
Assemblies of God in Italy	1,254,577
Italian Hinduist Union	1,238,013
Union of Christ Evangelical Baptist Church	990,410
Apostolic Church	272,734
Italian Buddhist Institute Soka Gakkai (IBISG) <sup>9</sup>	No data available

This fact that taxes paid by those who do not select an otto per mille option are still used for the overall funding of the Catholic Church is a source of considerable controversy, as is the fact that the scheme has increased the government contribution to the Catholic Church as compared to the direct subsidy it replaced. A further point of controversy regards the use of the funds, as religious bodies often advertise their charitable initiatives but in fact spend the otto per mille allocation on operational expenses and income for clergy, though some denominations clearly state that the resources will be solely used to help the people in need, either directly or through affiliated nonprofit organizations (UAAR, 2020). In addition to lack of state controls on the use of the funds allocated, critics also point to irregularities in the information about otto per mille choices forwarded by the tax support centers to the public authorities (Corte dei Conti, 2018: 19, 26). Italy's Court of Audit has been calling for a reform of the scheme since 1996, to no avail (Corte dei Conti, 2018: 25-26).

A second donation scheme introduced in 2006, *cinque per mille*, or five per thousand, allows the taxpayer to choose how a portion of their own tax obligation should be spent by selecting a beneficiary from among nonprofits, scientific and health research institutes, universities, the social activities of city councils, amateur sport associations, and entities safeguarding natural heritage and protected areas (Ministero dei Lavoro, 2019a). Unlike the otto per mille, the amount each taxpayer can allocate is linked to their own taxes paid rather than to a percentage of total national collection. In the 2017 tax year, 16.5 million taxpayers assigned 0.5 percent of their tax money to one of the broad areas mentioned above, and 14.1 million indicated a specific organization (De Carli, 2019a). The actual sum taxpayers allocated was over 500 million euro, but it had been reduced to the maximum budgeted threshold of 495 million euro (De Carli, 2019b). The most popular nonprofit organizations for this scheme in 2017 were AIRC, which promotes research on cancer, followed by Emergency, a humanitarian health NGO (Gianotti, 2019). Overall, nonprofit organizations received the largest portion of the funds (334.4 million euro), followed by scientific and health research centers (63.6 and 66.8 million euro, respectively), municipal social initiatives (15 million euro), amateur sport associations (13.7 million euro), and pro-heritage organizations (1.6 million euro).

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<sup>9</sup> The total amount declared on the source – 1,230,348,167 euro – slightly differs from the sum of the data here above. The Italian Buddhist Institute will start receiving funds starting from tax year 2017.

A third provision, the *due per mille*, allows taxpayers to designate how 0.2 percent of total national taxation will be disbursed among registered political parties. For fiscal year 2017, only 2.67 percent of contributors made this choice, for a total amount of around 14 million euro (Ministero dei Finanze, 2019). A similar, short-lived initiative in 2016 allowed another 0.2 percent to be allocated to cultural associations.

## Other individual donations

There are several ways for individuals to contribute to nonprofit organizations, the simplest of which is direct donations. As in other OECD countries, these sums can be deducted from the taxable income (up to 10 percent of the taxable income), or taken as a tax rebate (currently 30 percent of the sum for maximum of 30,000 euro, or 35 percent for organizations staffed exclusively by volunteers). Another common means of donating to nonprofit organizations is through text messages or phone calls to dedicated, premium priced numbers, which charge between one and two euro for text messages and between two and ten euro for landline calls (Codice 2017: 17) and are promoted through TV and radio campaigns. Recognized nonprofit organizations can apply for a premium number linked to a specific project (Codice, 2017: 15). At least two phone numbers are always available for the Civil Protection, the government department responsible for disaster relief, in case of major catastrophes (Codice, 2017: 9-10). In 2018, TIM, one of the country's largest phone companies, collected 11.3 million euro from their customers (80 percent from landlines) through 128 fund-raising projects (65 percent in Italy, 35 percent abroad ). Vodafone Italia reported a similar sum of 10.5 million euro in fiscal year 2016–17 (Vodafone, 2017: 57), while Wind/Tre collected 3.5 million euro in 2017 (WindTre, 2019). While the funds are collected by the phone companies, all three companies commit to devolve the whole of the funds collected to the nonprofit organizations.

## Institutional philanthropy

Institutional philanthropy is understood as comprising foundations, corporate funders and other players that 1) have their own financial resources which they deploy strategically, 2) are independently governed, and 3) use private resources for public good. These organizations, which are in myriad forms, are purposefully structured and organized over the long term and bound by structures of accountability, public benefit and public reporting and legal requirements (EFC, 2016: 3). In Italy, there are three principal types of institutional philanthropy (Italianonprofit, 2019b).

**Banking foundations** are independent, not-for-profit, private bodies created during the privatization of savings banks. This type of bank was established in the nineteenth century, either by public bodies or by citizens through subscriptions, with explicit solidarity goals. As part of their privatization in the 1990s, the banking functions were split from the solidarity and philanthropic activities, creating this type of foundation (ACRI, 2019a). Their role is to promote the development of the areas where they are located, as well as of the whole country, by giving resources to nonprofit organizations or local authorities, as well as through investments. As of 2019, there are eighty-eight banking foundations with total book equities of 39.75 billion euro (ACRI 2018a: 25) and total revenues of 2.08 billion euro (ACRI 2018a: 35). In 2017, these foundations distributed 984.6 million euro in twenty-one “permitted areas,” or issue areas defined by law (ACRI 2018a: 42, 103). These funds were concentrated in the following main areas:

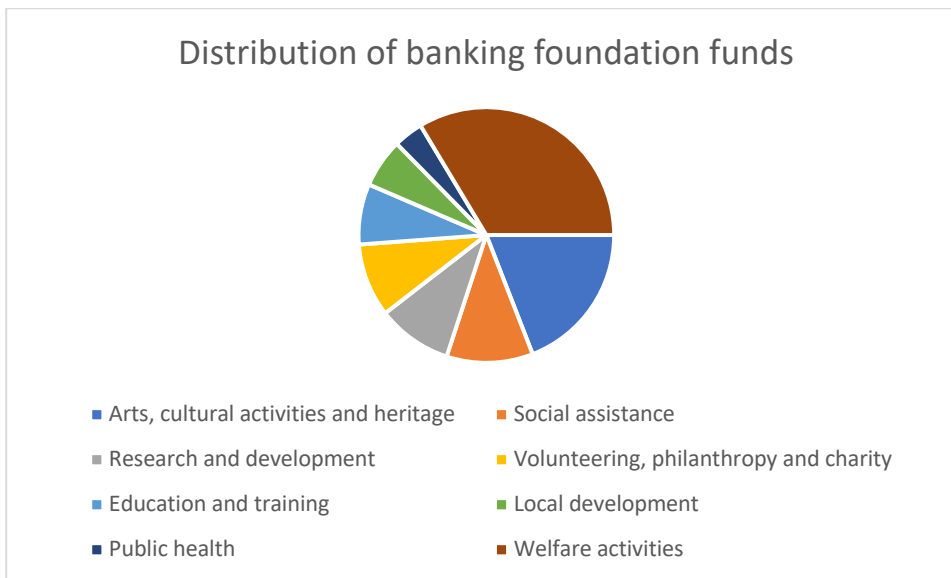


Figure 4: Distribution of Banking Foundation Funds from ACRI 2018a: 42, 103

**Community foundations**, born out of a model developed in the United States in the early 1900s, were introduced in Italy in 1999 (ASSIFERO, 2017: 15). Community foundations are mediators for philanthropic activities, acting as reference points for legacies, wills, and other forms of private charity in specific areas. Their aim is to improve the quality of life of their community. There are thirty-seven such foundations in Italy, twenty-seven of them founded by other foundations (Italianonprofit, 2019a). In a 2017 questionnaire, twenty-one respondent foundations, as well as two self-described “hybrid” private-community foundations, reported total equities of 191.7 million euro and 224.4 million euro funds disbursed since the foundations were established (ASSIFERO, 2017: 35-6). Their principal fields of action are poverty eradication, education and training, personal services, heritage, unemployment, and local development. The beneficiaries of these foundations are mainly young people, disabled people, the elderly, refugees and immigrants, and women (ASSIFERO, 2017: 34).

The third category, **company and family foundations**, are difficult to count in Italy, though there are estimated to be more than 150. **Company foundations** are set up by companies or groups of companies to promote their own social responsibility. **Family foundations** manage family wealth to be used also for solidarity or social initiatives (Italianonprofit, 2019c). These types of foundations can act by granting resources or by implementing social projects directly. A peculiar case within this category is *Fondazione Italia Sociale* (FIS), a private law foundation created within the context of the recent nonprofit reform. FIS aims at creating a fund, through donations from both companies and citizens, to support the social well-being and social equality in Italy. FIS will finance medium and long-term social projects, which should then become self-supporting, as well as make grants to cultural projects and promote philanthropy. To this end, it has created three separate funds for non-refundable grants, investments in social enterprises, and the management of third-party philanthropic funds. According to its statute, the majority of its funds must come from private donors (FIS, 2019a), and only two years into its operations, its current budget totals 700,000 euro (FIS, 2019b).

## Private funding from companies

Separate from company foundations, companies can make direct donations to recognized NGOs, which are deductible from corporate tax liability up to 10 percent of the total, with no absolute upper threshold (Italianonprofit, 2019d). Companies can also donate goods, such as food, medicines, and personal care items, including goods that are unsuitable for sale because of minor flaws (e.g., in the packaging) but still suitable for use or consumption. Companies are exempt from VAT charges on such donated products (Normattiva, 2019: 16).

Other common ways for companies to support nonprofit organizations include schemes that allow individuals to donate with the company as facilitator, such as loyalty cards, wedding and Christmas gifts and employee fundraisers. In some such cases, the company can still derive a tax benefit from the donation. It also includes direct donations of the company's own funds through sponsorships and co-marketing or "brand aid" campaigns. Some nonprofit organizations (see for example Emergency, 2018) have a public ethics code, excluding collaboration with specific industries or with companies not following ethical behaviors.

In 2017, AICS commissioned a study of 146 companies and 42 business associations, universities, and local authorities. It found that 48 percent of companies declared some ongoing charity activities, principally in response to the then-recent earthquakes in central Italy (De-Lab, 2017). For 61 percent of the companies, however, these activities are not part of a strategic corporate philanthropy but instead reflect responses to emergencies and personal choices by company owners (*ibid*: 16). Only 19 percent of the responding companies—mainly the largest ones—have adopted social guidelines (*ibid*.:17). Not more than 8 percent of Italian companies have adopted inclusive business practices (*ibid*.:18) to proactively "contribute to human development by including the poor in the value chain as consumers, producers, business owners or employees" (GIM, 2019), but 41 percent of them reported interest in developing such practices. Those companies most inclined to develop such practices have a strong international vocation and are concentrated in the green economy and ICT sectors (De-Lab, 2017: 19). Companies interested in "inclusive" or development-focused business practices emphasized the possibility of co-financing with the AICS (48 percent) and tax benefits (23 percent) as incentives for doing so (*ibid*.: 23). The report concludes that the for-profit sector is interested in inclusive business initiatives, although its meaning and implications are not clear, especially as the sample size reflects a small percentage of those companies targeted

## Conclusions

Charting the institutional context for commodity-based giving in Italy leads us to the following conclusions. First, the interface for "helping" between government legislation, state bodies, for-profit organizations, nonprofit organizations, the church, and individuals is rapidly changing, unevenly distributed, and sometimes quite opaque. Often, humanitarian helping for refugees abroad is confused with support (or not) for refugees in Italy. It seems that both the discursive understandings, public opinions, and actual funding is commonly mixed between humanitarian support and a positive disposition toward refugees. Second, corporations have always been part of the Italian development cooperation system as providers of services, funders of charity foundations, and participants in increasingly popular "profit + non-profit" partnerships. Third, the roles played by individuals as consumers, citizens and/or business owners in financing humanitarian helping are multiple. Notably,

Italy is unique for its two systems of personal allocation of tax monies to chosen religious organizations (overwhelming for the Catholic Church) known as *otto per mille* or to the nonprofits of their choice *cinque per mille* (where top recipients are cancer charity *AIRC* and international humanitarian organization *Emergency*). Finally, it is interesting that Italy requires nonprofit organizations to be at least minimally privatized (receiving a minimum of 5 percent of their income from private sources) in order to be eligible to apply for public grants, tenders, and collaborations. This institutional framework shapes the environment for how “helping” is perceived, essentially as private. Thus, it is not surprising that the most contemporary data suggest that now in Italy, nonprofits and corporations are forming “hybrid” organizations to tackle global challenges and to support vulnerable persons and marginalized communities (de Marchi and Martinez 2020, 6). Businesses, expected to demonstrate their “purpose,” partner with nonprofits who can provide them with useful causes. This overall context provides fertile ground for brand aid–style partnerships and other forms of commodifying compassion.

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## **Appendix 1: List of Acronyms**

**AICS:** Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo)  
**CDP:** Cassa Depositi e Prestiti, a financial institution  
**CICS:** Interministry Committee for development cooperation (Comitato interministeriale per la cooperazione allo sviluppo)  
**CIPES:** Comitato Interministeriale per la Politica economica Estera  
**CNTS:** National Council for Development Cooperation  
**DAC:** Development Assistance Committee  
**DC:** Christian Democratic Party  
**FAI:** The Italian Aid Fund  
**FIS:** Fondazione Italia Sociale  
**GNI:** Gross National Income  
**HIPC:** (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries)  
**ICT:** Information and Communications Technology  
**MAECI:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale)  
**ODA:** Official Development Assistance  
**OSC:** Civil society organizations (Organizzazioni della società civile)  
**PCI:** Italian Communist Party  
**ETS:** Non-profit organizations (Enti del Terzo Settore)

## **Appendix 2: Thematic and geographic areas of Italian intervention**

Italy's development cooperation objectives are defined in its annual three-year program document. The current plan, approved on January 19, 2018, makes explicit reference to international development policy objectives, including the 2030 Agenda (:16), its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals and associated targets, as well as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (:20) and the decisions taken in recent G7 and G20 summits (:21). The plan sets out policy areas of intervention as priorities for Italy, as well as geographic areas of priority as potential recipients of intervention. This section summarizes these policy areas.

### **Areas of intervention**

The three-year program lists the following policy areas as priorities: humanitarian aid, migration and development, agriculture and food security, environment, energy, health, education, global citizen education, culture and creative industries, justice, and debt relief.

**Humanitarian aid** comprises emergency relief in case of catastrophic events, both natural and man-made. This includes contributions to international appeals from UN agencies and the Red Cross as well as contributions to bilateral relief funds (AICS, 2017: 24). It also includes interventions around recovery, rehabilitation, and peace-building, where social, economic, and security conditions are restored through shared initiatives with the recipient country (AICS, 2017 :24) and humanitarian

interventions can be extended for longer than twelve months, beyond the scope of immediate emergency (AICS, 2018b: 12). In the most recent policy plan, there is also a stress on fostering resilience: “the ability of local communities to prevent and manage emergencies, thus reducing their dependence on external support” (AICS, 2018b: 12). In these types of interventions, NGOs and OSCs can join with government, including with the specialized department for disaster relief.

**Migration and development** has recently moved up in Italy’s policy plans to become the second priority. The aim of such interventions is “sustainable migration,” which goes beyond the short-term emergency and aims to transform migration into a source of economic and social growth both in originating and in destination countries. To promote this goal, the policy plan calls for investments in a stronger welfare system and in cultural and commercial exchanges involving migrant communities in Italy, and strengthened protections for minors who have been abandoned in transit. A number of the proposed policies also emphasize the relationship between migration and the labor market (AICS, 2018: 13). These include calls for a more efficient labor market which discourages illegal immigration and provides for more effective matching with the labor market of the destination country; information campaigns illustrating the dangers of illegal migration, specifically for unaccompanied minors, in particular the risks of slavery and human trafficking; skills training for young people to match labor market needs; programs to facilitate circular migration, “the regular or recurrent flow of migrants from their homelands to a foreign country and back again” (ICID-AICS, 2017: 41); and support for voluntary repatriation. These interventions target both originating and transit countries, as well as nearby countries in the regions where the largest migrant flows come from (AICS, 2018b: 14-15). A number of countries targeted are part of the Fund for Africa, an initiative set up in 2017 with 200 million euro to “relaunch dialogue with those countries in Africa with an important role in migration routes” (AICS, 2018b: 13), which pursues many of the same policy goals as the broader development agenda but also funds equipment and tools to control and prevent migration and to fight against human trafficking (AICS, 2018b: 14).

The third priority area is **agriculture and food security**, with interventions focused on the dissemination of sustainable techniques in cultivation, transformation and consumption, the increase of margins, the support of cooperation among small producers - in particular in the stages of transformation, sale and distribution—and improvement of the role of women in the supply chain (AICS, 2017: 37-38). There is an emphasis in this area on the role of private organizations and companies, both nonprofit and for-profit (AICS, 2017 :37-9), including the multinational **Global Donor Platform for Rural Development**, where AICS is a board member (AICS, 2018b: 15).

**Environment**, the fourth policy area, draws heavily on the 2030 Agenda and other international conferences on environment, emphasizing the goals of carbon neutrality through reforestation, the modernization of urban areas, the safeguard of protected zones, and a sustainable management of fishing (AICS, 2017: 40-41). Italy has fishing agreements with several smaller islands in the Pacific, as well as in the Caribbean, the Comoros and the Maldives, with projects underway for rural electrification of less-developed small islands. These projects are considered synergistic with the protection of fishing resources because they should strengthen the capability of local communities to withstand climate changes (AICS, 2018b: 16). For-profit actors, in fields such as energy, transport, industrial production, and urban management, are highlighted for their role in the transfer of technology (AICS, 2017: 40). Finally, Italy has established a center in Rome to facilitate the voluntary exchange of information on activities supporting African countries on climate change and energy efficiency (AICS, 2018b: 16).

**Energy** is set out as a separate policy area from environment, with Italian policy focused on four areas: the use of sustainable technologies customized to local needs, the creation of locally rooted and income-generating energy production activities, the support for **policies** which facilitate modernization, and the development of local managerial and technical skills, including research (AICS, 2017: 42-3). These goals have both direct effects on the environment and health and indirect effects on job-creation and local capacity. The target regions for these projects are all in Africa, in areas where the largest Italian companies already have longstanding operations and where they have been cooperating with civil society organizations (AICS, 2018b: 18). Among the energy-related companies operating in this area are Saipem (oil infrastructures), Eni (oil), Enel (electrical power), and Salini Impregilo (construction and civil engineering). As part of these efforts, a specialized working group (*Piattaforma Nazionale Multi-attori per l'Energia e lo Sviluppo*) has been set up with representatives from the public, private, nonprofit, and academic worlds to draw up specific guidelines in this field (AICS, 2018f).

**Health** interventions, a sixth policy area, focus on improving healthcare systems, access to health services both in urban and in rural areas, and maternal and infant health (AICS, 2018b: 18-19). This reflects a global interest in early childhood development, but the Italian approach notably includes fighting against maternal depression and domestic violence in addition to nutritional interventions (AICS, 2018b: 18-19). Other interventions include combatting transmissible and nontransmissible chronic diseases, with a focus on promoting prevention programs as well as training, with a particular stress on counterfeited medicines. (AICS, 2018b:18-19). Finally, there are specific actions linked to mental health, with community-based services and rehabilitation initiatives, drawing on Italian expertise as one of the first countries to deinstitutionalize mental health treatment and focus on reintegration of patients into society and economy. The three-year program draws particular attention to a successful program recently trialled in Egypt (AICS, 2018b: 19).

**Education** interventions focus on “early scholarization,” from preschool to post-university (AICS, 2018b: 21), with an emphasis on personal and community education beyond the classroom to promote social inclusion, democratization, peace-building, and resilience in response to humanitarian catastrophes. Particular attention is given to girls, female teenagers, disabled people, and minorities. These programs draw on, and reference, learning methodologies developed in Italy—such as Montessori education—which focus on the child, their needs, and the environment where they live (AICS, 2018b: 21). A further stream of interventions promotes training and cooperation among universities with a working group on vocational, secondary, and university education at the interministerial committee (CICS). Finally, a separate policy goal promotes **global citizenship education** for students both in Italy and abroad, on skills and know-how for sustainable development, through the promotion of sustainable lifestyles, human rights, nonviolence, and the appreciation of cultural diversities.

The policy-planning documents also emphasize the role of **culture and the creative industries**. This echoes the view of international development practitioners who have described culture as

a [potential] driver of sustainable development, which contributes to a strong and viable economic sector by generating income, creating decent jobs and addressing both the economic and social dimensions of poverty through cultural heritage and cultural and

creative industries, while providing innovative and effective solutions to cross-cutting issues, such as education, health, gender equality and the environment (UN, 2015c: 3).

In the New European Agenda for Culture, the European Parliament similarly “stresses that culture is an engine for sustainable development and intercultural dialogue” (European Parliament, 2018: 22). The European Parliament notes, however, that its safeguard and promotion has not been included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Italian policy, drawing on these international documents, is focused on supporting cultural and creative industries, the transfer of know-how, the dissemination of new technologies, the protection of cultural heritage, and the promotion of responsible, environmentally friendly tourism (AICS, 2018b: 22).

A tenth policy area covers interventions in **justice** that support judicial systems so that they are—“and are perceived as”—impartial, accessible, and fair (AICS, 2018b: 23). Action plans in this area focus on the harmonization of national law in target countries with international standards, and support for social protection schemes for the crime prevention and rehabilitation among juvenile offenders.

The final policy area covered is **debt relief**. As part of an international aid scheme of 400 million dollars for countries in the Middle East coping with assistance to Syrian refugees, Italy has pledged debt swap agreements with Jordan and Lebanon for a total sum of 50 million dollars between 2016 and 2018, with debt swaps planned between 2017 and 2019 (AICS, 2018b: 23). While negotiations with Syria have been put on hold, other swaps are ongoing, including with Indonesia (about 6 million euro) and Djibouti (14 million euro), with talks underway regarding an agreement with Zimbabwe. In 2016, Italy was part of international debt swap agreements with Albania (20 million euro), Cuba (13 million euro), and Tunisia (25 million euro). A further action is debt cancellation, as part of the HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) initiative launched in 1996. This includes a current agreement with Chad, while other countries, including Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea, sought but did not fulfill the conditions to access this initiative (AICS, 2018b: 24). In addition to these international agreements, Italy has bilaterally agreed cancel 228 million euro of trade credits and 5 million euro in loans, as well as an extra 88 million euro credits which were due to a subsidiary of the development bank CDP.

## Countries and regions

Italy’s overseas development interventions mentioned above cover a specific set of countries listed in the three-year planning document for 2016 to 2018 (AICS, 2017: 47-55) and confirmed in the latest planning document for 2017 to 2019 (AICS, 2018b). Figure 1 maps the countries targeted for Italian foreign aid.

The priority countries have been chosen taking into account the cultural and historical relations and proximity between Italy and the target country, including political and trade links; the potential for growth and development, with particular attention to fragile, least-advanced countries and those recovering from conflicts; existing commitments taken on a multinational or international level; and urgent humanitarian and political crises, including migration.