

The enhancement of school gyms to combat the social exclusion of minors.

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Introduction

In 2022, Istat presented the tenth edition of the Report on Equitable and Sustainable Wellbeing (BES), which analyzes in detail the trend over time and the comparison with the pre-pandemic period of the various indicators in 12 areas in which people's "well-being" is articulated, including Sport and physical activity. Therefore, the share of sedentary minors, who do not practice any sport or physical activity in their free time, is still high. This phenomenon could be affected by the enhancement of school gyms to reduce obstacles related to cost.

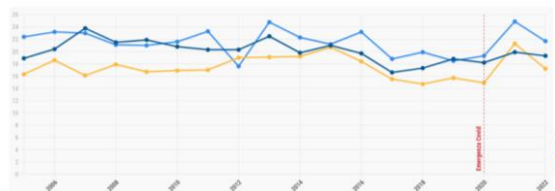
Objectives

In this work, the variables related to the sedentary lifestyle of pupils are analyzed based on Istat data from 2022, distinguished by age groups and family income disparities, and including the impact of the pandemic.

In fact, between 2019 and 2021, the incidence of minors who do not play sports grew from 18.5% to 24.9% between 6 and 10 years old, and from 15.7% to 21.3% between 11 and 14 years old. It is more stable among 15–17-year-olds, where it has nevertheless grown from 18.8% to 19.9%.

At the end of the pandemic, the share of sedentary people among minors began to decline. Except for children between 3 and 5 years old, who in one out of two cases do not participate in sports, the decline is visible in all other age groups. Sedentary people drop to 21.7% between 6 and 10 years old, 17.2% between 11 and 14, 19.3% between 15 and 17. However, even after the end of the pandemic, the share of children and young people who do not participate in sports remains close to one in five cases (Fig. 1).

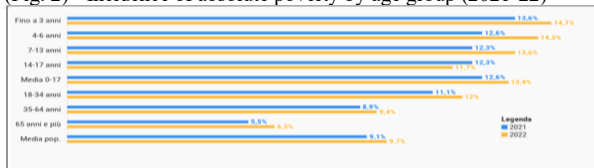
(Fig. 1) - Percentage of minors in each age group who do not practice any sport or physical activity (2005-2022).



Source: Istat, 2022.

In addition, Istat data from 2023 confirm that those living in absolute poverty, i.e. in a family that cannot afford all the goods and services that, in the Italian context, are considered essential to maintain a minimally acceptable standard of living, are children between 0 and 3 years old, who reach the maximum incidence: 14.7% of the youngest children live in absolute poverty (Fig. 2). The share also exceeds 14% between the ages of 4 and 6 (14.3%) and is slightly lower in the following one (13.6% between the ages of 7 and 13). Adolescents between 14 and 17 years old are also above average (11.7%).

(Fig. 2) - Incidence of absolute poverty by age group (2021-22)

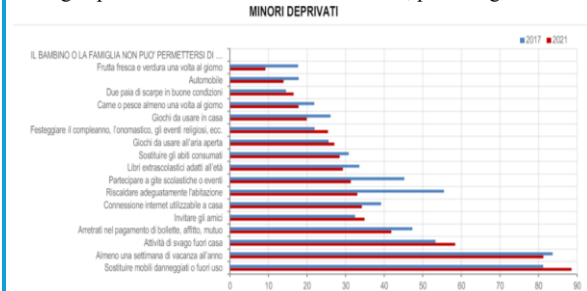


Source: Istat, 2023.

The impossibility of being able to afford a paid leisure activity outside the home is one of the items of child deprivation most frequently mentioned in the answers to questionnaires on the living conditions of families. It is indicated for almost one in 10 minors (9.1%); among those in deprivation, it was as high as 60% in 2021 (58.4%). In both cases, with values up compared to the previous pre-pandemic survey, in 2017 (Fig. 3).

In fact, one of the first aspects compromised for children who live in disadvantaged families is the possibility of practicing sports during the use of free time.

(Fig. 3) – Children and young people under 16 years of age by condition of material and social deprivation and items of deprivation among deprived minors. Years 2017 and 2021, percentages.

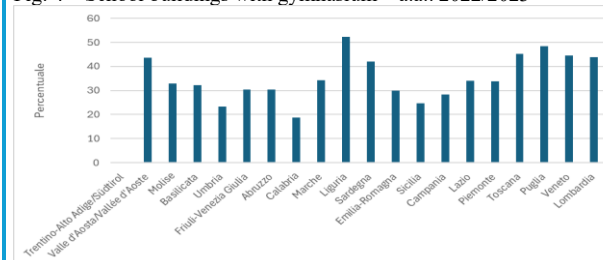


Source: Istat, 2023.

The lack of access to sports activities for economic reasons could be solved through the optimization of school gyms outside school hours.

During the 2022/23 school year, a gym is available in 35.8% of school buildings in Italy. A share that exceeds 40% in the north-west (41.3%) and is a few points from this threshold in the north-east (37%) and in central Italy (36.7%). On the other hand, the South lags in terms of sports facilities in schools. In the southern mainland, 31.7% of buildings have gymnasiums, in the islands 30.1%. Among the regions, however, after Liguria (52.4%), it is Puglia that shows the most widespread presence (48.4%), followed by Tuscany, Veneto and Lombardy (about 44-45%). At the bottom of the list, with less than one in 4 buildings equipped with a gym, are Sicily (24.6%), Umbria (23.3%) and Calabria (less than 20%). Data are not available for Trentino (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4 – School buildings with gymnasium – a.a. 2022/2023



Source: Ministry of Education, 2023.

Results

In this context, the fight against child educational poverty using school sports facilities at controlled prices and agreed with local authorities, can be considered as an investment in the demographic and economic future of the country.

