



Round table, Bruxelles 7- 11- 2023

Barbara Rosina, President of the National Council of Social Workers Italy

How does your organization influence the political debate in Italy, supporting the importance of social policies and the well-being of the workforce in social services?

The National Council of Social Workers (CNOAS) represents over 47 thousand professionals, subdivided by field of practice, who daily deal with increasingly complex situations of fragility and vulnerability: disability, chronicity, addictions, mental health, protection of minors and support for their families to the point of deviance and poverty, not only economic but also cultural, educational and relational, and should promote preventive actions to interrupt unfavorable intergenerational transmissions.

There are 47,358 registered social workers in Italy, half are under 44 years old, 93% are women.

The sectors in which social workers are most present, data as of 5.11.2023, are: local authorities 12,754, cooperatives 8,779, healthcare 6,508 (average age over 50 years), ministry of justice 1,480, freelance profession 1,066.

The profession is practiced both as an employee and as a freelancer, in the entire and complex system of health, socio-health and social services – public, third sector and private.

All the sectors where the profession is currently practiced have been affected by the pandemic. The pandemic has shown the structural limits of a socio-health integration that has never truly been achieved, our contribution to the public and political debate is aimed at not reducing the social component to a marginal role since continuity of care and home care cannot be secondary in interventions such as those that concern elderly people, those with disabilities, chronic diseases or poor prognosis. Investments and budget cuts made in recent decades. Even if, in recent years, significant signs of a trend reversal have been highlighted, the need to invest in preventive interventions and not just in remedial actions on compromised situations remains.

CNOAS is present in multiple working groups and observatories on specific issues on the reforms underway in our country, also linked to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, made up of competent Ministries and institutional bodies at national level.

The areas in which CNOAS implements constant interventions to try to influence the political debate in Italy, supporting the importance of social policies and the well-being of the workforce in social services through meetings with politicians, reporting of possible amendments to the rules, conferences and events on different themes are those linked to:

- Income support and reinforcement of local social services
Cnoas has always expressed its support for a minimum income scheme and participates in the "Alliance against poverty", a network of subjects that at a national level proposes topics, data and indications to the institutional political level. We have contributed to the debate and the definition of the rules on the "Inclusion Income" and so for the "Citizenship



Income”, pointing out how the intervention to combat poverty must combine the economic measure with accompanying paths that are as early and close as possible. In our opinion, the privileged place for understanding and “Integration between the healthcare system and the social service and reform of local healthcare charge” of complex situations must be the Municipality.

- Integration between the healthcare system and the social service and reform of local healthcare

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Elderly non-self-sufficiency, reform of interventions for disability

It is not possible to focus only on domiciliary care as a dogma and on allowances as an adequate solution to all needs. For non-self-sufficiency and disabilities, it is necessary to reorganize the network of residential services, making up for the delay in defining forms of residential care, which were stuck twenty-five years ago, with attention to social changes and contemporary life models. It is not possible to focus only on domiciliary care as a dogma and on allowances as an adequate solution to all needs. For non-self-sufficiency and disabilities, it is necessary to reorganize the network of residential services, making up for the delay in defining it is also necessary to address the issue of family care givers, a central aspect of the assistance and support system for non-self-sufficient people and requires dedicated forms of support, which do not reduce the resources allocated to direct services to the person who needs support at home. Also on this topic, CNOAS is among a network of subjects, the “Non-self-sufficiency network”, which at a national level proposes topics, data, indications at the institutional political level and participates in ministerial working groups.

Justice and probation reform

The attention of the National Council was focused on the organic and systemic reform of sentences in lieu of short prison sentences which goes in the direction of restorative justice and the strengthening of external criminal enforcement services for minors and adults. Delicate implementation processes because they are connected to principles such as justice, dignity and individual freedom. Even more sensitive are the reforms concerning the Juvenile Courts and family law, involving the weakest individuals and family relationships.

Child Guarantee and essential levels for minors



Health and disability problems or the migration path are some of the factors leading to the greatest risk of poverty and social exclusion of minors as well as school dropout. These critical issues require targeted interventions in favor of minors not separated from family support actions. These interventions can only be integrated and our intervention was aimed at calling the Ministries involved to national indications that fall on the territories with investments that must aim at preventive and early interventions with respect to risk factors, through forms of support for families to prevent protection responses outside the family as much as possible.

Essential level professional supervision

The essential level of social benefits which makes the supervision of social services staff mandatory is placed within the national framework of strengthening the overall system of response to social needs and is an essential level transversal to all those envisaged and defined by the National Social Plan, in order both to identify the best responses to the needs of the population and to prevent and combat burn-out phenomena. CNOAS and the National Foundation for Social Workers provide technical assistance for the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies in order to guarantee supervision of social workers in all territories. We highlight the need to extend mandatory professional supervision to all areas of practice of the profession.

In which areas of the country is the demand for social services more pronounced and for what main reasons? Furthermore, how is your organization actively contributing to the provision of professional training for social workers, their recruitment and retention?

The ratio of residents/social workers is established by law at 1/5000, the 2021 Budget law calls for a ratio of 1/4000, but there are areas where the ratio drops to one to 3000 and others where it rises to one to 15000/20000 (mountain areas or regions such as Calabria and Campania). It is a fragmented and often under-funded or poorly structured system which risks, if the development process started in recent years were interrupted, reducing the capacity to respond in the face of the evident socio-economic crisis underway. The need to best plan the professional resources necessary to guarantee the essential levels and the implementation of the numerous socio-health reforms require an urgent and timely update of the Register of Social Workers. In this sense, in fact, particular critical issues have been reported in some Regions for the procurement of these fundamental professional resources in the local Welfare system and the National Health Service and, therefore, it is necessary to have a correct and detailed information base to plan training and any interventions regulatory. The strong territorial mobility due to the unblocking of hiring and new investments makes it necessary, also to guarantee the necessary protection for citizens and institutions, the obligation to update the professional residence and to introduce a special list for retired professionals. The National Council of Social Workers has for years supported the need for a reform of the three-year and master's degree courses of universities in Italy, while requiring the offer of post-graduate specialization courses to allow professionals to develop specific skills necessary to face challenges complex in social care. In Italy, continuous training is mandatory for all social workers. Failure to comply with the obligation leads to disciplinary sanctions which can also lead to suspension from professional practice. The National Council of the Order of Social



Workers, the 20 regional Councils of the Order and the National Foundation, in addition to dealing with technical assistance for the supervision and prevention of burn out, offer free training courses annually to all Social Workers, with particular reference to ethical aspects.

What is the current status in Italy of the recognition of Social Services as a distinct discipline and recognized profession, with particular attention to progress towards the promulgation of national professional legislation?

The current regulation of the profession – L. 23 March 1993, n. 84 – outlines the profile of the social worker in terms of his technical-professional autonomy, the areas of intervention, the methods of professional exercise and the articulation of his functions, starting from work with people and communities, up to those coordination and direction. Furthermore, the rules refer to the possibility of carrying out teaching and training activities. This regulatory system is anchored to an idea of the profession and, above all, of society that is anachronistic and – certainly – no longer current and not in line with the international definition of social work (International Federation of Social Workers, IFSW, 2014). The current social crisis, the fragility of the service system and the presence of increasingly complex needs requires, on the one hand, a decisive intervention on the structure of social policies and, on the other, the rethinking of the structure of training paths and access to social worker profession. We believe that, in the face of a strategic and not necessarily economic investment, the results in the medium term in terms of quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions would be decisive. We have reported on several occasions – hearings, documents, research – that the current structure of the training of Italian social workers is still far from European and international standards.

In the surveys that the National Council of Social Workers carries out periodically to monitor the university educational offer of the study courses, there are numerous critical issues on which we are trying to intervene since in its current form, the Italian curriculum does not comply with the standards approved by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), 2020 and does not comply with the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on Social Work adopted on 17 January 2001. The preparation of graduates in social work is generalist: although they may be able to handle the majority of conditions of fragility, they require specialization courses on particularly sensitive and complex topics such as the protection of minors and families, non-self-sufficiency, the administration of justice, social-health integration, mental health. For almost 20 years, the National Council of Social Workers has been asking for a review of university courses, an investment in social service research and, therefore, a different and coherent organization of the Order itself through investment in doctorates (currently only two in total Italy); investment in research and development of departments or at least of specific competitive sectors (currently throughout Italy there is one full professor registered with the Order and less than twenty permanent professors).



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