

COVID-19 and the Unadorned Italian Experience: Flora Sapio Reports from the Field

Coalition for Peace & Ethics

Prepared by Larry Catá Backer

30 March 2020

1. How many COVID-19 cases have been recorded in Italy?

Today, 30 March 2020, the [official figures released by the Civil Defence Department](#) are as follows:

- 101.739 since the start of the epidemics, counting in those who died (may they rest in peace) and those who have recovered
- 75.528 positives
- 11.591 dead
- 14.620 recovered
- 27.795 hospitalized
- 3.981 in intensive care units
- 43.752 in fiduciary home isolation

The majority of cases are in the regions of Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, and Piedmont. COVID-19 cases exist in each one of the regions of Italy.

2. How has Italy reacted to the COVID-19 crisis?

Even though on December 31, 2019 China alerted WHO about the existence cases of an unusual pneumonia in Wuhan, and even though the news has been circulating on the Chinese, the English, and the Italian language press since January, a response to the virus came only at the end of February.

The response was gradual, and it saw the closing of all non-essential business activities, and the practice of social distancing. These measures have been in place since 10 March, initially until 3 April. They will likely be extended. I don't know until when the measures may be extended. As anyone else, I am relying on the news coverage of the COVID-19 crisis. The government has been adopting [stimulus measure after stimulus measure](#), in the effort to cushion the economic consequences of the spread of COVID-19.

3. How has the COVID-19 changed daily life in Italy?

Shops are closed, with the exception of grocery stores and pharmacies. The cities have suddenly become very quiet and empty. Schools and universities have closed down, and classes are taking place online. Whenever possible, persons employed in the public and the private sector are working from home.

Those employed in the informal sector of the economy have lost their job. The self-employed, medium and small-size businesses have gone bankrupt or are at a severe, concrete risk of bankruptcy. All of these persons are living on their savings.

The weakest, most vulnerable strata of the population are already at risk of hunger – all those employed in the informal sector of the economy do not have the money to buy food. They are at risk of eviction, because they do not have the money to pay the rent. They risk living without running water or electricity, because they do not have the money to pay utility bills. Their fellow citizens have launched independent fund-raising initiatives and are providing for their food. But these efforts are just a drop in the ocean.

Long queues have appeared outside grocery stores and pharmacy, because customers are admitted one at a time in pharmacies, or in small groups in groceries (depending on how big the store is). This is necessary to maintain a 2-meters distance between persons.

Civilian air traffic has been suspended, so travelling abroad is not possible. Movements between regions and cities have been restricted to the bare minimum. I cannot leave my city of residence but, food and medical supplies can circulate freely within the entire country.

4. Does everyone wear a mask and gloves?

In the area where I live, the few persons I see on the streets wear a mask and gloves. Some persons wear N95 masks, some of them wear homemade masks.

5. Can you go out? Do you need a pass? Is there anyone watching your building, or checking your temperature? Is everyone practicing social distancing? How often do you go out?

I can go out only for essential reasons (grocery shopping, donating blood, work in essential industries), but I cannot leave my city of residence. I don't need a pass, but I need to carry my ID, and a statement proving the reason why I went out and providing information about the start and end point of the route.

There is no one watching my building, other than nosy neighbors (but they have always been there), and no one is checking my temperature.

The vast majority of people is practicing social distancing.

I go out once every 7-10 days.

6. Is the government using mobile apps, drones, or other technologies to track the spread of COVID-19?

There have been press reports of some city governments using drones to promote social distancing. Mobile apps have been designed, and they are available for free, but their use is entirely voluntary. I am not aware of how many persons have chosen to download an app and use it, because most initiatives are taking place locally.

7. Is there a shortage of ICU beds?

There are fewer ICU beds than COVID-19 patients. The shortage of ICU beds is particularly serious in the regions of Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, and Emilia Romagna. In the Centre and in the South of the country the figures for COVID-19 are lower, but the shortage of ICU beds is equally severe.

8. Are hospitals expanding their capacity?

Yes, hospitals are expanding their capacity by adding more ICU beds, building field hospitals, and expanding existing structures.

9. How much does it cost to receive testing/treatment for COVID-19?

Testing and treatment for COVID-19 are provided free or charge by the national health system.

10. Is there a shortage of fuel, food, medicine, or other essential items?

The press is reporting a severe shortage of protective medical gear, and protective gear in general. Our doctors and nurses are making heroic efforts in saving lives, but they do not always have the protective gear they need. Persons who work in essential industries, persons who work as supermarket cashiers, truck drivers and cleaners are making equally heroic efforts, but they do not always have the protective gear they need.

There is no shortage of fuel, food, medicines or other essential items. I have not witnessed such a shortage in the city where I live. Yeast is very hard to find, for reasons I ignore. This far, the food supply chain has proven able to withstand the COVID-19 crisis. Non-surgical masks have been very hard to find until recently, when several domestic companies reconverted their production.

11. Has Italy received aid from abroad? If so, from which countries and in what measure?

Italy has received medical teams and medical supplies or other forms of aid from at least Albania, Canada, China, Cuba, Germany, Russia, and the United States. It is difficult for me to quantify the precise amount of aid that has been sent by each country. The press is reporting daily on the aid we receive and collating all the available figures is not always easy.