



Education: Key to breaking the cycle of poverty

Study on educational poverty



Results of a European survey on the impact of education on poverty, based on data from the Caritas Poverty Observatories in Greece, Germany, Italy and Portugal.

“I may be excessively optimistic, but I think at some point this situation will right itself, some day, and, at least I want to stay here and give it a try.”

Danae, Athens



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Preface

Caritas organisations empower people to find solutions to the poverty and social exclusion related challenges they face. The way in which Caritas does this, is firstly by listening to people and offering individual counselling, services, material or financial assistance. Caritas also compiles quantitative and qualitative data on the challenges faced by people who call on its services. In accordance with this two-pronged strategy, the link becomes clear that many of the challenges they face are rooted in gaps in the country's social welfare or social protection system.

This process allows for a structured approach within which the signals given by the people can be linked to the underlying structural cause(s) of the problems they face. Such an analysis enables Caritas to look for solutions that address the root causes, and to advocate for structural change by recommending solutions to the competent authorities at a local, regional, national and/or European level.

This is ultimately the main purpose of the Caritas Poverty Observatories (CPOs), to collect data in a structured way, analyse it and detect where structural change is necessary. Given the fact that the competence for social policy is situated at all governance levels, it is crucially important to continue increasing the national and European compatibility of CPO data collection. Keeping in mind that progress is achieved step by step, this publication marks the initial fruit of this process.

“When my Spanish husband retired, we returned to Portugal, after having lived and worked in Spain for 27 years. I only completed primary school and lack the skills required by the labour market. I had several temporary and non-qualified jobs and completed several trainings, but never obtained a scholar certificate. Currently, I am still unemployed, I don't receive any social support and still face the same difficulties with being included in the labour market”.

Maria, aged 57, assisted by the Diocesan Caritas in Beja, Portugal

Four Caritas organisations have collected data regarding the educational history of the people in need of their service. The analysis of these data, both qualitative and quantitative, have brought about a better link between the causes and consequences of educational poverty, both at social and structural levels and formulated recommendations for action by the various governance levels – including the EU level – in accordance with their legal and policy competence in the matter.

I want to thank, in the first place, all the people who visited our services at grassroots level, relied on Caritas to help them find a solution to the challenges they face, and agreed to share their stories with us. I am also grateful to the colleagues who made it possible to bring Maria's story to the European policy level, and in particular to Walter Nanni (Caritas Italiana), Ana Nunes (Caritas Portugal), Verena Liessem (Caritas Germany) and Maria Koutatzi (Caritas Hellas – Greece), who collected and analysed the data in their respective organisations, and without whom this publication would not have been possible.



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Introduction

Since the outbreak of the economic crisis of 2008 and the consequent exacerbation of the situations of poverty and social exclusion on the European continent, Caritas Europa has developed a series of coordinated research actions relevant to the fields of this study, with particular attention to the conditions of the people in need, who approach a Caritas organisation in the different European countries. Caritas Europa has produced three annual reports on the impact of the crisis and related austerity measures (Crisis Monitoring Report), three Shadow Reports on the progress of the "European Semester" process and the achievement of the objectives of Europe 2020, a specific report on child poverty, and two comprehensive reports on the situation of poverty in Europe (Cares Report)².

The added value of these research actions is attributed to Caritas's ability to base its scientific observations and policy on its field work experience, alongside the very people in situations of vulnerability and social distress. In fact, within these publications there is an abundance of life stories that try to clarify the consequences of poverty on the lives of these people, as well as their objective difficulties in being supported by effective services and welfare provisions.

Over the last decade, the evolution of data collection systems, among various European Caritas, has been opening up new research horizons, which have given us glimpse of the possibility of building a shared data collection system. This further serves as the foundation for the most rigorous and systematic reflections and analytic actions of Caritas at national and European levels. As a result, this publication has been compiled – specifically addressing the issue of educational poverty – based on data from the information collection system of four national Caritas organisations.

1. Education and poverty: What people in vulnerable situations tell us, what our statistics say

This chapter describes the characteristics of the people involved in the study, then analyses the challenges the most vulnerable group are facing in relation to their educational backgrounds and, finally, analyses the type of support this group of people requires of Caritas counselling services.

1.1. Who are we talking about in this study?

Women and men

The analysis in this publication is based on data collected from 7,837 people having used Caritas services, of whom 2,485 in Italy, 3,033 in Germany, 1,042 Greece and 1,277 in Portugal. 52% are women, 48% men, with the highest percentage of women in Portugal (66%) and the lowest in Greece (25%).

Tab. 1 – Caritas service users classified by sex and country of data collection

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Germany	Total
Females	24.7	48.7	65.9	58.1	51.9
Males	75.3	51.3	34.1	41.9	48.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Young and old

Almost half of the people included in the survey (44.6% of the total) are aged between 30 and 49. Except for Greece, children are almost completely absent (with only 1.2% in the overall sample). Only one out of ten Caritas service users is above the age of 65.

Tab. 2 – Caritas service users classified by age, class and country in the data collection (For every 100 people from the same country)

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Germany	Total
0-17	3.9	0.4	0.2	1.4	1.2
18-29	42.0	11.6	12.0	24.5	20.7
30-49	45.3	46.2	41.5	44.3	44.6
50-64	7.2	29.7	34.0	22.2	24.5
65+	1.6	12.2	12.4	7.6	9.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Family situation

“Till now, I have not given my kids any reason to complain about not having food. When they ask for an extra treat, I say we cannot have it, and they get upset for a while. The only thing I’m afraid of is embarrassing my kids, because I collect cartons in the street!

That’s why I chose to do it in other areas, far from where we live. During Christmas, the kids wanted toys, but I couldn’t afford it. But then I went to the second-hand shop and found one for two Euros. Christmas had come and gone, but my kid was happy again. I explained that we needed the money I make for eating bread. [...]

When I started collecting cartons, I had the impression that people were looking at me and throwing stones all the time. It was all in my mind. I felt very ashamed. But things happen.

I have hope. God is for everyone. He doesn’t abandon anyone, regardless of religion. I want to believe that all human beings are equal. I want my children to be compassionate and humane, and not racist. And above all, they should be useful to society”.

A.M., aged 60, Caritas Hellas (Greece)

The largest group of people (41%) live together with their family members, composed of: “all adult” families, families with parents and children, extended and enlarged families, families of only senior citizens, etc. In Greece, only 2.2% of the people included in this study live with family members. This is due to the fact that most users of Caritas services in Greece are hosted in reception centres (asylum seekers, migrants) or communities of various types.

The second group constitutes single people with 31.6% and the third group single-parent families with 21.5%.

Tab. 3 – Caritas service users categorised by family type and country in the data collection (For every 100 people from the same country)

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Germany	Total
Alone	19.2	15.9	40.8	41.4	31.6
In the family	5.5	49.7	37.9	40.8	41.0
Single-parent family	15.4	27.8	21.0	17.8	21.5
Other situations	59.9	6.6	0.2	0.0	5.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Citizenship

“I am a cook, a musician... I have worked as a foreman for more than 25 years. I have studied mechanical engineering. I'm a car specialist. I'm also an electrician and I do all sorts of small repairs. I can do almost everything.

My real problem is that I've been in Greece for more than 10 years now, and I still do not have the necessary legal documents. I'm still on my Armenian ID card. I have been waiting for the residence permit... They told me that it would be done soon.

Workwise I cannot do much, because everywhere I go, they ask me for my legal documents. Nobody wants to hire me without papers. My life in Greece will be easier once I get my legal registration. In Armenia, we lived in very good conditions and I had a good job. But then the war started, and we didn't want our son to go to the army, so we left.

But here things are also very difficult. I'm often at home, watching TV. What am I to do? I go out and look for someone to hire me, without papers. But nobody wants me. I don't weep, but it's really bad. I cannot help my family. I have been through tough situations. I have never asked for an amazing life. I have not yet been forced to beg for money. I just want a job; I want to work.

Greece is a beautiful country, and I have no problem with Greek people, but I do have a problem with the Greek state. [...] They continue to impose cuts on incomes and pensions. This really is a pity! In Armenia and Georgia, we use to think of Greece as a beautiful and wealthy country, but things are really difficult now.”

Armenian migrant, aged 55, Caritas Hellas (Greece)

Information on citizenship or nationality of the Caritas service users is not available for the German sample. Nationals represent 57% of the people included in this study, but with big differences at country level, evident in Table 4.

Tab. 4 – Caritas service users classified by national provenance type and country in the data collection (For every 100 people from the same country, N = 4.804)

National provenance	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Total
Foreigners	97.4	50.5	7.1	42.9
Nationals	2.6	49.5	92.9	57.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Children

More than 50% of the service users in Italy and Germany have minor children (no data available for Portugal). In Greece, they represent only 24% of the people included in the study, which is due to the fact that most of them are asylum seekers and migrants living alone in reception centres.

Tab. 5 – Caritas service users classified per number of cohabiting minor children (For every 100 people from the same country)

Cohabiting children	Greece	Italy	Germany	Total
None	76.2	38.4	48.1	48.9
1	21.9	34.0	18.6	25.1
2	1.9	27.2	17.1	18.5
More than 2	0.0	0.4	16.2	7.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Income and employment situation

An important characteristic among the population included in this study is the type of work/income that the person or family is able to rely on. Limiting the analysis to just the three countries that share the same classification³, the finding is that most people included (73%) are unemployed. More than one in ten signifies working poor.

We observe a higher representation of retired people in the Portuguese figures (11.9%), even exceeding the proportion of working people. This is an indication of the higher level of social risk among older Portuguese generations, likely due to the presence of interruptions in their professional life trajectories and low-income seniority pensions.

“ *I am 25 years old and I live with my boyfriend and two-year old daughter in my parent's house. I only receive the minimum income (Rendimento Social de Inserção), because we are both unemployed. Unemployment remains my family's biggest challenge.*

Since I completed high school, I've never found a job and it is very difficult, because there are very few opportunities for a person with my level of qualifications. Since 2006, I've been in a Caritas project, CRIARTE, where I am learning needlework and I've been attending training sessions to improve my qualifications and skills. However, I simply cannot find a job”.

25-year-old beneficiary in Diocesan Caritas of Coimbra

**Tab. 6 – Caritas service users classified by occupational condition type
(For every 100 people from the same country)**

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Total
Unemployed	92.6	72.7	66.3	72.7
Employed	1.9	13.1	11.4	11.3
Retired person	1.2	7.8	11.9	8.4
Unable to work	1	2	8.2	3.9
Other	3.4	4.4	2.2	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The data gathering system used in Caritas Germany is based on four macro-categories of employment / income situations:

1. people without any income;
2. people who only benefit from welfare benefits and social welfare measures (excluding retired persons and other active categories);
3. people who have an income from work (regular or irregular), together with other types of social-welfare assistance of a public nature; and
4. retired persons, who do not perform any kind of paid work.

Applying the same classification to the whole sample, we can highlight the presence of a huge number of people without income in Greece, Portugal and Italy, and a residual component in Germany (4.6%) (See table 7).

**Tab. 7 – Caritas service users classified by income source
(For every 100 people from the same country)**

Source of income	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Germany
No income or other income	92.6	72.7	66.3	4.6
Social welfare income	1.0	2.0	8.2	55.7
Job income (regular/irregular)	1.9	13.1	11.4	25.7
Pension (for retired people)	1.2	7.8	11.9	14.1
Other	3.4	4.4	2.2	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Several factors explain this situation: the absence of systematic and universal welfare measures to support income in Italy; the presence, among Caritas service users, of a large number of refugees excluded from welfare benefits, available to the native population (in Greece); and the weakness and low adequacy of existing welfare measures (in Portugal).

1.2. The long-term consequences of educational poverty: The vulnerable educational capital of Caritas service users

The dimension of educational poverty, subject of this research, essentially refers to the educational capital available among the adult population who rely on Caritas for any kind of help, related to a wide variety of social problems. The study does not address the issue of educational poverty among children who drop out of or leave school early or who are deprived of the provision of adequate educational services. Likewise, due to the evident lack of available data, it is not possible to describe the broader dimensions of educational poverty that refer to extracurricular, personal or social aspects, i.e. the habit of reading, consulting the Internet to study or for cultural development nor the ability to enjoy in cultural services (such as libraries, the theatre, the cinema, museums, concerts, etc.).

“Rosa and Nicola have three children aged 17, 14 and 7. They live in a disadvantaged and peripheral district of Bari, southern Italy. Their parents’ families and they have both been marked by instability for a long time: facing difficult separations, the challenges of newly composed or patchwork families, and loneliness. They have never experienced absolute poverty, but their family life was often connected to the local underworld and criminality. Nicola left school at the age of 11. He started working in bars and restaurants to support his mother and brothers, after they were abandoned by his father. Both Rosa and Nicola currently live off of low paid, occasional jobs. Due to their low education levels, they struggle to find high-level jobs. They have many ideas and continually come up with new possibilities for self-employment, in the field of itinerant trade, but fail to realise their aspirations due to a lack of budget and management skills. Their lifestyle seems very simple: they are constantly looking for work. During the day they watch TV while their children are permanently engaged with social media with their friends. Their children are not good students, though in different ways. The oldest is hyperactive and intolerant of discipline; he was even kicked out by at least a couple of schools for aggressive behaviour towards classmates and teachers. He dreams about luxury cars and a wealthy life. The other son is very shy, self-contained, never leaves home, is always locked in his room playing video games and doesn’t seem to have any future perspectives”.

Caritas Italy case worker

It is important to highlight, however, that the educational poverty examined in this study is in each case the result of a situation of educational challenges experienced in childhood and youth and that has left an impact even decades after the age of compulsory education.

While other types of vulnerable situations may arise in early adulthood or beyond (i.e. illness, loss of work, breakdown of emotional bonds, isolation, addictions, etc.), in the case of educational poverty attributed to education level, causes of the original deprivation were always found to be rooted in the period of childhood and adolescence. This is the reason why studying adult educational poverty somehow complements and integrates the study of children's educational poverty.

Studying the educational poverty experienced by adults allows for a better understanding of the causal links in the stories of school dropout or early school leaving, experienced among children or adolescents and "how they ended up". In spite of the fact that school dropout does not always lead to poverty and social exclusion, it is undeniable that behind many situations of social vulnerability witnessed among Caritas service users, are uncompleted school paths and/or intervals of inadequate cultural and professional training.

“ *A 37-year-old gypsy man, lives with his partner aged 33 in Beja (Portugal) and together they have five children, all younger than 18 years of age. Both parents had an irregular educational trajectory and didn't finish any formal education. Recently, both attended a training in basic skills – reading, writing, calculations, using new technologies. After that, the man concluded a painting and civil construction training for adults, which was an opportunity for him to also conclude his primary school level training. Despite that, the couple still have low levels of education and qualifications and still face severe difficulties accessing the labour market. This obviously affects their level of income; since 2004 they have been beneficiaries of the minimum income scheme and are accompanied by the Diocesan Caritas in Beja. The couple, however, appreciates the value and power of school and education and are now trying to transmit this value to their children”.*

Reported by a social worker in Diocesan Caritas in Beja

The analytical approach of educational poverty, experienced by adults, is also useful in the dimension of social intervention. Taking the educational level of the Caritas service users into account, is a better strategic variable in defining and planning the human development paths that must be activated: to understand what kind of job placement is possible; to evaluate the degree of cultural literacy; and to assess the extent to which the person is able to actively participate in society.

To be able to comprehensively examine the educational level among Caritas service users, it was previously essential to compare the different classification systems of the variable of education in the study, pertaining to the four countries. None of the systems considered, make use of the institutional taxonomies of educational levels applied by the statistical system of the European Union.

This is due to an indisputable distance between these categories and the formal education levels in force decades ago, in the different countries of the European Union.

Level of education of Caritas service users

It is not possible to make an overall and detailed comparison of the levels of education among the Caritas service users in all four countries involved in the survey because the classification used in Germany consists of four different levels of training and lacks details about the kind of diploma received. For the time being the analysis is limited to the three countries (Greece, Italy and Portugal) that share a common classification as regards educational level⁴. A strong scholastic weakness among the Caritas service users emerges: on average, 11.4% are illiterate or have no diploma. This type of vulnerability is very prevalent in Greece (14.7%) and is due to the strong presence of users from outside of Europe, who attended a weaker school system compared to the average European country.

“Elena and George live in Rome. They left Romania in 2008 in search of a better life. She was a dressmaker and had studied until secondary level, while George left school at the age of 13. But he is a skilled worker. They have three children. Initially, both were working, but George had to stop working after having had an accident at a building site.

In spite of Elena's job, they are no longer able to pay the rent regularly or to meet the family's primary needs. Currently, they receive the help of the Municipal Social Services and the parish Caritas. The eldest daughter, Iona, has completed secondary school in Italy, but returned to Romania to study at university, taking advantage of the presence of her grandparents who have always supported her. Maria, the second daughter, is 12 years old and is fully immersed in her family's difficulties.

Unfortunately, to enable Elena, her mother, to work, Maria is forced to not attend school regularly because she has to take care of Constantin, her two-year-old brother. Maria heavily relied on the help of Iona, her older sister, but since she went back to Romania, she has no one to help with her school work. Her father can't help her, her mother always works outside the house and when she returns home, she has neither the time nor the energy to help her children.

When she was younger, Elena had to go to work in the morning and Maria often stayed at home.

She had several interruptions to her school career and failed to recover from the difficulties she was having, especially with Mathematics. At school, Maria was also the victim of various episodes of bullying, which had already started in elementary school. Elena has reported episodes to teachers but has not always received their support. Instead, she has been forced to downplay the incidents.

The parish church courtyard is the only place where Maria doesn't experience problems, even when on her own. She meets peers, they play basketball, volleyball; there are other kids, and she finds the environment more serene".

Elena and George, assisted by Caritas Italiana

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that the incidence of university graduates is highest (15.9%) in Greece: this is due to the presence of almost a third of Caritas service users (29.8%) having come from Syria and Iran and having a medium-high educational and training level.

A small minority of the total sample (10.2%) have a high school diploma, which in Western countries is considered the minimum education level required in order to find a job and avoid social exclusion.

The most frequent situation among the sample is reflected by those with a lower secondary school certificate (38.1%).

Tab. 8 – Caritas service users per type of school qualification

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Total
Illiterate/no qualification	14.7	12.0	8.9	11.4
Primary school degree	16.1	19.1	34.0	23.5
Lower secondary degree	20.3	41.0	41.1	38.1
Professional titles/certificates	28.8	9.8	2.1	10.0
Higher secondary degree	3.6	12.3	9.6	10.2
University degree	15.9	4.9	4.3	6.3
Other	0.5	0.9	–	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In order to avoid excluding one or more of the four countries from the comparison, we adopted a more generic, but more inclusive classification consisting of four different types of training levels:

- a. School diplomas / certificates: includes those who have completed at least one cycle of education, both higher and lower;
- b. Certificates and professional diplomas: obtained within the secondary education system or from private companies / training institutions;
- c. University degree: people who obtained undergraduate degrees or diplomas at university level;
- d. No diploma: they are people who have not been able to complete any kind of scholastic level and are therefore totally devoid of training certifications.

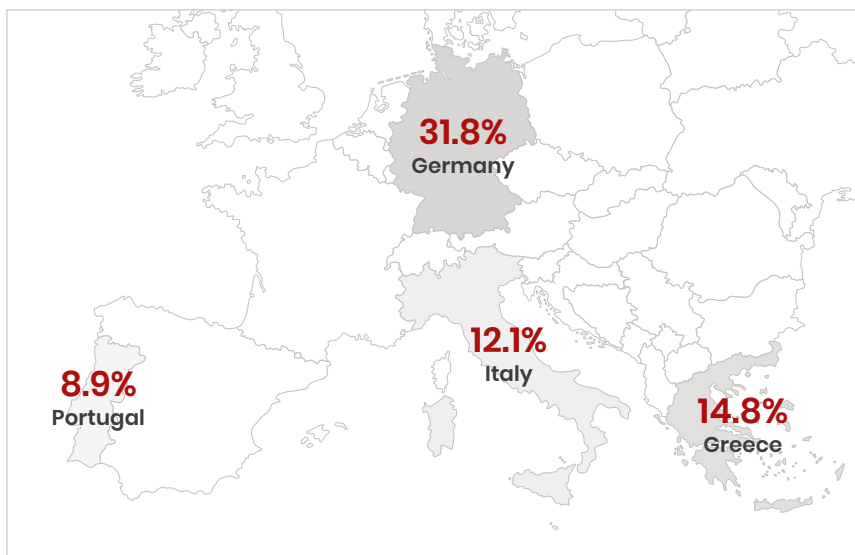
Based on this classification and on the data collected, the percentages of the population reaching out to Caritas for support is characterised as follows:

- a. On average, just over half of the Caritas service users in the four countries considered (53.7%), hold a school education certificate, though below a university level. The lowest number is registered in Germany (28.4%), the highest in Portugal (84.7%);
- b. Professional certifications concern one out of five users. The data is strongly influenced by the presence of this type of certificate in Germany (33.4% of the people) and in Greece (29%);
- c. Graduates represent only 6.3% of the total and are mainly present in Greece (16% of all Caritas service users). This figure is influenced by the fact that among refugees and asylum seekers there is a significant number of people with a higher education;
- d. One service user in five has no school certification (20.1%), ranging from almost 32% in Germany to less than 9% in Portugal.

Tab. 9 – Caritas service users classified according to the school education macro-categories

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Germany	Total
School certificate	40.3	73.0	84.7	28.4	53.7
Professional school	29.0	9.9	2.1	33.4	19.9
University Degree	16.0	5.0	4.3	6.3	6.3
No certificate/diploma	14.8	12.1	8.9	31.8	20.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Fig. 1 – Caritas service users without a diploma (%)



What is the social profile of the weakest? People calling on Caritas services who do not have any kind of qualifications represent 20% of the whole sample, but this varies considerably between countries (see Fig. 1).

Women and men

“We turned to Caritas when our life was going through a huge storm – a seriously bad economic wave”. Anna has completed secondary schooling but could not pursue university studies at that time due to a lack of funds. She had been working for 25 years consecutively but had to stop to take care of her mother, who was suffering from dementia, and of her little daughter. Her husband, Kostas, is an engineer with a PhD. He started working in the USA after completing his studies. After 9/11, things were becoming difficult and he decided to return to Greece. That’s when he and Anna met and decided to move to Syros together. They also started their own business (a gas station). The economic crisis, though, soon brought the family immense debts. They had to sell the company but were still in debt. Since then, Kostas has only been able to find seasonal work in tourist businesses and Anna had to stay at home taking care of both mother and baby-daughter. Only recently has she been trying to work again, doing some at home sales for a cosmetics company. Now they are “older” (+50) and it’s not easy to get back into work/business. For the sake of their daughter, they decided to stay on the island even though this enormously restricted their professional options.

Economic distress also puts pressure on the couple's relationship: a lack of money and debt leads to nagging and fights. Poverty hinders them from dreaming and enjoying life, because they have to think about survival on a daily basis. This daily fight for survival does not leave any space for self-esteem and leads to depression. One of their concerns is to protect their child from having to carry the poverty-induced (material and emotional) burdens. These last couple of years have humbled the couple and made them stronger".

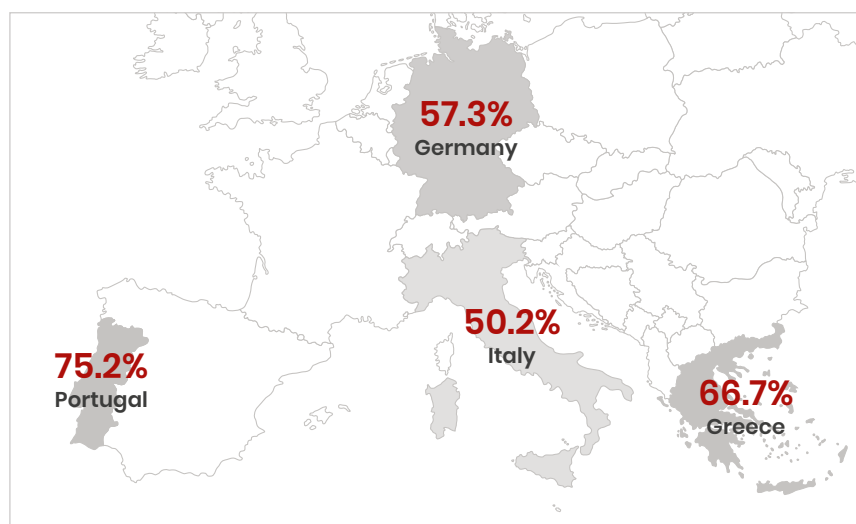
Anna and Kostas, Syros Island, Caritas Hellas (Greece)

Women are overrepresented in the group of people without diplomas. Overall, 53.8% of all the people without a qualification are women, ranging from 75.2% in Portugal to 50.2% in Italy. It is therefore interesting to note that regardless of the social and cultural differences that distinguish different countries, women without diplomas needing Caritas services consistently outnumber men in the same situation. This could be an indication of the presence of the phenomena of discrimination in terms of access to education, which women are most often subjected to, undermining the possibility of their resilience and social promotion path.

Tab. 10 – People without qualification classified according to sex (% per country)

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Germany	Total
Men	33.3	49.8	24.8	42.7	46.2
Women	66.7	50.2	75.2	57.3	53.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Fig. 2 – Number of Caritas' female service users relative to the total of people with no qualifications (%)



Young and old

Contrary to society in general, in the case of Caritas service users, the absence of a qualification is not particularly common among elderly people. In other words, while more people of an advanced age have lower levels of education in society, when it comes to those relying on Caritas services this is not the actual case and cannot be verified as true in the four countries considered.

Tab. 11 – People without educational qualification classified according to age group (For every 100 people from the same country)

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Germany	Total
18-29	35.1	19.8	2.7	34.0	28.7
30-49	37.7	42.3	36.3	41.4	40.9
50-64	26.0	25.4	36.3	18.8	22.0
65+	1.3	12.5	24.8	5.8	8.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The figures also indicate a direct and positive correlation between age and educational level: in the group of young people. Nearly 1 in 4 is without a diploma (or 23.6%, aged from 18 to 29). Among the elderly, this percentage drops to 15.8%.

Tab. 12 – Share of people without diplomas classified into age group (for every 100 people from the same group)

	Number of people	without qualification	% without qualification
18-29	1,606	379	23.6
30-49	3,464	540	15.6
50-64	1,907	290	15.2
65+	703	111	15.8
Total	7,773	1,320	17.0

Out of 100 people without a diploma, the largest subgroup is averaged to be 30 to 49 years (40.9% of the sample). This is followed by young people, aged between 18 and 29, constituting 28.7% of the sample.

Young people relying on Caritas services are particularly weighed down by a lack of qualifications. This type of vulnerability appears to be particularly evident in Germany and Greece, to different degrees of gravity, that are not, however, easily comparable. In the case of Greece, 93.6% of people without a qualification and under 30 years of age have a foreign nationality.

Unfortunately, for the data related to Germany the information on the citizenship of the Caritas service users is not available, so it is impossible to make any kind of formal comparison. There is, nevertheless, information relative to migration background.

The presence of a serious fragility in the formative capital that emerges from the Caritas data, mostly affects subjects of an active age. In other words, those who would mostly need, and benefit from an adequate educational qualification. It therefore seems imperative to provide a rapid path for these people to recuperate their lost school years or to pursue a training qualification process, suitable for a particular job being sought.

Family situation

Another important variable to define the weakness and social vulnerability level of a person is the type of household in which he/she lives. According to various studies and responsible staff in the sector, people who live in a family situation of isolation and relationship difficulties are in fact more exposed to the risk of remaining in a cycle of poverty for a long time.

“I was happy to get the opportunity to say something about our pedagogic offer “good game!” and the people I meet there. Often I meet children and youth who cope with their lives with much courage, curiosity, openness and will power. These children have many problems – shocking biographies and fates, worrying living circumstances. Dysfunctional families, parents unable to cope and too few resources are only a few factors. I want to mention a boy who lives with his parents and two siblings in too small a flat. The parents are very busy building a future for themselves, learning to speak German – many things fall by the wayside. Notably, it’s his friendly personality, who just wants to get attention. Children and youth especially who lead difficult lives need all their strength and energy to survive – not only physically but also mentally and on a psychological level. Children with challenging behaviour are mostly a product of their environment – and if their energy is already exhausted from the fight of staying alive, there is often nothing left in the way of school and educational objectives.

This is where our offer of support comes in. In cooperation with the school, we create safe rooms in which the children are able to develop and test themselves. Together with the parents, we work on the circumstances which constrain the development of their children. It is precisely the combination of the two systems “school” and “children” and the youth welfare service” that provide the children and youths with the possibility of not falling behind in a rapidly changing environment.

The transfer of knowledge in the digital era and the development of social skills have to be the aims of the educational system for the future.

I said at the start, that children and youth with whom we work have manifold competencies, of which they are often unaware. Our task with the pedagogical work is to accompany them and see them grow and it is our duty as a society to provide the means to ensure this".

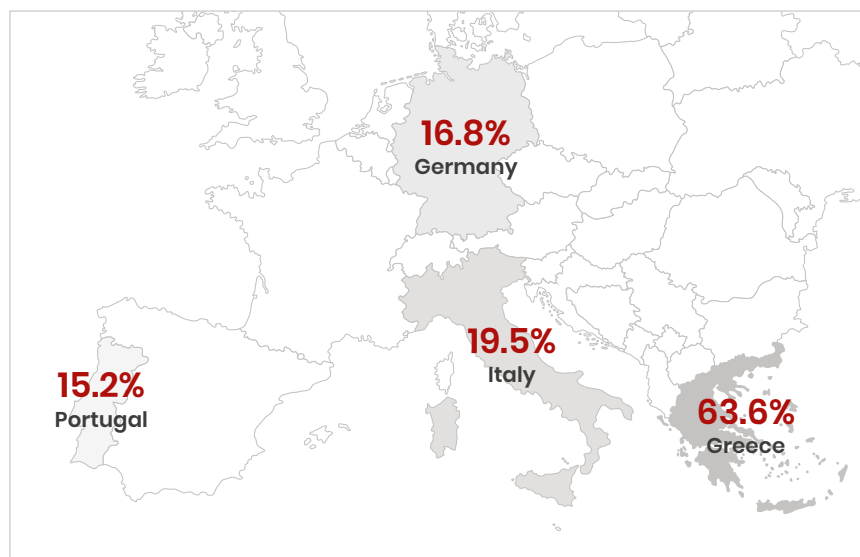
Sascha Weger, Social pedagogue, project leader, IN VIA Hamburg, Caritas Germany

The figures indicate a moderate correlation between a lack of diplomas and vulnerable family situations, potentially at risk of marginalisation and social exclusion: 36% of the Caritas service users who failed to obtain any type of certificate or school certification are single people, 18% are single parents.

Tab. 13 – Caritas service users without qualification classified according to family unit (% per country)

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Germany	Total
Alone	31.8	16.3	34.8	40.6	36.0
With the family	4.5	64.2	50.0	42.6	46.1
Single parent	63.6	19.5	15.2	16.8	18.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Fig. 3 – Percentage of single parents who are Caritas service users, without diplomas (%)



Income and employment situation

“I’m Manthos and I am 18 years old. I was born on Tinos Island and I live here with my parents. A year ago, I was accepted into the University of Thessaloniki but I can’t attend the classes because my parents are unemployed and my sister, who works in Athens, basically supports us. So, I have to work too and I can’t go and study. Maybe I will find some work during the summer season, as a waiter, but when this season is over, what will I do? I do not see any light at the end of the tunnel in Greece’s current economic situation”.

Manthos, aged 18, assisted by Caritas Hellas (Greece)

In the overall sample, more than half of the people (59%) are without sustainable and stable sources of income, while nearly four in five people without diplomas have no income (see Table 14). In view of this, we are facing a population at high risk of social exclusion, since the absence of work is present in addition to an almost total lack of educational capital.

In absolute terms, this type of Caritas service users, in a clear situation of social exclusion, makes up 4% of the entire sample. So while it is a small group of people, it is still necessary to pay special attention to this group and to pursue two main courses.

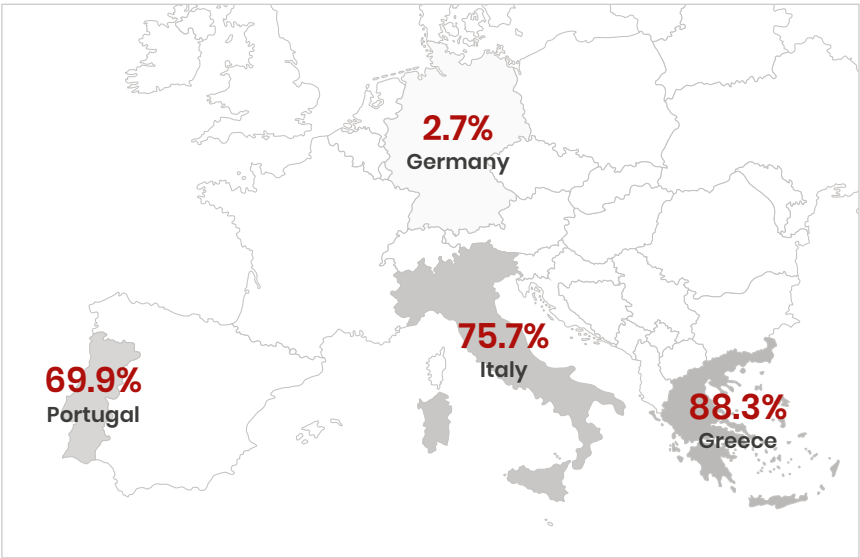
Firstly, to help them in their job search and, while simultaneously supporting and encouraging the possibility of their achieving a minimum level of training or education in order to increase their opportunities in the labour market and future endeavours.

It needs to be pointed out that most of the people without diplomas and who are receiving welfare are also at high risk of social exclusion, because the opportunity to change their situation is low – as is the level of that type of income.

Tab. 14 Caritas service users without a diploma, classified according to employment/type of income (% per country)

	Greece	Italy	Portugal	Germany	Total
Income	3.7	7.8	2.7	13.3	5.9
No income	83.3	75.7	69.9	2.7	77.9
Retired people	1.9	9.6	23.9	8.6	13.2
Only welfare	11.1	6.9	3.5	75.4	3.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Fig. 4 – The total percentage of Caritas service users without a qualification (%) nor an income



© Christophe Hargoues, Caritas France

1.3. The main requests for support

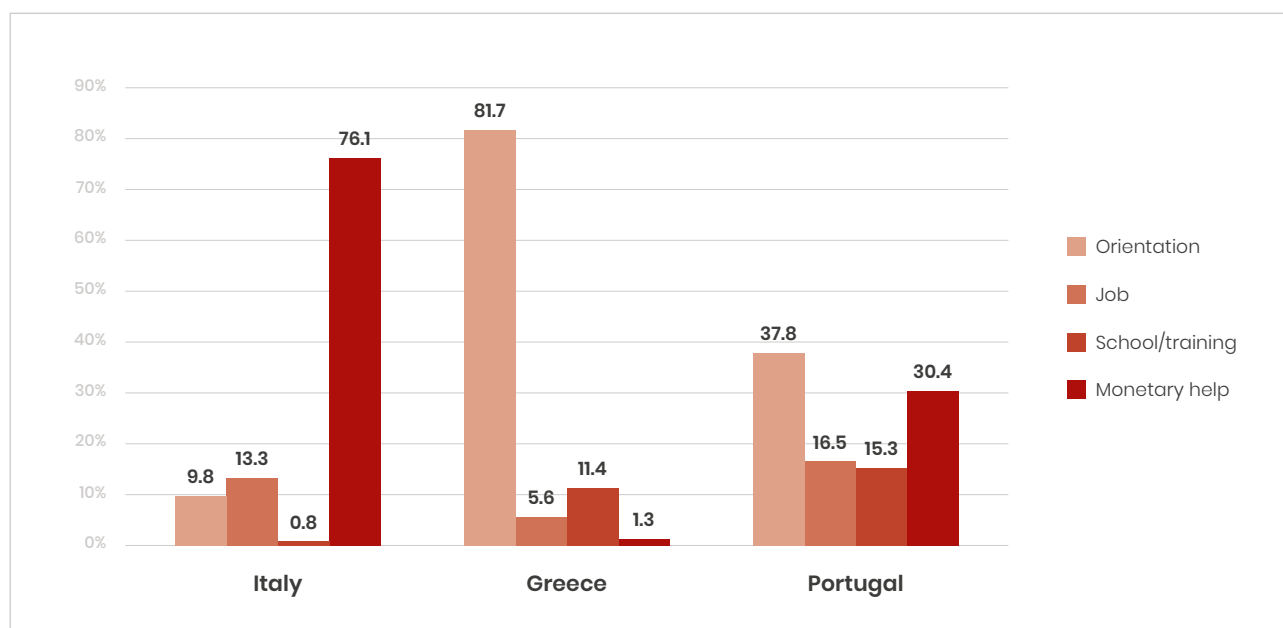
An analysis, from an international perspective, of the kind of social needs/demands addressed by the Caritas counselling services is not available due to the partial unavailability of data on this aspect in Portugal and Germany. In Portugal, the data collection section on requests and interventions provided by Caritas is being implemented and currently makes data available for four type of requests, in line with the Italian information system: work, guidance, education/training, and financial assistance. In Germany the information concerning intervention and in-take is collected according to other categories and is therefore not comparable for the present analysis. For this reason, the section concerning the requests expressed by the Caritas service users is limited to Italy, Greece and Portugal.

In general, the types of care needed are quite different to each other, which depend on various factors and concerns of the users/users being addressed. This becomes more apparent, as the data emerges, when taking note of the type of Caritas service user centre at which requests for support are being lodged, in the three countries under review (see Figure 5).

In Italy, financial assistance is the most important request (76.1%) made by Caritas service users. This is followed by guidance requests, which typically concern five different information needs: access to social-health services, housing-related needs, bureaucratic or legal practices, family-type problems, and retirement or social security administrative issues and follow ups.

In Greece, most of the requests concern orientation (81.7%) because Caritas services users there, need general information. The prevalence of information requests is due to the fact that most of Caritas Hellas (Greece) service users come from the refugee and asylum seekers reception circuit, which already provides some material assistance. Hence, for people constituting this category, one of the main needs entails carrying out a series of complex bureaucratic and administrative issues linked to their particular legal status and to the gaps in their knowledge of the bureaucratic and administrative system in Greece, in this case of the host country.

Fig. 5 – Needs/requests expressed by Caritas service users in Italy, Greece and Portugal (% for each country)



The situation in Portugal differs even further:

the figures show more poverty among the autochthonous. None of the four types of assistance, registers the absolute majority of the needs/demands requested. Demands for service orientation rank first (37.8%). Within this type of request, almost a quarter ask for help access the information and another quarter ask for help with accessing social support. Another aspect, that is important to highlight is related to the lack of information/guidance available in schools and universities for students and families (especially the most vulnerable) with respect to two issues: helping them build a career path, in line with their aspirations and labour market needs; and helping them access social support and facilitate the accompaniment process (also for the families) during their studies. The beneficiaries in Caritas Portugal's network seem to face serious difficulties in accessing public services and information by themselves, and due to this difficulty, they look for Caritas support to collect information about training opportunities, job offers, CV writing skills, or even requesting state social support (like minimum income, family allowances, unemployment benefits, pensions, etc.). The lack of information available, without the support of Caritas, contributes to preventing them from accessing some of the rights to which they are entitled. However, due to some misunderstandings, a lack of coordination between services or even a lack of personal skills, they fail to apply themselves because they simply do not know the procedures nor how to go about the steps. It may also be the case that they simply are not aware that they are entitled to accessing certain social support.

Requests for financial assistance rank second (30.4%) among the service users in Caritas Portugal. Requests in the educational and educational-school field (15.3%) rank last in Portugal, but this figure is still higher than in Italy or Greece.

Requests for assistance related to education and training represent less than 10% of the total, despite the presence of a very high share of people facing challenges in comparison to their level of education, in all the countries participating in the survey.

These requests were merely exceeded by demands for basic material assistance and guidance to welfare services. This is not surprising, considering the basic necessity for money for immediate survival.

This ascertainment can partly be explained by the fact that requests, largely depend on the type of services provided. In other words, people tend not to ask Caritas for what they know it will not be able to provide them with. It is also possible that some of the Caritas service users who apply to counselling centres and who do not ask for school and training services, already receive help from other Caritas centres and services, specialised in the training and educational dimension.

To this effect, the lack of requests regarding the educational dimension is also indicative of the challenges faced by Caritas organisations to offer a wider range of interventions, including services related to training and education and being able to monitor the multitude of services offered and used. These types of interventions require considerable resources because of the high level of professionalism required to assist young people, and people in need of achieving a more adequate level of training and professional competence.

Another partial explanation is that a lack of access to or simply a lack of an adequate level of social benefits may exacerbate their tendency to not go beyond "survival modus". People need to satisfy their basic needs, food and shelter prior to pursuing training courses to increase their chances on the labour market.



2. Caritas action/ projects and good policy examples

Caritas organisations do not only help individual people and families to find a solution to the problems they are facing, but also tests structural solutions in projects at local, regional, national and European levels. Examples of these types of projects, made possible with private funding/grants and/or co-financed by local, regional, national authorities and/or the EU, are described below. These projects give Caritas' policy the means to formulate recommendations to address social challenges and social protection system shortcomings in a given country. This yields positive results to the wellbeing of those in vulnerable situations.

Caritas also acknowledges that policy initiatives implemented by governments have made or are contributing to making a difference in the lives of those least fortunate. These initiatives also merit being recognised as policy options by Member States, regions, or local authorities. Examples of such measures are listed below.

2.1.1.1. Developing training courses and life skills for adults in the social economy sector, reinforcing work insertion strategies and labour integration

M'ama Food – Catering dal mondo, Diocesan Caritas, Milano, IT

M'ama Food - Catering dal mondo (Catering from the world) is a social catering organisation offering international/ethnic menus that employs refugees and asylum seekers. The idea arose in the framework of the Sammartini shelter, managed by the social cooperative Farsi Prossimo and was promoted by Caritas Ambrosiana in Milan, which offers temporary shelter to women asylum seekers, with or without children. A kitchen workshop was started in 2010 to promote the integration of refugee women. Founded as a training activity, the initiative achieved resounding success: the women felt personally rewarded and developed a strong sense of motivation, while the customers valued the originality and quality of the recipes. M'ama Food soon also started to receive requests for catering services at various events and meetings. Having noticed the huge potential for this experience as a tool for social inclusion and work insertion, the cooperative registered and started up M'ama Food as a regular social catering business in 2012. Hence, M'ama Food has mainly been funded by the cooperative, along with some private donations, but is now becoming self-sustainable, with the income generated from the catering service. M'ama Food has developed greater professional competence through qualified training, slowly building an entrepreneurial spirit. Today, the initiative, born with an initial group of six people, employs up to 35 to 40 people. There is a regular group of cooks, caterers and hostesses and different people participating on a temporary basis, gaining professional experience and opportunities to start a new career.



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As Nossas Quintas (Our Farms), Diocesan Caritas in Azores, Portugal

This project is also a Social Inclusion Company, appearing to contribute to the sustainable development of innovative actions towards the integration of people in situations of social vulnerability. It also tries to balance social intervention and the promotion of personal, social and employability skills through the production, packaging and marketing of agricultural products obtained in certified organic production and traditional pastry, as well as in the provision of agricultural services. This project is part of a wider socio-community intervention carried out by Cáritas da Ilha Terceira. It aims to foster the inclusion of young people at risk or in situations of social exclusion, through their insertion into practical workshops, academic trainings, vocational guidance and follow-ups, and/or eventual insertion into the workplace and certified brief professional trainings. This is always done in conjunction with a supportive team of social workers, who are experts in mediation and the promotion of soft skills. Since 2017, three young people were contracted and four were included into occupational employment programmes. In addition, three more training units of a brief duration were developed, resulting in 38 certifications and 800 hours of training, to support the inclusion of young people into the labour market. Six young people entered into the regular labour market as a result.

The initiative fights poverty and social exclusion through: integration and/or socio-professional reintegration; the acquisition and development of personal and professional skills appropriate to the exercise of an activity; and job creation. The target group are young people between the ages of 14 and 21 years in situations of vulnerability (i.e. with low educational levels, absenteeism or early-school leaving, without employment and without prospects of inclusion in the labour market, often leading to poor decisions and markedly deviant pathways).

<https://www.asnossasquintas.com/>

Employability Hub, Caritas Hellas (Greece)

Caritas Hellas employability hub services offer a holistic support and accompaniment to job seekers, taking into account the analysis of the labour market and legal framework. In preparation, Caritas Hellas conducted research, considering methodologies such as the value chain market analysis in Athens, developed digital tools such as the Online Platform and App linking refugees to employment and training opportunities, and hired professional job counsellors and social entrepreneurship experts who run pilot programmes in the Caritas Hellas shelters and social services.

Currently, Caritas Hellas promotes the following offers to potential job seekers: job counselling, financial counselling, vocational training, job-related legal counselling, social entrepreneurship counselling, and micro-credit.

MAKEBRAGA – CLDS 3G, Diocesan Caritas in Braga, Portugal

The project promotes employment, qualification and inclusion, and stimulates the entrepreneurial skills of unemployed and long-term unemployed persons, minimum income beneficiaries, young NEETs and high-school students. The project includes a programme, based on innovative methodologies that offers transversal skills to the beneficiaries, needed to enhance their employability, entrepreneurship and opportunities for self-employment.

This programme benefited 103 persons and offers ongoing support to 58 in the labour market training programmes. The second programme called “Ideas Incubator”, intends to train entrepreneurs and business idea-holders to acquire the knowledge necessary to carry out their social impact and self-employment projects. With this activity, it was possible to support ten projects via the Idea Incubator.

The third activity is connected to a platform creation that allows high school-level students to gain temporary job experience and have their first experience with entrepreneurship through the development of projects, framed in the Sustainable Development Goals. This also aims to address the problems identified by the students in their local communities. This activity benefited 564 students in 2018.

<https://makebraga.pt/>



© Yiannis Tiannakopoulos, Caritas Hellas



© Yiannis Tiannakopoulos, Caritas Hellas

Skills and language training, Caritas Hellas (Greece)

Apart from the trainings offered in the context of Employability and Livelihoods, in 2017 Caritas Hellas centred its educational activities on English and Greek language classes for adults and children.

Specific courses for the illiterate population were also designed. The courses mainly targeted refugees and migrants, since basic language skills have been proven essential for social and labour market integration. Other educational activities included; basic skills computer classes for the refugee and migrant population in Athens and Thessaloniki, afternoon tutoring for school children, intercultural and social informative sessions, and more.

Reception conditions in the islands are sub-standard. In Moria, young minors are put in detention because there is no alternative appropriate space to accommodate them. Vulnerable women share the same space with young men. There are overcrowded camps, because there is no heating (they start fires inside the tents, causing dangerous accidents), inappropriate access to toilets and the bathrooms, which are not adequate. Almost no NGOs are allowed inside the hotspot anymore, because its management has been transferred to the state, alluding to the difficulty that the state is having in ensuring safety and human rights norms are met.

CriArte, Diocesan Caritas in Coimbra, Portugal

CriArte is a social entrepreneurship project that seeks to leverage the acquisition of autonomy and employability skills of people living in deprived neighbourhoods, with a particular focus on gypsy women. The project promotes and validates the personal and socio-professional skills of socially disadvantaged people in order to boost their integration.

The target group is composed of socially disadvantaged individuals living in social housing in Coimbra. The project is implemented in the S. José Community Centre, a service developed by the diocesan Cáritas in Coimbra and located in a social rehousing neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city. This area is prone to many social inequalities and problems, such as violence, poverty, drug addictions and trafficking, school dropouts, ethnic tensions, among others.

The project is promoted by the diocesan Caritas in Coimbra, along with a broad partnership, and seeks to promote the participation of said target group to raise awareness on circular production in solidarity.

In order to bring about integration, especially of gypsy women, the S. José Centre has been operating an occupational workshop space for 11 years, which allows for the acquisition of personal and social skills and is also aimed at transforming mentalities and behaviours and respecting interculturalism.

The need to expand this concept to a more cohesive and comprehensive project, led to the launch of CriArte in 2015, which received funding from a national programme coordinated by the Portuguese High Commissariat for Migration. The excellent results achieved, garnered approval for a second phase of the project, referred to as CriArte 2G.

The first phase was aimed at training, employment, and education, simultaneously, with a view to creating and launching a product line (supported by a designer). Together with the training provided, throughout the project, would empower people to create their own business through a social incubator solution.

The second phase went further, automatically employing two beneficiaries, besides the other activities that had already been developed. Since the beginning of the project, 24 training sessions for scholar certifications, soft skills and needling had been organised, 36 women became certified, and several workshops had been offered. Four seamstresses and one designer were hired by Caritas, as a result.

<https://www.caritascoimbra.pt/project/criarte/>

Social and Solidarity Economy – ELBA, Caritas Hellas (Greece)

Over the last couple of years, and particularly since the beginning of the Greek financial crisis, the idea of social and solidarity economy has become increasingly appealing to parties interested in providing viable solutions, with a social impact, through the promotion of social entrepreneurship. Caritas Hellas has embraced this vision and is gradually becoming an active agent in the development of such initiatives across Greece. An example is the ELBA project, involving 11 Caritas organisations, which focuses on social entrepreneurship as an emergency response to the labour market crisis in the Balkan area.

The main activities of the project include an educational programme for the local coordinators, the social entrepreneurs and the local churches, a feasibility study for an antipoverty school/school for social economy, accompaniment, counselling and financial support to existing social enterprises and regional and national mobilisation actions and awareness raising. As part of the ELBA project, three new social economy initiatives have been established in Greece, while another 134 applications are being considered from the last tender call.

2.1.1.2. Basic and advanced school courses for migrants and asylum seekers

Migrant schools (Scuolemigranti), Caritas Roma, Italy

Scuolemigranti is a network of voluntary associations in Lazio, Italy that organises free Italian courses for migrant adults and children. It is supported by CESV, the Service Centre for Volunteering Lazio. Caritas Roma's school for migrants is part of a network and runs an Italian School from the Foreigners' Counselling Centre. To date, 112 pupils are enrolled, divided up into five levels: 14 in pre-literacy, 21 in Literacy, 1, 25 in Literacy 2, 20 in Base 1, 17 in Base 2, and 15 in Intermediate.

Courses are held both in the mornings and the afternoons. The teaching body is made up of qualified and volunteer teachers. In addition to the normal teaching activity, students are also involved in activities outside the classroom: guided tours of the Presidential Palace (Quirinale) are planned, as well as some educational walks aimed at helping the migrants familiarise themselves with the neighbourhood where the school is located and other central areas of the city.

2.1.2. After-school parish centres

After school support centres, Caritas Italy

Italian diocesan Caritas and parishes organise various forms of support concerning the educational poverty of minors, especially in the form of afternoon/after school activities. The services are implemented, thanks to volunteers, and in some cases collaboration with the schools, which help identify the children in need of some form of support. This support can include the possibility of offering lunches to children, especially to the youngest, where the canteen services are not universally and structurally provided.

The support to after school children allows the local Caritas to broaden their range of action. In fact, they are able to establish contact with families in difficulty who would not always turn to the Caritas listening centres. In this way, an alternative and different form of outreach and counselling takes place. This is developed in contexts different to the traditional points of assistance and, is thus more widely accepted by the families in question.



© Caritas Italy

After school programme (A casa di Leo), Diocesan Caritas of Potenza, Italy

The “A Casa di Leo” afterschool programme was founded in 2008 on the initiative of the diocesan Caritas of Potenza, in the Bucaletto neighbourhood, a socially risky area of the city, where many families face economic and unemployment problems. Even the educational and cultural poverty of young people and adults is widespread in this area, with a high rate of early school leaving. Ten young volunteers are active in the after school programme, under the supervision of two expert social workers. The children who are welcomed are between ten and 18 years of age and remain along a path that can last several years. The cases are reported by Caritas Counselling Centre and by the city schools. For four years, the after school programme has developed a family approach: action is not only devoted to children but also to family members, who become actively involved in different ways. For instance: parents and children study together, have a snack together or participate in trips and excursions, workshop activities, etc. One activity, the laboratory on emotions, for instance, was a great success. The kids and their parents – under the supervision of a psychologist – painted pictures to depict their emotions. An exhibition of the paintings was then opened to the whole city. Moreover, the students enjoy studying in a library with many texts, a beautiful place, in contrasts with the urban degradation and poverty of the reference territory.

2.1.3. Projects set up in coordination with schools



good game! Integrated learning group, IN VIA Hamburg, DE

The integrated learning group good game! is a project of IN VIA Hamburg e.V., run in cooperation with the school and youth welfare service of Hamburg. good game! supports ten pupils and their families for the duration of about a year in their day-to-day school life. The goal is to enhance pupils' school and societal participation.

The linchpin is a professional football training taking place, three days a week and is incorporated within the school teaching. The goals and focal points of the socio-pedagogical work are to strengthen the pupils' integration into the community, to initiate a network of support and help for the families and to enhance their parents' parenting skills. The situation of the pupils is affected by complex psycho-social impairments and their families' precarious living circumstances. Their behaviour is determined by a lack of alignment or limited bonds, a low developed sense of right and wrong, and a low tolerance for frustration.

These characteristics typically result in hyperactivity, restlessness, high aggression towards themselves and/or others, often decreased or poor school performance, and a sense of threat or risk of becoming the school "losers".

By accepting cooperative rules in a team, gaining a sense of achievement during the football training and through concerted resource-oriented and socio-pedagogical support, the pupils are able to develop or rediscover basic social skills, recognise their own goals and finally develop the willingness "to achieve something for themselves".

The project is promoted by the Department of Labour, Social Affairs, Family and Integration and the Department for School and Vocational Training of the city of Hamburg.

2.1.4. Family budgeting and financial education for adults

A Ray of Light, in collaboration with the Diocesan Caritas of Pescia and of Pistoia, Italy

The experience of observing poverty in the listening centres in Italy suggests that many situations of service users' difficulties derive from a lack of competence in dealing with the administrative and financial aspects of family life. Believing that investing in financial education means investing in the future of the country, several diocesan Caritas have developed training courses and family tutoring paths to improve the level of students and adults' financial competencies.

Since 2014, the Foundation A Ray of Light, in collaboration with the Diocesan Caritas of Pescia and the Diocesan Caritas of Pistoia, has therefore been promoting financial and entrepreneurial education of students and adults. The project aims to spread key concepts and knowledge required for a conscious management of money, to provide the tools to effectively apply to the banking and financial world, and to develop and promote an entrepreneurial mentality among young people and adults.

The 28 anti-usury foundations, promoted by local churches in Italy, also implement an educational and informative preventive action, spreading a culture inspired by the values of solidarity and sobriety. In cooperation with 100 connected listening centres and the support of more than 1,000 volunteers, through various tools (manuals, personalised accompaniment, meetings, seminars, study and research groups, conferences, debates, etc.), the consortium of foundations propose lifestyles – personal and community – that seek to enable people facing economic challenges to develop a responsible attitude towards the way in which they spend their incomes.

2.2. Good government initiatives and policy measures

Good practice in Italy – “Control room” on school leaving and educational poverty

The Ministry of Education set up a “Control room” on school leaving and educational poverty in May 2017. The group studied documentation produced in institutional bodies, such as the Council of Europe, the UN, the Italian Parliament, and analysed and compared good practices already present in Italy. In addition to a complete overview of the phenomenon, the Control room issued a set of recommendations and actions to be implemented in the next five years to tackle school dropout and educational poverty, through the adoption of a “national law enforcement plan against school dropouts”.

Good practice in Italy – national fund against educational poverty

In 2016, the Italian government and Banking Foundations signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the management of a fund for the fight against children’s educational poverty. The intention behind the fund was “to support experimental interventions aimed at removing the obstacles of economic and social inclusion and that prevent the full use of educational processes by minors”. The fund has a budget of €120 million a year for three years.

The implementation of the fund has been assigned to a new social enterprise, known as “With the Children” (Con i Bambini), in order to allocate resources through calls for proposals. The strategic orientation choices are defined by the steering committee in which the Banking Foundations, the Italian government, civil society organisations and representatives of L’Istituto Nazionale per l’Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche (INAPP) and the Einaudi Institute for Economics and Finance (EIEF) are represented equally. Among the first three calls, 271 projects were selected. The interventions are expected to involve more than 500,000 children and teenagers, together with their families, who live in dire conditions, along with 6,500 associations. The regional and multiregional projects are supported with a total of €213 million.

Good practice in Italy – school lunch and food support

School lunches provided to children aged five to 13 are an important way to support families in need and to teach children about nutrition and healthy habits. Well-balanced school meals are linked to improved concentration in class, improved academic outcomes, and reduced numbers of sick leave days. Many countries in Europe have policies that support schools in providing free or low-cost meals of high quality.

But in Italy, the canteen services in public schools is limited to primary school (to the age of 14), causing difficulties for families who are not able to offer a proper and punctual meal to their children. Statistically, it has been proven that the possibility of having a meal at lunchtime reduces the rate of school dropouts, especially in the poorer areas of the country.

Good practice in Greece – school meals programme

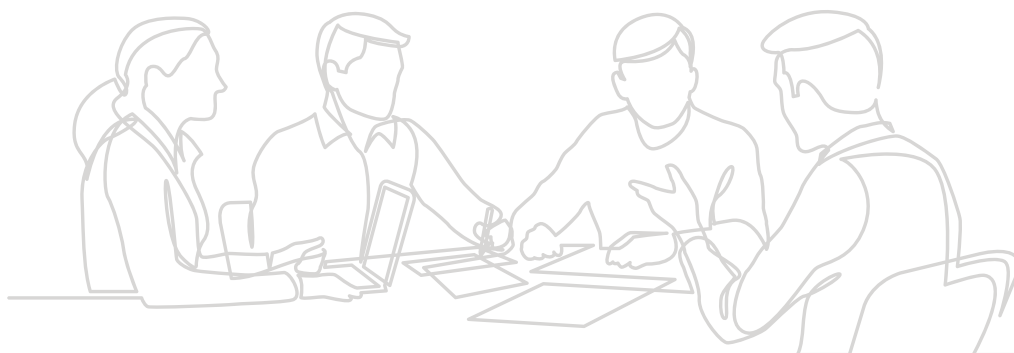
The Greek Ministry of Education continued its “school meals” programme in the 2018-2019 school year at selected schools in Greece, where very high levels of unemployment exist. In accordance with the evaluation of the pilot phase, the sponsored school meal appeared to be the only meal some children obtained. For the current academic year, the measure was extended to also include evening classes at high school (typically for working (young) adults or early school drop outs).

Good practice in Portugal – free school manuals for all the students until the 6th grade

The Portuguese Ministry of Education implemented the measure in 2017 for the distribution of school manuals, free for all the students of primary school age. In 2018, the measure was extended to include students up to the sixth grade. This policy is a step towards improving the national education system and a first step in guaranteeing free education to everyone. The school manuals, mandatory for the classes, represent a high cost for many families, for which the majority find impossible to cover, in particular those with no or low incomes.

Good practice in Germany – policy for children and youth

The education policy in Germany is mostly a regional (Länder) competency. There are several programmes dedicated to combating early school-leaving and early drop-outs, which aim at ensuring better quality teaching, better educational results and/or better reading and speaking skills.



Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, this study confirms that poor education and poverty are often interconnected, suggesting that poverty is directly correlated with an inadequate level of educational attainment. Evidence from the study's findings show that significant groups among the Caritas service users, generally affected by poverty and social exclusion tend to have low levels of formal education. Another challenge facing Caritas service users is the risk of loss of competences which occur during long periods of unemployment. The testimonies show how a low level of education affects people for the rest of their lives and makes it all the more difficult to cope. The considerable vulnerability of the formative capital that emerges from the Caritas data mainly affects people of active schooling age, those who would mostly need and benefit from an adequate educational qualification. In accordance with the study's findings, the age group between 18 and 25 evidences that more people than average are poorly educated. Though, for them in particular there is hope, because at this age, it is still relatively easy to learn and get a (better) job later on, provided that access to education is guaranteed in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability and adequacy.

Many of our service users have children. They also suffer the consequences of poor education opportunities their parents were subjected to in their youth. The vulnerability of formative capital also puts the education path of their children at risk and thus contributes to the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion.

Lack of access to or an inadequate level of social benefits also prevents people from going beyond the "survival modus". People need to meet their basic needs, food and shelter first before they can think about pursuing training courses to increase their chances in the labour market.

On basis of the findings of this study, Caritas Europa formulates the following recommendations:

Recommendations to the EU:

- Enable all people of the active age group to reconnect to the labour market.
- Promote, through the available financial instruments, provisions for a path to recuperate lost school years and to possible qualifications and skills training programmes as soon as possible.
- Build on the good example of the Youth Guarantee and consider extending this to other age groups, particularly to people living on benefits.
- Support national measures to prevent early school leaving by providing tailored policy guidance.



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Recommendations to EU Member States:

- Ensure adequate levels of social benefits or social (financial) assistance in particular to families with children of a school-going age.
- Invest in education to guarantee the availability, accessibility, affordability and adequacy of education, both to children and adults.
- Improve educational guidance counselling services and provide tailor made accompanying services to individual children in need, in general and at key moments in which they have to choose a type of school.

- Increase structured and permanent counselling desks/centres in schools, relying upon adequate and stable professional staff (not necessarily internal to the teaching staff), and create cooperative structures in local areas and in communities to support children from an early age.
- Tackle school dropout by strengthening laboratory teaching, with more flexible and open management of classes to include the organisation of workshop and practical activities inside and outside of the school, going beyond school hours and curriculum subjects, supporting digital innovation and laboratories, fostering teacher training, etc.
- Prevent and address truancy by investing in measures that identify and target particular youth at risk, to prevent school dropouts.
- Promote supervision paths for teachers and for educators who can help teachers to welcome and deal with frustrations and feelings of isolation at work.
- Support teachers and educators to provide useful tools in their daily interactions with school children, providing skills for them to address specific cases.
- Strengthen and reinforce educators to be able to apply healthy and proactive remedies that result in reducing the exponential increase in recent years of requests for certifications, visits by neuropsychiatrists, registration of support figures, or otherwise.
- Provide free or low cost school lunches and food support to children in secondary schools, who are currently excluded from canteen services.
- Provide broader support for school expenses including those expenses that are not normally reimbursed by public social services (i.e. visits, school-trips, extracurricular activities, stationery material, digital and computer tools, free access to home Wi-Fi, etc.).
- Support young people by guaranteeing protected and healthy spaces that encourage them to meet, actively engage, that inspire and invoke their creativity and passions, help them discern and make choices that are positive for them.
- Improve information and guidance about public services (in schools, universities, national employment centres), about social support, and about accompanying services that foster one-to-one relationships with the aim of decreasing education-related poverty levels.
- Set up projects that increase the educational competence of teachers and parents. Teach teachers to take the opportunity of interventions with the children to involve the parents and offer them training opportunities.
- Provide tools and knowledge to address trends in youth distress, such as bullying, self-harm, hikikomori and to address the imbalances facing NEETs.

- In using European funds and relying on strengthened Employment Centres, design vocational retraining programmes for adults with low levels of education, who find it difficult to integrate into the work world.
- Ensure access to lifelong learning to unemployed people, ideally offering government funded training or social economy job options.
- Promote civic and financial education courses, including in specific cases reading and writing courses.
- Include in school curricula a focus on situations of educational poverty, where different actors fulfil complementary roles (training, work placement, orientation, parenting support, etc.). The direction and coordination of these interventions must be entrusted to public institutions (e.g.: schools, municipalities, social service providers).
- Improve coordination among public authorities to provide and bring about the opportunity to participate in school certification trainings with a guarantee that the trainings correspond to labour market needs.



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1. The European Semester is a cycle of economic and budget policy coordination within the EU. It is part of the economic governance of the European Union. During the European Semester, Member States align their economic and budgetary policies with the objectives and standards agreed at EU level.
2. The publications are all available for consultation and are downloadable at: **www.caritas.eu**
3. Information about the occupational condition of the people is available for Greece, Italy and Portugal. In Germany, reference is made to the family unit's types of economic income.
4. In order to enhance the possibility of comparison with the Italian situation, the terminology of the school levels in use in Italy is used in the table. It should be emphasised that in the three countries considered, the achievement of the same scholastic levels may take place at different ages.

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**Above all the education of youth
from every social background
has to be undertaken, so that
there can be produced not only
men and women of refined
talents, but those great-souled
persons who are so desperately
required by our times.**

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