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Answer given by Executive Vice-President Mînzatu
on behalf of the European Commission
(27.6.2025)

The Commission acknowledges the situation regarding school canteens in Sicily and is working closely with Italy to ensure the effective implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan¹. Investment 1.2² supports the construction or renovation of canteen spaces for at least 1 000 structures³. This would allow schools to extend school time, increase the educational offer and keep schools open beyond school hours. The Commission will assess its implementation via the target for ‘Structures to host students beyond school time’⁴, whose completion is expected by Q2 2026.

The European Social Fund + (ESF+) regional programme (RP) in Sicily contributes to combat education poverty and improve access to essential services. Under its specific objective 4.5⁵, the RP launched in 2023 the call ‘Open schools for the territory’⁶, making available EUR 27 million⁷ to enhance training provision, supporting students at risk of failure and dropout, and promoting schools as cultural hubs. The call also supports access to school canteens, covering the costs of meals for students participating to afternoon activities.

The ESF+ contributes to the implementation of the Child Guarantee through targeted actions and structural reforms to tackle child poverty. To this end, Italy has earmarked EUR 1.1 billion of ESF+ resources, with roughly EUR 25 million⁸ to be invested in Sicily. The Commission regularly monitors these funds to ensure goals are met. Member States have developed national plans for the Child Guarantee, also overseen by the Commission. Through these efforts, the ESF+ strives to break the cycle of poverty and provide every child with equal opportunities, a crucial aspect for the effective implementation of the Child Guarantee, particularly in regions like Sicily.

¹ https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility/country-pages/italys-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en.

² Plan for the extension of full-time under Mission 4, Component 1.

³ The Council Implementing Decision (CID) does not envisage a specific distribution of such structures across Italian regions. It is therefore within the Member State’s remit to decide the allocation of such structures over the national territory.

⁴ M4C1-21, part of the 10th payment request: ‘At least 1 000 structures are built or upgraded to facilitate the extension of school time and the opening of schools to the territory beyond school hours’.

⁵ ESO 4.5 ‘Improving the quality, inclusiveness, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems, including through the validation of non-formal and informal learning, to support the acquisition of key competences, including entrepreneurial and digital skills, and promoting the introduction of dual training systems and apprenticeships (ESF+)’.

⁶ Avviso 10/2023: <https://www.sicilia-fse.it/avvisi-e-bandi/pr-fse-2021-2027/avviso-10-2023>.

⁷ EUR 9 million annually for three consecutive school years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26.

⁸ On top of this specific allocation for Sicily, the ESF+ national programmes ‘Social inclusion’ and ‘School and skills’ also contribute to the Child Guarantee across Italy, including in Sicily.