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Answer given by Executive Vice-President Minzatu
on behalf of the European Commission
(24.11.2025)

Eurostat's employment data confirm the positive trend observed in Italy since the start of the post-COVID recovery, with employment rates increasing everywhere across the country, reaching a record-level rate of 67.1% among people aged 20-64 nationally in 2024. Despite this growth, the employment rate at national level, not only for Sicily and southern regions, remains still far below the EU average. As highlighted by the Country Report 2025¹, regional disparities are particularly pronounced² and result from structural weaknesses in southern regions and a prevalence of smaller, less competitive and less innovative firms offering fewer job opportunities.

Supporting Member States and regions achieving high employment levels is part of the ESF+ general objective, as indicated by Article 3(1) of the ESF+ Regulation³. Under specific objectives set out in article 4(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1057, ESF+ programmes can support improving access to employment and activation measures for all jobseekers, unemployed and inactive people outside the labour force. Moreover, Italy is also required⁴ to target at least 12,5 % of its ESF+ resources to dedicated actions and structural reforms for youth employment, vocational education and training⁵.

At 73%, Italy's 2030 employment rate target remains substantially above current levels, calling for continued efforts. As indicated in the Country Report 2025, Italy should work towards reaching its 2030 target for example by better using the potential of underrepresented groups through a more effective active labour market policy system, addressing skills mismatches and labour shortages, shifting taxation away from labour, improving job quality as well as women's participation in the labour market through access to quality childcare and long-term care.

¹ https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b1061802-4b9c-4ecb-9a38-d6fa9d7ef64d_en?filename=IT_CR_SWD_2025_212_1_EN_autre_document_travail_service_part1_v3.pdf.

² In 2024, the employment rate between the North-East and the South regions recorded a gap of 22.5 pps.

³ Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

⁴ In accordance with art. 7(6) of the ESF+ Regulation.

⁵ Around 40% of the overall ESF+ allocation of the regional programme ESF+ Sicily 2021-27 (i.e. EUR 430.8 million on a total budget of EUR 1 061 million) pursues these goals.