

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-000059/26
to the Commission
Giuseppe Antoci (The Left)
(12 January 2026)**

Subject: Economic growth forecasts for 2026 and regional disparities in Italy, with specific reference to Sicily

A recent report by the research office of the CGIA (trades and small enterprises) association estimates Italy's GDP, in nominal terms, to be over EUR 2 300 billion, and puts real growth at around + 0.7%. It would seem, as part of these forecasts, that Sicily has one of the lowest real growth rates (at around + 0.28%) and that in some provinces, including Enna and Ragusa, growth is contracting. These estimates are only forecasts, but point to the risk of the gaps between regions widening in relation to the cohesion objectives under Article 174 TFEU. Furthermore, given that the NRRP milestones and targets have to be met by 31 August 2026, priority should be awarded to strengthening implementation capacity and the quality of spending.

Could the Commission therefore state:

1. What concrete measures it will take in 2026 to bolster administrative capacity in Sicily (including through the TSI and technical assistance), improve project selection and expedite the implementation of the ERDF and ESF+, with the timeline and indicators for this?
2. Whether it will in 2026 promote targeted initiatives for SMEs, the digital and green transitions and youth employment in the south of Italy, specifying the area-based criteria, indicative resources, timetable and performance monitoring that will be applied?

Submitted: 12.1.2026

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Fitto on behalf of the European Commission
(3 March 2026)**

1. As for each programme funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in Italy, an Administrative Regeneration Plan ('PRiGA') has been drafted for the Regional Programme Sicily⁽¹⁾ ('RP'). The PRiGA sets objectives, actions, resources and indicators to face administrative capacity needs for a smooth implementation of the RP.

In support of the plan, the regional authorities can make use of the technical assistance priority of both the ERDF programme (EUR 134.4 million) and the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) programme (EUR 42.4 million).

Some actions in the PRiGA are supported by the National Programme 'Capacity for Cohesion', which also supports the RP by providing on-demand expertise services and by hiring permanent staff to be allocated in the Regional administration for its implementation⁽²⁾.

Additional assistance to Italy for administrative capacity is currently provided by the Commission also through the Technical Support Instrument (TSI)⁽³⁾.

2. The RP Sicily allocates EUR 331 million (ERDF) for measures of specific support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)⁽⁴⁾.

With regard to the ESF+, the RP priority 4 (EUR 204 million) is entirely dedicated to youth employment. Moreover, promotion of employment and skills, especially among young people, is among the priorities of the national programme Youth, Women and Jobs, which focuses mainly on southern regions⁽⁵⁾.

The Single Market Programme (SME Pillar) provides guidance and free advice to SMEs via the Enterprise Europe Network⁽⁶⁾. A broader support comes from calls for proposals in sectors such as tourism⁽⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁾ https://priga.capcoe.gov.it/news/dettaglio/11yYGZUBIId_J40Uy7FR.

⁽²⁾ According to the information available to the Commission, out of the 70 hirings planned, 56 persons have already been hired and entered into service by January 2026. In addition, the service centre is currently being set up to complement the activities already in place. Other support activities may be activated by the relevant administrations and contracting authorities within the scope of individual economic frameworks.

⁽³⁾ For example, with the 'Next generation Behavioural Public Administration in Italy' project in Italy, the TSI is supporting the Department of Public Administration to improve the planning process for Italian administrations, especially at the regional and local level through their PIAO (Piano Integrato di Attività e Organizzazione) plans. Improving the PIAO process for regional and local authorities helps them set clearer priorities, convert them into feasible initiatives with measurable targets and accountability, and align people, skills, and organisation to improve their implementation capacity.

⁽⁴⁾ Operational details on these opportunities can be found in the programme website: <https://www.euroinfocilia.it/bandi-e-avvisi-pr-fesr-21-27/>.

⁽⁵⁾ The National Programme allocates EUR 1.9 billion out of its total ESF+ budget of EUR 2.7 billion to the south of Italy.

⁽⁶⁾ Including local network contacts in Sicily: Local contact points in Italy | Enterprise Europe Network: <https://een.ec.europa.eu/local-contact-points/it>.

⁽⁷⁾ Calls for proposals — European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA): https://eismea.ec.europa.eu/funding-opportunities/calls-proposals_en.