Italy

Structural Focus - Unpaid Care & Time Poverty

Policy Recommendations

1.Sustained Public Investment in Universal Care Infrastructure

Italy should scale and equalise public investment in formal care services, with a focus on expanding affordable, high-quality childcare for children aged 0–3 and comprehensive elder and dependent care across all regions. This is a critical economic policy lever to address structural time poverty, which disproportionately limits primarily women's ability to pursue advanced training, digital work, and entrepreneurship. By shifting the burden of care from unpaid labor to well-funded public services, the state can unlock broader labor force participation of caregivers and accelerate inclusive growth. Evidence from OECD consistently underscores the economic returns of care investment, reinforcing its role as a cornerstone of both gender equality and sustainable development.

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Hypatia
Digital Gender Gap, Digital Violence, Housemaking. An education and awareness programme

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Access Layer of the Digital Gender Gap

Identified Issue:	Italy faces a pronounced "Grey Digital Divide," with older women (over 65) being disproportionately excluded from online services and civic participation (a 10% gender gap among this cohort).

Policy Recommendations

1.Fund and scale regional digital facilitation points

To combat digital exclusion among elderly women and homemakers, especially in underserved areas such as Southern Italy, regional governments should systematically fund and expand the network of "Digital Facilitation Points" currently operating in public libraries and Civic Centers. These centers must provide free, structured, in-person digital training tailored to the needs of these groups, who often face cultural and confidence-related barriers rather than purely technological ones. This recommendation builds on the existing Repubblica Digitale initiative and leverages the proven success of similar programs already underway in regions like Puglia and Sicily, offering a scalable national model.

2.Integrate digital Literacy with E-Government Service Adoption

To ensure that the digitalization of public services does not leave vulnerable citizens behind, all services transitioning to digital-only formats, such as healthcare bookings, pension applications, and SPID activation should be required to include embedded, mandatory digital literacy support as part of their rollout. This directly ties skill acquisition to immediate, practical needs, addressing the widespread "lack of perceived relevance" that often deters older users. The Italian Strategy for Digital Skills already prioritizes the uptake of digital public services, offering a clear policy framework for integrating training at the point of service.

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Usage Layer of the Digital Gender Gap

Identified Issue:	Women's digital engagement is characterized by passive use (consumption, communication), with a deficit in utilizing digital tools for economic or professional empowerment. This is exacerbated by regional cultural norms.

Policy Recommendations

1.Integrate practical economic skills into local digital training

To shift women's digital engagement from passive use to active economic participation, all publicly funded digital training programs, such as those under Repubblica Digitale, should include core modules on digital commerce, secure online financial management, setting up digital business profiles, and accessing gig economy platforms. These skills must be prioritized in regions with low female labor participation, particularly in Southern Italy, and adapted for women facing time poverty due to caregiving responsibilities. By equipping women with the tools to earn and manage income digitally, this policy directly tackles the usage divide and promotes digital inclusion as a pathway to economic empowerment. Existing models like Fondazione Mondo Digitale's She Means Business program provides a proven template for localised, results-driven implementation.

2.Strengthen public response to technology-facilitated gender-based violence

To ensure women can safely and confidently participate in digital spaces, Italy must significantly strengthen its institutional response to technology-facilitated gender-based violence by increasing funding for specialised training of judicial, law enforcement, and mental health professionals. This must be paired with support for civil society monitoring initiatives and targeted digital media literacy campaigns to counter the documented pattern in which public indignation at online GBV often triggers further waves of hate speech. A robust, proactive response shifts the current model from passive tolerance to active enforcement, reinforcing trust in digital environments and addressing a major barrier to sustained female digital engagement.

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Skills Layer of the Digital Gender Gap

Identified Issue:	Italy exhibits a systemic failure in the education pipeline, ranking last (27th) in the EU for female ICT graduates (only 1.7% of Italian women hold an ICT degree compared to 8.2% of men).

Policy Recommendations

1.Introduce mandatory cross-curricular computational thinking

To address gender disparity in tech from the ground up, national education policy should mandate the integration of computational thinking and coding across the curriculum starting in primary school embedding it into multiple subjects rather than confining it to optional tech electives. This must be paired with targeted career guidance in secondary schools to actively challenge gender stereotypes. Such early, systemic intervention is critical to disrupting the "leaky pipeline" that causes most girls to self-exclude from technical paths before adolescence, contributing to Italy's alarmingly low female graduation rate in ICT. The EU Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027) supports this kind of structural reform, while the 40% rise in Women Startups in Italy underscores that demand for skills is growing. What's missing is an educational pipeline to match.

2.Establish a national STEM mentorship network with leadership targets

The Ministry of Education and Research should launch and fund a high-visibility national mentorship network that connects high school girls and female university students with women working in technical fields, research, and tech leadership. To ensure institutional commitment, a portion of university funding should be tied to measurable increases in female enrollment in ICT degrees. Visible role models are essential to breaking persistent cultural stereotypes that frame STEM as male-dominated or inaccessible to women. Linking mentorship with funding incentives builds accountability and drives systemic change from the ground up. Corporate programs like the Amazon Women in Innovation scholarship and AWS re/Start already provide effective models that the public sector can scale nationally.

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Employment Layer of the Digital Gender Gap

Identified Issue:	Women scientists and engineers (S&Es) consistently account for a low proportion of the total labour force in Italy. Their representation (1.6% in 2021) is significantly below the EU-27 average of 3.4%. Gender balance also remains unmet in research leadership: in 2022, women made up only 35% of board members (EU average 38%) and 33% of board leaders in research institutions (EU average 40%).

Policy Recommendations

1.Strengthen leadership pipelines and research visibility for women in STEM

To address the persistent underrepresentation of women in senior research positions and increase their visibility in scientific output, research institutions should adopt targeted measures to strengthen leadership pipelines for women in STEM. This includes structured mentorship and sponsorship programs for early- and mid-career women researchers, transparent promotion pathways, and dedicated support for women-led research projects. Institutions should improve gender balance in authorship and patenting by incentivising collaborative publishing and innovation models that actively include women. These actions would build on Italy's moderate progress, such as the rise of women in Grade A positions but aim to close remaining gaps in research leadership and output. Italy's participation in EU initiatives like *MINDtheGEPs* and national frameworks such as the *Strategia Nazionale per la Parità di Genere* offer both precedent and infrastructure for implementation.

2.Fund "Career re-entry" programs with guaranteed care support

To re-integrate women with STEM qualifications who have left the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities, national policy should allocate targeted funding, through the PNRR or similar instruments for structured career re-entry or "returnship" programs. These initiatives should be explicitly designed with built-in care support, such as subsidized or on-site childcare and eldercare, to remove one of the most cited barriers to women's workforce re-entry: the work-life balance conflict. By pairing professional upskilling with guaranteed care solutions, this approach enables women to regain career momentum and bridges the gap between talent loss and labor market demand. The ESF+ program *Supporting Single Parents on a Digital Pathway to Employment* provides a practical model for integrating digital training with care infrastructure to overcome participation barriers.

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Innovation Layer of the Digital Gender Gap

Identified Issue:	In the Italian market, female entrepreneurs encounter greater obstacles in obtaining credit, as they are 6% more likely than male entrepreneurs to be required to provide collateral, even though interest rates remain the same regardless of gender.

Policy Recommendations

1.Promote financial transparency to address gender bias in credit access

To address the persistent issue of gender bias in access to finance, Italy should implement a requirement for banks and financial institutions to collect, anonymise, and publicly report disaggregated data on credit access and loan pricing, categorised by gender, business size, and region. This transparency measure would facilitate the identification and rectification of "taste-based discrimination," a phenomenon in which women-led enterprises experience higher borrowing costs despite demonstrating lower default rates. The public dissemination of such data would foster accountability and encourage fairer lending practices, while also enabling regulators to monitor systemic bias effectively.

2.Fund "Career re-entry" programs with guaranteed care support

To re-integrate women with STEM qualifications who have left the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities, national policy should allocate targeted funding, for structured career re-entry or “returnship” programs. These initiatives should be explicitly designed with built-in care support, such as subsidized or on-site childcare and eldercare, to remove one of the most cited barriers to women's workforce re-entry: the work-life balance conflict. By pairing professional upskilling with guaranteed care solutions, this approach enables carers to regain career momentum and bridges the gap between talent loss and labor market demand. The ESF+ program *Supporting Single Parents on a Digital Pathway to Employment* provides a practical model for integrating digital training with care infrastructure to overcome participation barriers.

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