

ⓘ Anyone can publish on Medium per our [Policies](#), but we don't fact-check every story. For more info about the coronavirus, see [cdc.gov](#).

Day 54: life in Italy under lockdown. Are we the world? How are the children?



CFlisi

Apr 30 · 4 min read ★



Mojca JJ from Pixabay

Cabin fever, corona style, is nothing like I remember the term. Back when my kids were toddlers, cabin fever kicked in when the snow outside was almost a foot high, the temperature was zero degrees Fahrenheit, nursery school sessions were cancelled, and offices were closed.

Back then, no Internet, no computers, not much on cable television. We weren't prohibited from going outside, but the streets were impassible and my sons did not have Arctic-suitable snowsuits. We were on climatic lockdown: home alone with two children under the age of three.

A big difference between then and now is the duration. The snow didn't persist for weeks on end. Within a few days my sons returned to nursery school and I to work. Instead, here in Italy, the parents who have been staying home with their offspring didn't know until this week when school would reopen (it will happen in September). Meanwhile, working parents who will be returning to their jobs in stages during the month of May have a huge problem: what to do with their children?

This question is foremost in the mind of Lia Quartapelle, an economist and academic from Milan, who has served in Italy's *Camera dei Deputati* (like the US House of Representatives) since 2013. Her areas of specialization are the economy and international relations, but with the corona crisis she has also been focusing on the impact of quarantine on children and families.

Italy is a country with relatively few children per household and a negative fertility rate, plus fewer than half of working age Italian women are employed, the lowest in Europe. But still, about 30 percent of kids between 0 and 2 were enrolled in early childhood education and care services until the crisis closed them down.

“Children were the first to go into quarantine {when schools closed} and it seems they will be the last to come out of it,” Quartapelle points out. She is working with colleagues and counterparts in France, Germany, and Spain to identify and implement the best solutions for problems that have arisen as a result.

They are focusing on three things in particular:

1. the developmental impact on children who are cut off from schooling
2. the logistical impact on parents who need to work outside the home and can't afford private caregivers
3. the economic impact on families trying to reconcile #1 and #2.

She is working with other deputies to ensure that lockdown does not mean the worsening of conditions for women. For example, she reports situations where working mothers of small children have tried to “telework” from home, can't manage, and have to quit their jobs, with subsequent financial

consequences. One interim solution has been to allocate a certain amount of money to parents who opt to take a leave of absence to stay home with their children. This works for the immediate crisis, but is not sustainable if lockdown persists, or returns periodically.

The academic needs of students in middle school and high school are being temporarily addressed through lessons by Internet. However, in certain areas of Italy, up to 30 percent of students have no access to a computer or tablet. Parliament has responded to this problem with the allocation of €70 million to help such families. Additional response at the regional level predictably varies. In Lombardia up to €500 per family are available to provide a computer or tablet.

Quartapelle and colleagues are working with the providers of Internet services to ensure that all families can afford access. That works in high-density Lombardia, but what about remote areas of Italy where Internet does not arrive at all? She recognizes that providing the network and the tablet are not enough in some situations. Her task force is considering special mobile units that might go to such areas, or volunteers who might go into specific homes to help students one-on-one. Meanwhile, the government-sponsored television network RAI has launched a new TV program called *Siamo Tutti Maestri* (we are all teachers) to impart lessons. “Television is not interactive but everyone has it,” notes the deputy, adding that Portugal has used this channel effectively.

The details of how schools will be organized in the fall are still

under discussion. Like public schools in the US, children in Italy are sometimes in classrooms of 20 to 30 students. One-meter distancing would not be possible at that size with current classrooms. Should timing for the school year change? Should classes be held in shifts? Architectural changes? For the moment the government is completely open in terms of possible solutions, reports Quartapelle.

Meanwhile, her immediate focus is to help Italian families take advantage of the assistance available to them between now and September. Longer term, she says, “I hope that the world in which we live post-pandemic will be much more aware of the need for international cooperation.”

Cabin-fever-dazed parents would settle for some neighborly cooperation, the sooner the better. Lyrics from “*We are the world, we are the children*” come to mind:

*There comes a time
When we heed a certain call
When the world must come together as one
There are people dying
Oh, and it's time to lend a hand to life —
The greatest gift of all.*

###

Discover Medium

Welcome to a place where words matter. On Medium, smart voices and original ideas take center stage - with no ads in sight. Watch

Make Medium yours

Follow all the topics you care about, and we'll deliver the best stories for you to your homepage and inbox. Explore

Become a member

Get unlimited access to the best stories on Medium — and support writers while you're at it. Just \$5/month. Upgrade

[About](#)

[Help](#)

[Legal](#)