

Italy: StudioSì Fund makes available zero-interest student loans for Southern Italy



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- EIB-managed “StudioSì” fund awards first €2 million in zero-interest loans to support students from Southern Italy enrolled in university in Italy or abroad.
- By covering tuition and living costs, StudioSì supports access to higher education and improves professional opportunities, notably for students from lower income families.
- Total availability of €100 million in EU social funds, of which 75% for students from Southern Italy, and 25% for students from all over the EU who want to study at Southern Italian Universities.

To improve educational and professional opportunities in Southern Italy, the “[StudioSì](#)” fund, founded by the Italian Ministry for University and Research (MUR) and managed by the European Investment Bank (EIB), has awarded its first €2 million in cost-free loans. The fund, benefitting from a €100 million allocation of the [European Social Fund](#) (ESF), supports students from Italy’s eight southern regions who study in Italy or abroad, with zero-interest loans to finance their tuition fees and living costs.

The loans can be requested through two Italian banks, [Intesa San Paolo](#) and

[ICCREA](#), who will each manage half of the total allocation. The financing is meant for students who follow master's studies in one of the twelve specialisations outlined in the [National Strategy for Intelligent Specialisation](#) (SNSI), including agrifood, design, energy and sustainable mobility. Up to 25% of the resources can be used by students from other regions or EU countries, who want to study at a Southern-Italian university, in-line with Italy's National Operational Programme [PON](#).

"StudioSì is the first instrument in Europe to offer financing without interest or requests for collateral to students who can do important things for Italy and the EU." said EIB vice-president **Dario Scannapieco**. *"Thanks to this partnership between the Ministry and the EIB, which makes available European funds through Intesa SanPaolo and Iccrea, thousands of students will have the possibility to finance their studies worry-free, improving educational output. Furthermore, the rotating nature of this fund means that the resources can be re-invested to guarantee wider support to university participation in Italy."*

Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, said: *"We have a collective duty to provide our young people with the tools they need to thrive. With €100 million available from the European Social Fund we can make higher education accessible for so many students in Southern Italy. The zero-interest loans from the StudioSì Fund will allow these students to engage in their studies and careers with greater confidence and financial security. In today's uncertain times, this is particularly welcome."*

An [OECD report](#) from 2019 highlights that 19% of 25-64 year-olds in Italy have a tertiary education, compared with an OECD average of 37%, although tertiary attainment rates are increasing for younger generations. StudioSì is expected to increase educational and professional opportunities for students from Southern Italy, and improve enrolments in universities located in the south, as 90% of foreign students choose Northern-Italian Universities. Thus, the fund can improve the contribution of universities to regional development, with a view to strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion, in a sustainable way.

Background information:

The **European Social Fund** (ESF) is Europe's main instrument for supporting jobs, and promoting social inclusion in EU. It works by investing in Europe's human capital – workers, young people and disadvantaged groups. The ESF finances the implementation of the principles from the European Pillar for Social Rights through actions in the area of employment, education & skills and social inclusion. Website: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf>

Financing conditions:

Funding is accessible for students of all single-cycle and specialist degree classes relating to the 12 areas of the National Strategy of Intelligent Specialisation (SNSI). In particular, the 12 areas of specialisation on which the call is focused are: Aerospace; Agrifood; Blue Growth; Green Chemistry; Cultural Heritage; Design, creativity and Made in Italy; Energy; Smart

Factory; Sustainable mobility; Health, Smart, Secure and Inclusive Communities; Technologies for living environments

The loan is disbursed, without interest and without requiring guarantees, to students or third parties in tranches upon obtaining / maintaining the requirements defined in the stipulation phase (the first tranche can be disbursed before the beginning of the academic year). The disbursement of the tranches is subject to the passing of profit checks carried out by the financial intermediary in progress.

In addition to university fees, up to EUR 10,000 per year, the amount can also support room and board expenses. Students can request lower amounts, for needs they identify themselves, and have the possibility to request early repayment without fees. Final beneficiaries will be able to apply for a maximum funding of 50,000 euros for their entire study period.

The loan has a maximum duration of 25 years from the payment of the first tranche, or a shorter term if so agreed between the parties. Eligible for funding are post-bachelor, single-cycle university courses and masters, coherent with the national strategy for smart specialisation ("SNSI").

[Streamlining public procurement within the EU for more efficient public spending](#)



The Council today adopted a set of conclusions centred on how efficient public procurement rules and practices, combined with increased public spending, can accelerate the economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and lead to a sustainable and more resilient EU economy.

In these conclusions, the Council calls on all authorities involved, be it European, national or regional, to coordinate closely their actions for achieving the following objectives:

- Enhancing efficiency of public procurement to boost recovery and to tackle future crises,
- Setting the right incentives for innovative and sustainable investment and growth in the EU through public procurement,
- Contributing through public procurement to a more resilient EU economy.

The Council calls in particular on the Commission and the member states to use public procurement as a strategic tool to foster sustainable and innovative growth, while reducing administrative burdens and compliance costs at the same time.

Furthermore, the conclusions focus on the need for a level playing field in public procurement to ensure fair competition for a competitive European economy.

[Press release – MEPs set out blueprint for a new Industrial strategy](#)



In a report adopted on Wednesday with 486 votes in favour, 109 against, and 102 abstentions, MEPs call on the Commission to come up with a revised industrial strategy, as the [original strategy](#), published in March 2020, coincided with the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and came out before the [Next Generation EU](#) plan was set up. It could therefore not take into account the impact of the pandemic on European industries.

The new strategy should have two distinct phases, one focusing on recovery and the other on reconstruction and building resilience. The first should focus on maintaining the smooth functioning of the single market, mainly by recapitalising enterprises, saving jobs and adapting production to a post-COVID “new normal”. The second phase should aim to help reconstruct and transform European industry by pursuing the objectives of the twin transitions and reinforcing the EU’s industrial sovereignty and its strategic autonomy, which require a competitive industrial base and massive investment in research and innovation.

Managing the twin transitions: environmental and digital

MEPs stress that the new strategy should in particular help the EU achieve climate-neutrality, deliver on the European Green Deal, manage the twin green

and digital transitions and create high-quality jobs.

It should contain a strong social pillar, address the social consequences of structural change and help hard hit regions to recover economically and socially.

MEPs also highlight the importance of a research-based European pharmaceutical industry to safeguard high-quality manufacturing and guarantee affordable medicines for all patients in need. They call again for a plan to mitigate the risk of medicine shortages.

“Our blueprint for a new and powerful industrial strategy shows that the European Parliament is committed to providing the EU with a vision for its industry that has been missing for too long”, said lead MEP [Carlo Calenda](#) (S&D, IT).

[Press release – Parliament wants to better protect consumers from unsafe products](#)



The resolution on product safety in the Single Market was adopted on Wednesday with 688 in favour (eight against and one abstention).

MEPs emphasise that all products circulating within the EU must comply with product safety rules – whether manufactured inside or outside the EU – in order to assure fairer competition between companies, guarantee traceability, and provide reliable product information to consumers. They urge online platforms and marketplaces to take proactive measures to tackle misleading

practices.

Better market surveillance needed

MEPs insist that if EU rules are not respected, products that pose a safety hazard, contain dangerous chemicals, or have unsafe software must be effectively recalled from the EU market and that the market surveillance system has to be improved. They also stress that it is key to adapt product safety rules to the digital transition. Emerging technologies must be safe and secure. To guarantee this, effective checks must be developed to test high-risk products that use Artificial Intelligence, they say.

The resolution refers also to the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, underlining that it is of paramount importance that products used in emergencies, especially medical and protective equipment, are safe.

“Existing product safety rules have to be made fit for the digital age, since products with emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence embedded in them challenge these rules. All products sold in the EU must be safe, regardless of if they are sold online or offline, produced in or outside the EU, or include emerging technologies or not. However, innovation should not be held back by red tape. We have to concentrate on closing these existing legal gaps,” said Rapporteur [Marion Walsmann](#) (EPP, DE).

New Consumer Agenda

Ahead of the vote, MEPs discussed on Monday the [New Consumer Agenda](#) with Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders. The Commissioner emphasised that both Parliament’s product safety and [sustainability](#) reports shed light on many of the long-term priorities outlined in the new strategy.

MEPs welcomed the new agenda, but also drew attention to a number of issues, including how passenger rights have been widely breached during the pandemic, with consumers receiving no reimbursement or having to wait too long for it.

Catch up with the debate [here](#).

[Press release – Media freedom: EP warns of attempts to silence critics and undermine pluralism](#)



In a resolution adopted with 553 votes to 54 and 89 abstentions, Parliament points to “attempts by governments of some member states to silence critical and independent media and undermine media freedom and pluralism”. MEPs are particularly concerned about the state of public service media in some EU countries, where they have become an “example of pro-government propaganda”.

They stress that media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists are crucial components of the right to freedom of expression and information, and are essential to the democratic functioning of the EU. “Freedom of the media has been deteriorating in recent years”, warns the text, and the COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated this deterioration.

Protect journalists better, particularly women

MEPs see a “growing pattern of intimidation aimed at silencing journalists”, citing the murders of Daphne Caruana Galizia and Ján Kuciak and his fiancée as examples of the risks faced by investigative journalists. They call on public figures to refrain from denigrating journalists, and insist on the legal obligation to investigate all attacks, highlighting that female journalists are especially vulnerable and should be given additional protection.

Excessive media concentration threatens pluralism

The resolution notes that when media ownership is concentrated in the hands of too few people, pluralism is put at risk, making it more difficult to challenge the spread of disinformation. MEPs demand that EU countries take action to avoid excessive concentration and guarantee transparency. They criticise governments for invasive interference in public advertising, and make clear that EU funds must not be spent on government-controlled media or political propaganda.

In this respect, Parliament also calls on the European Commission to assess in each member state how transparent the ownership of media outlets is, as well as private and government interference in the sector, in its annual rule of law assessment. MEPs insist that attempts to damage media freedom and pluralism should be considered a serious and systematic abuse of power that goes against fundamental EU values.

Online hate speech and disinformation

MEPs want a more robust legal framework to prevent and combat increasing online hate speech and call for more collaboration between online platforms and law enforcement authorities. They stress that platforms' voluntary actions are "necessary yet still insufficient" in tackling disinformation, illegal content and foreign interference. Nonetheless, they "must not become private censors" and the removal of illegal content must be subject to safeguards.

Finally, the adopted text highlights concerns about foreign democratic interference seeking to polarise and nullify pluralism and warns of the potentially harmful consequences of manipulating information relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Quote

[Magdalena Adamowicz \(EPP, PL\)](#), rapporteur, stated: "Today we witness democracy being withdrawn, power taken with lies. There is no freedom without media independence, no democracy without media pluralism. Media should serve the truth, not lies. It should serve voters, not those in power, and should be a check on power. Media should protect democracy, but media can also kill it. That is why it must be independent".