

COVID-19 crisis leaves 700,000 children without sufficient food in Italy



Rome, May 14 (RHC)-- The coronavirus pandemic and ensuing economic hardship has left 700,000 children under 15 years of age in Italy without enough food, the country's biggest farming organization has warned.

"The number of children under the age of 15 who need help to get milk or food to eat has risen to 700,000," the farmers organization Coldiretti said in a statement issued in Rome. The "critical" situation has been "aggravated in many families by the closure of schools and school restaurants" which were where many children received a guaranteed hot meal every day, the union said.

The children affected are often from families whose parents lost temporary employment due to the COVID-19 lockdown, as well as "small traders or artisans who have had to close." Undocumented workers "who do not receive special subsidies or public aid and have no savings" are also struggling.

While the whole country has been affected, the regions worst hit economically are in the south, with 20 percent of the new poor in Campania, 14 percent in Calabria, and 11 percent in Sicily.

The situation has been made worse by rising food prices, with the organization saying the price of fruit went up by over eight percent in April, while vegetables were up five percent, milk up over four percent, and cold meats up around 3.5 percent.

Italy, the first European nation to enter lockdown, began a partial easing of its restrictions on May 4, with manufacturing and construction the first industries to restart. Shops are expected to open on May 18, with restaurants and bars not due to open until June. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said this week, however, that some restrictions may be eased earlier than planned.

The country's death toll from COVID-19 surpassed 30,000 on May 8, with over 219,000 confirmed cases of the infection recorded across Italy.

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