INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON "NEW APPROACHES FOR MEASURING POVERTY: STUDIES AND PERSPECTIVES"

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Over the last decades, poverty has been a most relevant topic in socio-economic research. In particular, the measurement of poverty has stimulated a vivid debate among researchers from different fields: economists, philosophers, sociologists, and statisticians.

For more than eighty years, the Italian Society of Economics, Demography and Statistics (SIEDS) has focused on these issues by promoting a multidisciplinary scientific debate and welcoming the research ideas of scholars with different skills and professional experiences. Motivated by this interest, SIEDS has promoted this special issue of the *Rivista Italiana di Economia Demografia e Statistica* entitled "New approaches for measuring poverty: studies and perspectives".

This special issue collects several contributions on cutting-edge research questions in the study of poverty. It includes methodological analyses, empirical works, critical reviews as well as reflections on conceptual and definitional aspects of poverty measurement. All in all, this special issue provides valuable insights into the new challenges that are emerging in poverty measurement.

The issue builds on the work of the "Inter-institutional Scientific Commission on absolute poverty" established by Istat over the years 2022-2024. The Scientific Commission was assigned the task of analysing the methodology for estimating absolute poverty originally developed and routinely applied by Istat (Istat 2009), with the specific aim of verifying its validity in the current economic and social context. The Commission, chaired by the President of Istat, included experts from Istat, the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), the Bank of Italy, the Council for Agricultural Research and the Analysis of Agricultural Economics (CREA), the Revenue Agency and several universities.

Italy is the only European Union (EU) country to have an official statistic of absolute poverty. At the EU level, the definition of a measure comparable across Member States has been investigated within the joint pilot initiative between the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and the Joint Research Centre, "Measuring and monitoring absolute poverty, ABSPO" (Menyhért et al. 2021). This project, launched in 2018 and completed three years later, emphasised the many relevant challenges in designing an EU-wide absolute poverty line, but also proposed

implementable methodologies. Until now, however, it has not brought to changes in official poverty measurement at the EU level. To our knowledge, Switzerland is the only other country in Europe that adopts an absolute standard (Ufficio Federale di Statistica 2024); and of course the United States remain the major exception among advanced countries in relying on an absolute official measure dating back to the 1960s, though accompanied by the Supplemental Poverty Measure since 2011 (Shrider 2024). Hence, an in-depth reflection on the various facets of the measurement of absolute poverty in Italy should be of general interest.

The thirteen papers published in this special issue offer an interesting overview of the topic. They start from the discussions of conceptual and methodological issues by Chiara Saraceno (page 9) and Cristina Freguja and Federico Polidoro (page 21).

The Italian methodology for estimating absolute poverty is based on three main components of the poverty basket: Valeria de Martino, Lorenza Mistura and Raffaela Piccinelli (page 49) illustrate the food component, Andrea Cutillo (page 65) the housing component, and Ilaria Arigoni (page 81) the residual component. Federico Di Leo and Isabella Corazziari (page 97) discuss methods to account for quantity-related savings in good purchases, while Alessandro Brunetti, Stefania Fatello, Orietta Patacchia, Rosabel Ricci (page 111) and Francesco Altarocca, Cristina Dormi, Stefania Fatello, Carlo Matta (page 123) examine new data sources for improving poverty estimates.

The last part of the special issue broadens the analysis. Luigi Biggeri (page 139) considers possible future developments, while Luigi Biggeri and Monica Pratesi (page 157) suggest exploiting the regional absolute poverty thresholds for computing sub-national purchasing power parities. Massimo Aprea, Michele Raitano, Eleonora Romano, Pietro Zoppoli (page 173) introduce the multi-dimensional perspective by exploring how absolute poverty is correlated with energy poverty as well as with low work intensity. Federico Polidoro (page 189) brings into the picture the international dimension by sketching the evolution of extreme poverty over the last 30 years in different geographical areas around the world. Lastly, Vito Peragine and Giovanni Vecchi (page 199) provide a critical re-examination of Istat's approach to the measurement of absolute poverty.

We think that this special issue contributes to the literature on poverty measurement by shedding lights on existing methods but also stimulating the reflection on future developments. We hope that this issue may inspire further research in the academia as well as national statistical institutes on theories and methodologies for measuring absolute poverty.

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