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**OSAKA 2025
WORLD EXPO**
**THE REASONS
FOR MICROCREDIT**



ENTE NAZIONALE PER IL MICROCREDITO



ITALIA
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SUMMARY



EMMA EVANGELISTA
Editor in Chief

THE REASONS FOR MICROFINANCE AT OSAKA2025

The National Microcredit Agency (ENM) is participating in the Osaka 2025 World Expo, representing the best practices in ethical finance developed over the years. Microfinance as a tool for individual and social development represents an important opportunity for those belonging to disadvantaged social groups who have no other financing options. Microcredit is also a vehicle for international cooperation that can be counted among the factors useful for promoting economic and financial culture, which contributes to the stability and growth of countries, as well as to the growth of individuals through economic stability and individual freedom as a path to emancipation. The Agency has structured the 'Italian way of microcredit' that it is proposing in Japan at the Italian Pavilion through an agreement signed with the Commissioner for Expo, the objectives and motivations of which are outlined below.

ENM's mission is characterised by an ethical vision of finance, the Ente intends to represent the main point of reference for public administrations and stakeholders interested in the development of microcredit in Italy and Europe, in developing countries and in economies in transition, for this reason its activity is oriented towards supporting initiatives aimed at encouraging the development of micro-entrepreneurship and self-employment, as well as the fight against poverty and the financial inclusion of those social categories defined as "non-bankable" due to the lack or shortage of guarantees to be offered to the traditional banking system.

This mission is part of an ethical vision of finance, which considers financial activity (and thus the use of money) as a means and not as an end, having as its reference the human and social promotion of individuals. On the basis of this vision, the organisation sees microcredit not as a form of 'welfarism' or 'charity', but as a real loan aimed at developing entrepreneurial projects or implementing projects to improve the personal or family living conditions of the weaker sections of the population.

In keeping with the themes of Expo 2025 Osaka, the aim of the event is to promote the innovation, growth and internationalisation of microcredit and microfinance, and in particular of the "Italian way to microcredit" as an instrument of social and financial promotion and integration, in the promotion of the Millennium Goals of which microcredit is an instrument and expression.

Expo 2025 Osaka also represents a precious opportunity to bring creativity, industry, art and work into dialogue, through an exhibition that recounts the evolution of microfinance in Italy and the world as an instrument of preventive diplomacy.

In agreement with the Extraordinary Commissioner for Expo 2025 Osaka, Ambassador Mario Vattani and the President of the National Microcredit Agency, Mario Baccini, signed an agreement to collaborate on an initiative to promote microcredit and microfinance in order to strengthen national and international public-private partnerships, with a focus on the activities of the Italian way to microcredit, and to enhance the commitment to cooperation in the fight against social and financial exclusion for the achievement of the millennium goals. In the agreement it is proposed to implement activities to promote the Italian system of microcredit, involving (companies, investors, start-ups) to create opportunities for the internationalisation of SMEs and the attraction of international investors; finally, to contribute to the promotion of the Italian way to microcredit in the field of art and business culture in the spaces of the Pavilion, through text and multimedia stories of microcredit experiences.

The aim of Universal Expositions is to promote industrial and technological progress on a global level, showcasing the latest technical, scientific and cultural innovations that contribute to improving the social and economic living conditions of people and the planet; the overall theme of Expo 2025 Osaka is “Designing Future Society for our Lives” and the sub-themes are: Saving Lives (protecting and saving the lives of individuals), Empowering Lives (enhancing the lives of individuals and expanding their potential), Connecting Lives (enhancing the social capital and participation of individuals, generating communities).

The Universal Exposition is - by its very nature - an international event because of the number and nature of the expected participating countries, the large flow and diverse origin of the expected visitors, the nature of the international relationships that will be developed, the consistency of the co-operation projects that will be activated, the cultural and human capital exchanges that will be generated by this event, and the nature and global nature of the theme chosen by the Organisers.

The Body derives directly from the “National Microcredit Agency”, set up in 2004 as the body responsible for organising events relating to the “2005 International Year of Microcredit”, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly (UN Resolutions 53/197 and 58/221) in order to promote the achievement of the Millennium Goals.

Expo 2025 Osaka will be an enabling platform for the realisation of the “Society 5.0” Plan launched by the Japanese Government with the aim of realising a “Super Smart Society” that leverages the transversal use of new technologies (Big Data, Robotics, Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence) to respond to the needs of societies and individuals, putting the person at the centre of all economic and social dynamics.

Expo 2025 Osaka will provide an opportunity to take stock of the efforts undertaken to achieve the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) and imagine a future society that ideally goes beyond the 2030 Agenda Goals.

Italy and Japan, both G7, G20 and OECD members, are linked by more than 150 years of political and diplomatic relations, as well as by intense economic exchanges based on the vitality of SMEs and their

conglomeration into industrial districts with particular reference to the sectors of: art, culture, design, sport, aerospace, life sciences (genomics, biopharma, diagnostics, humanoid robotics, silver economy), mechatronics, energy transition, sustainable mobility, artificial intelligence, environment, agribusiness, textiles, fashion, performing arts (cinema, music, dance, theatre); project culture, craft skills, creative thinking and the nature-technology-humanity relationship have always linked cultures and artistic expressions in Italy and Japan, with particular reference to activities to combat social and financial exclusion through the promotion of micro-credit and microfinance; the Commissioner intended to give space to artistic research and experimentation in a broadly interdisciplinary sense, with the ability to represent social issues such as diversity, sustainability and inclusion in which the organisation fully represents itself.



ITALIA-CHAN our mascotte in Osaka



MARIO BACCINI

President of National Microcredit Agency

THE ROLE OF MICROFINANCE IN PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



Creating the conditions so that armed conflicts between nations do not arise is the obligation of all countries with respect for humanity. How to do this is the task of that subtle art that goes by the name of preventive diplomacy, which has been practised for centuries through culture, dialogue and cooperation between peoples. One tool that we can count among those useful for this purpose today is certainly microcredit. In the Millennium Goals, dictated by Agenda2030, peace, security and recognition of the self-determination of the individual through decent work are at the heart of what is intended to be the project of a better world, where no one is left behind.

At the origins of microcredit, and of microfinance in general, there is certainly the idea of enhancing the talents of the individual, stimulating economic and social development, despite a background of difficulty and financial exclusion. The recovery in the labour market and the active contribution of disadvantaged, weak social groups, young people, women and migrants is a risky business, which only through the intervention of the state, with a vision of horizontal subsidiarity, can support in a framework of social and market economy that reduces the flaws of an absolute liberalist system. In the appeal that Kofi Annan addressed to the member states of the United Nations in 2005, the International Year of Microcredit, he said: "Use microcredit to fight extreme poverty". Twenty years after that call, Italy now boasts a public body that has supported the creation of over 27,500 enterprises and also experimented with social microcredit activities. The social and market economy that drives microfinance is an economic model that combines free

market principles with social justice and solidarity objectives. In practice, it seeks to obtain the advantages of a market economy, such as efficiency and innovation, but mitigating its potential negative consequences, such as inequality and poverty, through state intervention and social policies.

With the agreement signed with Ambassador Mario Vattani, the Italian Commissioner for Expo Osaka 2025, the opportunity to promote the organisation's activities in an international context has been realised. The agreement stems from the shared desire to propose the best practices of the "Italian way to microcredit" as an innovative and sustainable model of ethical finance, for the dissemination of microfinance culture, which focuses on combating social and financial exclusion and supporting entrepreneurship in the most vulnerable segments of the population.

The Osaka Expo is a unique opportunity to showcase the social and cultural impact of microcredit, combining innovation, solidarity and sustainable development. Culture is spreading ideas that generate beauty, the economic tools that can fulfil man and his dreams, realising human potential itself. It is up to nations to accept this request and transform it into concrete support tools, such as microcredit. If the island of dreams was artificially built in Japan, one can take up this challenge by making it

everyday, interpreting needs and not turning a blind eye to them but translating them into concrete actions to grow and create a socio-economic fabric that can withstand time and innovation. Microfinance is one of the tools for achieving the Agenda2030 millennium goals.

With this participation, National Microcredit Agency consolidates its role as a reference point in the Italian and European panorama for the promotion of ethical, inclusive and human development-oriented finance.

Microcredit is an opportunity for the affirmation and growth of identity, human dignity and solidarity. In fact, default (insolvency) occurs only in rare cases, because a sense of responsibility matures; people know that the guarantee funds created will also serve others. In short, a virtuous circle is created. It is not charity, but an action of trust that generates a win-win model.

In fact, in the 'Italian way to microcredit' designed and implemented by the National Microcredit Agency, the first beneficiary is the client, who is generally a person not bankable in ordinary channels. The client obtains access to credit (at a market interest rate), training and advice from an agent in non-financial auxiliary services (tutor) who supports the client from the conception to the realisation of the enterprise and is also monitored in the subsequent years of development until the loan is repaid.

The second beneficiary is the lending institution that obtains a risk reduction of at least 60%, achievement of objectives, new acquisitions and increased sales, and return on capital.

The third beneficiary is the tutor who obtains remuneration from the services provided and consequently an increase in his main and parallel activities and greater visibility and credibility towards the system.

The fourth and last but not least in terms of importance is the state, which obtains an improvement in the country's economic and social conditions, an obvious reduction in unemployment and a strong lever to combat usury, and lastly, greater tax revenue and a reduction in welfare spending.

Our organisation stands and operates notoriously halfway between institutions and business: to express the culture of solidarity, proper to institutions, and to impart the culture of business, in areas where it would otherwise not flourish on its own. We wish to bring up the 'culture of microcredit', understood as the idea of a finance that becomes small, that becomes 'micro', to make the area of those who benefit from it ever larger, ever more 'macro', and to make it a moment of training for the country's ruling class.

But we also wish to continue to work from the bottom up, starting from the thousands of micro-enterprises to which we offer financial support through the microcredit tool, through the network of intermediaries and credit institutions that we have contracted, creating a true ecosystem for inclusive finance.

If we think, then, that Italy brings with it the promotion of a cultural system that boasts thousands of years of beauty and art, we cannot but reflect on how this value can be a bridge between nations. Through culture we generate that preventive diplomacy that reduces the possibility of conflict and mitigates the effects of time. If to this we link the possibility of creating cultural enterprise, even through microfinance, we activate a virtuous circuit that produces macroeconomic and geopolitical effects.



We are talking about the value of culture, which for Italy is also a strong activator of the economy.

Overall, for every euro of added value produced by cultural and creative activities, it is estimated that another 1.8 euros are activated in different economic sectors, such as tourism, services, transport and Made in Italy, worth more than 176 billion euros. Therefore, making culture means making economy, and bringing this value to an international assembly such as the Expo can be a useful lever to understand how microfinance and the development of enterprises that know how to translate beauty and art into value, promotion and services can put Italian skills back at the centre of an international economic system.

Exporting the knowledge and skills of the Italian mi-

crofinance world becomes a process of skills transfer that is useful at a global level for a pervasive and penetrating action of complex systems for the structuring of an economic fabric that starts from very small businesses to become a model of a diplomacy that puts the economic needs of the individual back at the centre by enhancing skills and leveraging their ability to do business. A robust and resilient cultural sector, capable of applying knowledge, creativity and talent to generate economic wealth, represents for Italy the possibility of a strong internal push, but also a projection abroad, as in the case of the Osaka World Expo, where we promote best practices related to our way of conceiving microfinance.

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THE MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER GENERAL FOR ITALY AT EXPO OSAKA 2025

HIS EXCELLENCY
AMBASSADOR
MARIO VATTANI

The Memorandum of Understanding with the National Microcredit Agency allows us to bring to Expo 2025 a vision of economic and social sustainability designed to put people, their aspirations and potential at the centre, which have always been at the heart of the creativity and originality that have made Italy famous throughout the world.

Italy is taking to the global stage at Expo 2025 Osaka with the aim of expanding and completing the image of our nation in Asia and around the world. The Italian Pavilion, a strategic outpost for growth diplomacy, is an active tool for integrated promotion, hosting cultural and economic events, panels and in-depth forums with local and international partners.

In this competitive environment, the mission of the National Microcredit Agency to ensure the development of micro-enterprises is an essential tool for the economic and social growth of our country.

NATIONAL MICROCREDIT AGENCY (ENM): MISSION AND VISION



National Microcredit Agency is a non-economic public body that exercises important functions in the field of microcredit and microfinance, at national and international level. In particular:

- Promotion, guidance, facilitation, evaluation and monitoring of EU-promoted microfinance instruments and microfinance activities implemented using EU funds;
- monitoring and evaluation of Italian microcredit and microfinance initiatives;
- promotion and support of microcredit and microfinance programmes aimed at the economic and social development of the country, as well as developing countries and economies in transition.

The mission of the organisation is to promote the development of micro-entrepreneurship and self-employment, as well as the social and financial inclusion of the most disadvantaged. To this end, the organisation develops initiatives to facilitate access to credit through microfinance instruments, training, mentoring, re-research, capacity building, and dissemination of good practices.

Thanks to the experience gained at national and international level, the organisation is now the main point of reference for public administrations and stakeholders interested in the development of microcredit in Italy and Europe, in developing countries and in economies in transition.

The organisation's activities are characterised by an ethical outlook, which considers finance - and thus the use of money - as a means and not as an end, with the human and social advancement of individuals as its focus.

According to this vision, the organisation sees micro-credit not as a form of 'welfarism', but as a genuine loan aimed at developing entrepreneurial projects or implementing projects aimed at improving the personal or family living conditions of weak sections of the population.

For the organisation, micro-credit must encourage a prudent and rational use of financial resources, without repudiating the basic mechanisms of finance, but reformulating its reference values: the person and not capital, the idea and not wealth, a fair return on investment and not speculation.

In the organisation's vision, microcredit should support both those entrepreneurial activities that produce a social and economic benefit on the territory, and those that move towards a humanly and ecologically sustainable development, e.g. in the non-profit sector, social and international cooperation, cultural and artistic activities, organic farming, fishing, etc.

THE BOARD'S STRATEGY

The organisation's strategy is divided into three areas of intervention:

- **Financial instruments area:** design of microfinance interventions aimed at strengthening public administration capacity, enhancing systemic action and monitoring public and private microcredit initiatives;
- **Technical area:** promotion, steering and facilitation of microfinance instruments promoted by the European Union; monitoring and evaluation of microfinance initiatives; support and stimulation of the legislative framework; management and updating of the National List of Tutors; capacity building activities for the PA, the private sector, the non-profit sector and other stakeholders; development of microcredit and microfinance models and instruments;
- **Promotional area:** major promotional events, e.g. European Microfinance Forum and Forum on Cultural and Creative Enterprise; information and training seminars; dissemination of microfinance culture; financial education; creation of one-stop microcredit desks activated at local Italian PPAAAs; networking among microfinance operators.

The Ente's strategy is developed both at a national level (domestic microfinance) and at an international level and, in particular, in favour of developing countries and economies in transition (microfinance for international cooperation), in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in line with the international cooperation policies adopted by Italy. In the areas of financial, technical and promotional instruments, the Authority develops project, training, research and assistance initiatives that indirectly favour access to microcredit by micro-entrepreneurs and disadvantaged persons. It should be emphasised, in fact, that the organisation is not a financial intermediary authorised to exercise credit and, therefore, does not disburse funds directly, but creates the conditions to favour access to credit by the target subjects. These are the Ente's main strategic initiatives:

- development - also by means of funds made available by the European Union, the State, the Regions and local authorities, as well as by private operators - of projects aimed at supporting

the realisation of investments by micro-enterprises and cooperatives, or the financial inclusion of individuals or families in a state of poverty or otherwise unable to access bank credit;

- development of microcredit and microfinance models and tools;
- evaluation of the social performance of public and private programmes aimed at micro-entrepreneurs;
- awareness-raising, training and capacity building of public administrations and microcredit providers;
- analysis and development of regulatory solutions;
- Targeted information to the target audience on microfinance instruments;
- promotion of communities of stakeholders in the microcredit system;
- development and dissemination of microfinance culture.

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BUILDING PEACE THROUGH DEVELOPMENT AND MICROFINANCE

INTERVIEW WITH MR. ANTONIO TAJANI

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Hon. deputy Mr. Antonio Tajani, has always supported entrepreneurial and microfinance policies. We discussed with him how microcredit activity can be a driving force for our entrepreneurship abroad and how the best practices developed by the ENM can be an example and support for preventive diplomacy at the centre of the debates at Expo Osaka 2025 during the Human Rights Week.

Tajani, already at the conference held in December 2024 at the Farnesina, had spoken out in favour of using the microfinance instrument as a vector for peace and development. The Minister was keen to emphasise how Italian foreign policy is also promoted in the world by those who bring something material or intangible of Italian civilisation abroad. Mr. Tajani recalled the important role of international cooperation: "Everything that an Italian does that is positive in the world, especially when it comes to peace bearers, helps our political action. In all of this, the instrument of microcredit can play a key role," the minister went on to emphasise how this instrument can be useful for the development of the territories most in difficulty. "This is also peace diplomacy, because where goods circulate, weapons do not circulate".

Microcredit supports Italian entrepreneurship, and in particular supports small and medium-sized enterprises. Within the framework of a preventive diplomacy, what, in your opinion, could be the contribution that the National Microcredit Agency, through this instrument, can provide to companies in the process of internationalisation?

It must first of all start with those young people who have the capacity for innovation but not the means to exploit it. It must support start-ups, such as those looking for a second chance. It must set itself the goal of fostering the growth of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs by helping above all the new generations, women, third sector organisations and immigrants. The support of Maeci, as well as of the entire government, is not an isolated fact, but is part of a path that is an integral part of our philosophy. The instances of corporate social responsibility and attention to the social context are themes that find widespread application in our strategies. Although the development path of microcredit still has wide margins for growth, it is important to know that even institutions in a country like Italy are

well aware of the importance of this instrument of true cooperation.

In the great story of Italy, which is at the centre of Expo Osaka, the social value of enterprise is also mentioned. The presence of the Ente Nazionale per il Microcredito (National Microcredit Agency) wants to highlight this aspect in particular. What value do you attribute to the possibility of narrating, in a global context, the role of microcredit as a lever of inclusion and development?

The Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, who was the creator and implementer of modern microcredit said that "Normally countries run like a train with a locomotive pulling the convoy. Microcredit, on the other hand, makes each individual carriage stand on its own. If you detach it from the locomotive, it can continue to travel on its own, because every human being is a creative engine". And this allows us to have an effective tool to fight social exclusion and to activate economic and social development processes that take individuals, families, and entrepreneurial activities out of the subsistence economy and make

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them become conscious and responsible actors embedded in dynamic and open economies.

An equitable and sustainable socio-economic development passes through what many call 'Peace through Development'. In light of your role and commitment in international cooperation, do you think that microcredit could become a lever of our foreign policy in favour of economic and inclusive growth within partner countries?

The microcredit instrument plays a key role and we as a government want to enhance it more and more. It is particularly suited to relaunching growth starting from the territories, enhancing small business activities, perhaps family businesses. Through cooperation and development we are carrying out many interventions especially in the African continent. This too is peace diplomacy, because where goods circulate there is growth and prosperity and not arms. And then I think it is urgent to settle the contradiction between a world that is growing and developing and the increase in imbalances and poverty through adequate, concrete and new types of instruments. And microcredit is one of them.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are the backbone of our economy. What measures is MAECI putting in place to support this type of enterprise in foreign markets and how, in your opinion, could we intervene, especially in the younger or less structured entrepreneurial realities?

Since I took office at the Farnesina, supporting

the international paths of micro and small enterprises has been a priority on my agenda. Together with Simest, we have deepened and innovated the instruments of financial support for internationalisation, introducing dedicated subsidised finance products: from contributions for investments in digital and ecological transition, to the hiring of temporary export managers who can accompany companies entering international markets for the first time. We also wanted to extend the benefits of subsidised finance to companies in the supply chain that are not yet exporting. With an eye instead on younger and more dynamic entrepreneurial realities, we support the internationalisation of start-ups. That is, of those new and young innovative companies with high growth potential, and forges of frontier technologies. Recent studies (Assolombarda and InnovUp) show that in the 2012-2023 period a quarter of all new jobs were created by innovative start-ups and SMEs. And these are generally jobs characterised by high professionalism and high added value, given that these very types of companies are mainly dedicated to cutting-edge technologies, often experimental, often the result of spin-offs and academic research. But given the still very weak structure of this type of enterprise, MAECI and Agenzia-ICE have equipped themselves to provide a tailor-made form of assistance, with acceleration programmes abroad and participation in international technology fairs (where young entrepreneurs-innovators are brought into contact with large companies or specialised investors such as venture capital funds in Italy's pavilions).

CULTURE BUILDS BRIDGES

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR OF THE ITALIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE IN JAPAN, MRS. SILVANA DE MAIO



A distant world in many ways, starting of course with geography, but Japan and Italy have something that links them, sometimes in a totally unexpected way: culture and social transformation.

The Osaka Expo 2025 represents an opportunity to bring the two worlds together and allow them to get to know each other better. In this sense, the activity of the Institute of Culture of Italy in Tokyo is fundamental.

Silvana De Maio has been coordinating its activities as director of the same institute since 2022. A privileged vantage point to observe this reality with an emphasis on all aspects of art and a focus on social dynamics.

Japan is experiencing years of profound transformation. The image of a country where everyone works for the large Japanese multinationals - giants ranging from electronics to cars - is leaving room for small private initiative. A pattern that makes us closer. The protagonists of this transformation are young people.

'In Japan there has always been a reality of small and medium-sized enterprises,' explains Director De Maio, 'and perhaps that is one of the reasons why we are so close to Italy. It's true. There are the big realities such as Honda or Suzuki to name but in the many different prefectures, perhaps far from Tokyo, there are smaller realities. I am thinking for example of the companies that produce the components'. A model that could recall what happens, for example, in some regions of northern and southern Italy for the automotive industry.

'Moreover,' insists the director with an enthusiasm that leaks passion and knowledge of the country, 'now, as a reflection of the massive arrival of foreigners, both eastern and western, including many Italians, there is a huge return of attention to traditional productions such as, for example, agricultural production. These realities are booming. To make you understand the impact it has on the country there is a useful fact: every morning the national TV stations present a sector to the general public. For example, sake is having a huge success: there is a strong demand for licences to open new small production companies. Courses for sake tasters are developing, both for Japanese and foreigners. It is not just a fad,' he points out. This dynamic is reminiscent of what has happened and is happening in Italy with the wine sector: tradition and many jobs for young people. 'Obviously there are the big companies, but small companies are springing up that are finding an interest. And this is also happening in the food sector: I'm thinking of the production of seaweed for fusion cuisine or that of local products such as tofu or misu.

‘Local craftsmanship is a sector where there are more and more companies,’ explains Di Maio, ‘There is an undergrowth in turmoil that may not be noticed at first glance. Young people are discovering that there is interest in all these sectors’.

The activities of the Italian Cultural Institute in Tokyo date back to 1939. The building, which was destroyed during the bombing of World War II, has been renovated several times, most recently in 2003 to a design by architect Gae Aulenti. Since 1997, the teaching of the Italian language has had a boost that has seen the number of students enrolled rise to the current 4,000. ‘Italians are increasing a lot. Compared to 30 years ago, they have more than doubled. Beyond the big companies that have been here for decades. In this the role of the embassy acts as a bridge between Italian and Japanese companies. From agribusiness to space. It always arouses a lot of interest’. ‘Japan is also in a moment of change in its relations with the Belpaese: ‘Especially for culture we are in a phase of transition,’ he emphasises. ‘For decades Italian culture was known by the country’s elite, now this stratum of society is leaving its legacy to the new generations. There are beginning to be young people who are very interested in Italy, its music, cinema and cuisine itself, but with a background that must be cultivated, must be enriched’. There are economic aspects that obviously have an influence: ‘With the devaluation of the yen, the young people who manage to come to Italy are not many. It’s generally difficult for Japanese people to leave their country, also because they live well’. The comparison with Italy and its young people is automatic. The role that Microcredit has played is important and has helped many new small entrepreneurs who, like their Japanese counterparts, need a push to start their own businesses.

The Italian Institute of Tokyo coordinates the activities and contributes to the process of spreading Italian culture: ‘As an Institute we are hosting some of the realities that are presenting themselves at Expo 2025 Osaka. Many Italians come both to make contacts and to understand the prospects for promoting their cultural sector. Those who come to Japan from Italy always pass through Tokyo. Teaming up is important because you get to know the country better, exchange information and knowledge. By working together you are able to reach more areas of interest’. ‘As an institute we are really developing many

projects,’ recalls Di Maio. ‘Soon we will have a symposium on Italo Calvino here at the Institute’s headquarters and at Tokyo University. Then there will be a round table on the 60th anniversary of the Venice Charter for the Conservation of World Heritage, a document from ‘64’.”

“The Japanese state continues to invest in culture, but publishing companies also play a great role in the realisation of large exhibitions riding the Expo wave. We collaborate with some important realities: one boast is the Italian Film Festival that we realise in collaboration with Cinecittà’.

In Japan, the average age of the population is high, as in Italy, and we are beginning to see poverty phenomena to which the inhabitants were not accustomed. ‘Poverty is obviously everywhere, even in Japan,’ says Di Maio, ‘It is increasing unfortunately. Now there are also frequent announcements on TV about setting up food banks to help the destitute. The economic crisis is also beginning to be visible on a social level’. In these spaces, one rediscovers the importance of Social Credit in Italy. Even in Japan, there is a kind of facilitation of access to Microcredit. The state with specific government policies facilitates loans for Small and Medium Enterprises and entrepreneurs. The growth of this sector is supporting local growth and development. The transformation of the Japanese economy, traditionally characterised by the presence of large multinationals and corporate ‘loyalty’ in the sense of difficulty in changing employers, is underway. A transformation that also affects social dynamics.

“Here, for example, single mothers are in great difficulty. Children often have a meal only because they go to compulsory school where it is given to everyone. Before it was taboo to talk about poverty; now they are starting to communicate it. An attempt to prevent the marginalisation of the weakest’.

The Osaka Expo 2025 kicked off on 13 April. It is scheduled to end on 13 October. Italy is present with its own pavilion designed by Mario Cucinella Architect and proposes an interpretation of the Italian Renaissance city with squares, porticoes, gardens and meeting places. The theme chosen is ‘Art Regenerates Life’: the aim is to present Italy’s excellence: from scientific research to classical and contemporary art, from design to craftsmanship.

AT EXPO OSAKA 2025, ART MEETS CIRCULAR ECONOMY FOR INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

WORKSHOP BY ARTIST MARIO ARLATI EMBRACED BY UNIDO ITPO ITALY



At first glance, art and industry might seem like opposing concepts – intrinsically distant in their modes of expression. The mechanical nature of serial work contrasts with free creation; the meticulous rigor of science opposes the genius of inspiration. Yet, these two seemingly parallel worlds often intersect, drawing from each other in form and content to create something unique and transformative. This dynamic was exemplified by “UNcompleted Flag”, the artwork conceived by Italian artist Mario Arlati, which embodies the highest values of industry – sustainability, inclusiveness, and cooperation – while specifically reflecting on the environmental and social impact of the textile industry. On August 11th and 12th, 2025, UNIDO ITPO Italy – the Italian Investment and Technology Promotion Office of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization – returns to Expo Osaka on the occasion of the second workshop organized by Mario Arlati, titled “United Flags: Youth, Inclusivity and Sustainability for Italy and Japan”. Scheduled during the Expo’s week themed “Peace, Human Security and Dignity”, this workshop will highlight once more the critical importance of circular economy, social inclusion, and international cooperation, reinforcing UNIDO’s core mandate through the medium of art.

“UNITED FLAGS: YOUTH, INCLUSIVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY FOR ITALY AND JAPAN”

Building on the success of the *UNcompleted Flag*, this initiative evolves from the artistic workshop held in July 2023 — a collaboration among artist Mario Arlati, the social enterprise **Il Carro** and **Monza Arte Contemporanea**, with support from the **Galleria d’Arte Contini of Venice-Cortina d’Ampezzo**. During the workshop, youths from vulnerable social backgrounds used **recycled textile waste to create a reinterpretation of the United Nations flag** — a symbol not only of unity but also of sustainability and inclusiveness. Embraced by UNIDO ITPO Italy in light of the strong resonance with its vision and principles, the workshop and its result combined artistic creativity with environmental awareness and a commitment to circular economy principles, transforming discarded materials into a powerful statement about social and industrial responsibility.

Since its creation, the *UNcompleted Flag* has gained notable recognition, and was exhibited at the 2024 **CodeWay Expo**, a major event organized by Fiera Roma focused on international cooperation and sustainable development. The event’s inauguration was officiated next to the artwork by Edmondo Cirielli, Italian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, marking a significant institutional statement about the values and impact of the initiative.

The upcoming workshop at Expo 2025 Osaka takes this concept further by inviting young people from vulnerable contexts in both Italy and Japan to collaboratively create two symbolic artworks: **an Italian flag made by Japanese youth, and a Japanese flag created by Italian youth**. Adhering to circular economy principles, these flags will be crafted exclusively from recycled materials, mirroring the approach of the previous workshop. This exchange is more than an artistic endeavor: it is a cultural dialogue fostering mutual understanding, social inclusion, and environmental consciousness.

The flags will serve as both artworks and symbols of cooperation between the two nations. This collaborative process will enrich the experience of



Diana Battaggia and Mario Arlati

participants as well as of the broader audience at Expo Osaka, allowing them not only to develop skills in artistic expression but also an environmental consciousness and intercultural exchange, exemplifying how art can serve as a vehicle for connecting cultures, promoting sustainable innovation, and advancing inclusive societies centered on the individual.

In this sense, the recurring themes of circular-economy sustainability, youth inclusivity, and cooperation at international level, **run as a common thread** linking the original *UNcompleted Flag*, the upcoming *United Flags* workshop at Expo 2025 Osaka, and UNIDO ITPO Italy’s broader mandate.

UNIDO: ACCELERATING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

The **United Nations Industrial Development Organization** (UNIDO) is a specialized UN agency tasked with promoting inclusive and sustainable industrial development, as reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goal 9: “*Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*”. UNIDO envisions a world free from poverty and hunger, where industry supports low-emission economies, improves living standards, and safeguards the environment for present and future generations — advancing *progress by innovation* to leave no one behind. Headquartered in Vienna, UNIDO operates a global network of **Investment and Technology Promotion Offices (ITPOs)**



strategically placed across industrialized countries, serving as bridges between their host countries and developing or transitioning economies. Based in Rome and operational since 1987 thanks to the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), **UNIDO ITPO Italy** plays a vital role in enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from developing countries and economies in transition. Its mandate includes mobilizing investments, transferring technology and management skills, and implementing industrial projects aimed at sustainable local development. The office also fosters **international partnerships and business cooperation** with Italian public and private sectors, enhancing cross-border industrial collaboration. Working closely with donors, partners, and a broad range of international stakeholders — including ministries, embassies, regional authorities, investment promotion agencies, universities, and private companies — ITPO Italy advances public-private partnerships and promotes technology-driven sustainable industrialization.

UNIDO ITPO Italy offers a wide array of services to institutions and companies alike, from capacity building and technical assistance to matchmaking and participation in international trade fairs and forums. The focus is on supporting industrial projects that contribute to sustainable development goals while enabling knowledge transfer and innovation exchange. The office's key sectors include agribusiness, renewable energy and green technologies for the environment, blue economy — all firmly rooted in sustainability and circular economy principles — and, of course, textile.

MADE IN ITALY SUPPORTS TEXTILE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

UNIDO ITPO Italy has wide experience in the textile sector, main focus of the *UNcompleted Flag* as well as of the upcoming *United Flags* workshop. With the support of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), the Office is now implementing two projects in this field: one in Egypt and one in Ghana.

“The Egyptian Cotton Project – Phase II” aims at strengthening and upscaling the **environmental,**

economic, and social sustainability of the cotton value chain in Egypt. The first phase of this flagship initiative was developed in collaboration with Filmar Group, and since then has expanded to include Cotonificio Albini — both esteemed Italian suppliers of high-quality yarns and textiles made from Egyptian cotton for renowned brands. These strategic partnerships with the Italian private sector have facilitated a demand-driven approach, ensuring alignment with market needs and effectively leveraging Italian expertise, know-how, and a robust network of buyers.

UNIDO ITPO Italy has also recently launched a project aimed at **promoting circular economy best practices in the textile sector of Ghana**, a key industry for the country's economic development. The project seeks to introduce a circular approach by engaging local private sector actors alongside institutions, academia, and business associations. By fostering sustainable investments and practices, the initiative will strengthen the industrial sector, drive economic growth, and generate employment opportunities, ultimately improving the well-being of local communities. In the last two months, ITPO Italy has joined two missions to Accra — respectively with the Italian Cooperation and Made in Italy Circolare e Sostenibile (MICS) — meeting with local stakeholders and visiting the Kantamanto market, West Africa's largest second-hand clothing hub, for a firsthand insight on the national economy. Both mission reaffirmed UNIDO ITPO Italy's commitment to driving innovation, sustainability, and industrial partnerships in support of Ghana's development goals.

EXPO OSAKA 2025: A CATALYST FOR COLLABORATION

Coming back to the *United Flags* workshop and, more specifically, to its stage of Expo 2025 Osaka, one of UNIDO ITPO Italy's flagship projects currently underway is ***“Innovation Gateway Trieste-Osaka 2025”***. Implemented with the financial support of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region, this initiative aims to create international networks and foster global partnerships among young innovators, entrepreneurs, industries, research institutions, and business communities to



Mario Arlati and Diana Battaglia

build a smarter, greener, and more inclusive business ecosystem that encourages equal participation of women and youth, leveraging technological innovation for sustainable development.

The project's activities are designed to **connect the innovation ecosystem of Friuli Venezia Giulia with Expo 2025 Osaka**. Last April, a delegation of five selected companies and representatives from the Regional Desk for the Internationalization of Enterprises (SPRINT) participated in a business mission to Japan. At Expo Osaka, the delegation took part in the "Selecting Italy" event — a platform showcasing Italian excellence in various sectors — and high-level institutional meetings, such as with Massimiliano Fedriga, President of Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, and Sergio Emidio Bini, Regional Council Member for Economic Development and Tourism. In Tokyo, a networking event held at Yokohama Connéct featured Italian companies presenting innovative solutions through elevator pitches and live demonstrations, followed by dynamic exchanges with Japanese counterparts. The delegation also engaged in strategic meetings with key Japanese institutions, including UNIDO ITPO Tokyo, JETRO, and the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan, reinforcing the foundation for long-term cooperation.

This initiative — as well as future initiatives to be implemented at Expo 2025 Osaka later this year in the framework of the project and beyond — amplifies UNIDO ITPO Italy's commitment to fos-

tering cross-cultural and international collaboration, perfectly echoing the spirit of the *United Flags* workshop, as both champion international collaboration, circular economy, and youth empowerment as essential drivers of inclusive and sustainable industrial development, in line with UNIDO's mandate.

OUTLOOK

From reclaimed textile waste in a local workshop to an international exhibition at Expo Osaka, the initiatives of artist Mario Arlati embody a powerful message: sustainability, inclusion, and cooperation are not abstract ideals, but sound realities accessible to everyone, everywhere. To this end, art can bridge industries and cultures, serving as a catalyst for social integration and environmental stewardship in a rapidly changing world. By embracing initiatives centering youth and creativity in industrial dialogue, UNIDO ITPO Italy fulfills its mandate of accelerating inclusive and sustainable industrial development while inspiring new generations to envision and build a more connected, equitable, and sustainable future.

"United Flags: Youth, Inclusivity and Sustainability for Italy and Japan"

Art workshop by Mario Arlati

August 11th and 12th, 2025 | Expo 2025 Osaka — Italian Pavilion

For more information, please contact itpo.rome@unido.org

MICROCREDIT: MAIN TOOL OF AGENDA2030

Microcredit has established itself as an effective tool to foster the economic autonomy of the most vulnerable segments of the population, contributing to poverty reduction and the promotion of social equity. It therefore represents a tool for sustainable development and the achievement of the Millennium Goals.

Microfinance, in general, is proposed as a possible prospect to support a socio-economic fabric that, starting from the local, becomes a global economic movement for self-entrepreneurship and the integral development of the person and his or her capacities.

This tool, made famous by the experience of Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, has shown that it can transform the lives of millions of people in developing countries, and with the skills and experience gained in different countries also in undeveloped countries. This instrument gives so-called non-bankable people the opportunity to start small businesses, improve their living conditions and gain economic independence, thanks to the support of the state and credit institutions.

Therefore, in the European conception of this instrument, it cannot be considered only as a small loan but as an integrated offer of financial and non-financial services, accompaniment, training, tutoring and consultancy, aimed at ensuring greater sustainability of business projects. In this context, the National Microcredit Agency has developed an "Italian way to microcredit and microfinance" that is transversally in support of six of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the 2030 Agenda.



GOAL 1 - DISCOVER POVERTY

End all forms of poverty in the world

In the world, out of eight billion people at least one billion live in poverty, and 263 million new poor are expected in 2022. In 2021, there were 1,960,000 poor Italian families, while absolute child poverty affected 1,382,000 children.

Microcredit can contribute significantly to achieving Goal 1 of Agenda 2030, especially if it is embedded in inclusive and well-structured public policies. It does not eliminate poverty alone, but it can be a concrete tool to build economic autonomy and resilience among the most vulnerable segments of the population through access to capital for the poorest. Microcredit enables people in extreme poverty, often women, farmers, small artisans to obtain the means to start or expand productive activities. This stimulates self-employment and income, and promotes financial inclusion by ensuring access to banking services, even in rural and disadvantaged areas. Economic resilience is thus strengthened. Many microcredit programmes specifically target women, who often reinvest profits back into the

family, improving education, nutrition and health. This has multiplier effects on intergenerational poverty reduction. Small loans generate entrepreneurial activities that, if well managed, create jobs not only for the loan holder but also for the surrounding community. Microcredit can help people diversify their sources of income, reducing their exposure to negative economic events (job loss, agricultural crises, etc.).



GOAL 4 - QUALITY EDUCATION

Ensure quality, equitable and inclusive education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In Italy, early school leavers go from 14.7% in 2018 to 13.1% in 2021, against an EU average of 9.7%. Stronger gender gaps than in other European countries and alarming social and territorial disparities in the quality of learning persist.

Microcredit enables families to increase their income, making them more able to meet the costs of education (school fees, uniforms, books, transport). This is crucial in contexts where poverty forces children to work instead of study. Microcredit, often aimed at women, improves their decision-making status in the family. When women earn more, they tend to invest more in the education of their children, especially daughters, helping to close the gender gap in access to education.

By triggering sustainable economic activities, microcredit incentivises people to invest in education as a means to improve their economic future, recognising the value of education not only for their children but also for themselves. Concretely, to contribute to Goal 4, it must be combined with public policies for free or subsidised access to education.



GOAL 5 - GENDER EQUALITY

Achieve gender equality and empowerment (greater strength, self-esteem and awareness) of all women and girls.

In Italy, only 16.2 per cent of female graduates have a Stem (scientific disciplines) degree, compared

to 37.3 per cent of men, despite a 5 per cent increase in female enrolment. The mastery of digital and financial skills remains below the European average. In the EU, around 17% of ICT (Information and communications technology) specialists and one in three Stem graduates is a woman.

Microcredit offers women access to the capital they need to start or expand small businesses; generate their own income; have a greater voice in family and community decisions. It also has a direct impact on women's empowerment, as economic independence is often the first step towards social and political autonomy.

Many microfinance programmes not only provide credit, but also offer

training on money and asset management; education on women's rights and

their economic role and consequently greater awareness, competence and

ability to negotiate their own space in society, thus contributing to the reduction of vulnerability to gender-based violence.

With economic resources of their own, women are more likely to escape abusive or dependent relationships and to make autonomous decisions about their lives and their children. They improve their own economic status and tend to invest more in their children's education and health. This has a sustainable and lasting impact on achieving Goal 5 and the other SDGs (e.g. Goal 1 - poverty, 4 - education, 10 - reducing inequalities).



GOAL 8 - ENJOYABLE LABOUR AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Fostering durable, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

In 2022, the unemployment rate in the European Union was 6 per cent, while in Italy it was 7.9 per cent. The effects of the pandemic crisis have been severe and persist, especially among young people, women and in the South. Italy continues to hold the negative record of unemployed young people who neither study nor train (Neet).

In this context, microcredit represents a key tool to

foster financial inclusion, support entrepreneurship and improve the socio-economic conditions of people in situations of poverty or vulnerability. Micro-credit supports the development of micro-enterprises, promoting self-employment and sustainable employment; it encourages more stable forms of work as opposed to precarious or undeclared work.

It is often complemented by training and mentoring programmes, which enhance the quality of employment. In this context, its inclusive strength embraces often marginalised groups, such as women and neets (Targets 8.5 and 8.6). Women represent a significant share of microcredit beneficiaries: this reduces the gender gap in employment.

Micro-credit acts as a first step towards greater bankability, initiating pathways of growth for micro-enterprises, strengthens the local economic fabric, especially in rural or marginal areas.

rural or marginal areas. For micro-credit to contribute fully to Objective 8, it must certain conditions are guaranteed:

- Fair and sustainable access: low interest rates and transparent conditions;
- Financial education: training and accompaniment for conscious credit management;
- Integration with public policies: synergies with welfare, entrepreneurship incentives, infrastructure;
- Impact monitoring: assessing the real effects on employment, income and quality of life.

Microcredit, if well structured and accompanied by support services, can be a powerful tool to achieve Goal 8 of Agenda 2030, stimulating economic growth from below, strengthening employment economic growth from below, strengthening decent work and reducing inequalities.



GOAL - 10 REDUCE INEQUALITY

Reduce inequality within and between nations

Pandemic and inflation exacerbate inequality within the country: from 2019 to 2021 the worsened the disposable income inequality

index and high territorial and gender territorial and gender differences. Even in the rest of the world, the gap between rich and poor: the wealthiest 10% of the population owns 76% of global wealth.

This is about economic and social inclusion of the most vulnerable segments of the population and improving the income of the bottom 40%. In this context, microcredit is a key tool to foster financial inclusion and promote economic autonomy. Thanks to microcredit, many people manage to start a business, generate income and contribute to local development. This process fosters social mobility, reduces extreme poverty and expands economic opportunities for those who would otherwise be excluded. In this way, micro-credit contributes concretely to the achievement of sub-goal 10.2, which promotes inclusion for all, and sub-goal 10.1, which aims to increase the income of the poorest 40 per cent of the population.

Furthermore, microcredit promotes gender equality, as a significant proportion of beneficiaries are women, who are often economically and socially discriminated against. By fostering women's empowerment, microcredit also contributes to the reduction of inequalities of opportunity, as stipulated in sub-objective 10.3.



OBJECTIVE 17 - PARTNERSHIP FOR OBJECTIVES

Strengthen the means of implementation and renew the global partnership for sustainable development

In 2021, development aid (ODA) increased by 4.4% compared to 2020, due to of the aid rich countries provided to fragile countries to cope with Covid-19. Also in Italy in 2021 ODA increased from 0.22% to 0.28%, but this is partly of 'inflated aid' or resources spent in donor countries and is still a long way from the far from the target of 0.70% of Gross National Income (GNI).

This target aims to build strong partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society to achieve all the other goals of the Agenda. Microcredit can significantly contribute to the achievement of Goal 17 through public-private partnerships

for economic development. Microcredit promotes collaborations between public institutions (governments, development agencies), international bodies. These partnerships combine resources and expertise to offer inclusive financial services to people excluded from traditional banking circuits. By mobilising financial resources: micro-credit is a concrete tool for mobilising capital and financial resources, including on a local scale. By attracting socially responsible investment and private capital, it helps finance the economic development of the most vulnerable communities, especially in developing countries. New technologies make microcredit increasingly accessible even in remote areas, and support for these instruments from international partners allows for expanding social impact and accelerating progress towards the SDGs.

Microcredit is not only a tool for fighting poverty, but also an engine for global collaboration. By fostering economic empowerment, resource mobilisation and dialogue between public and private actors, microcredit makes a tangible contribution to the realisation of Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda, strengthening the means of implementation and partnership for sustainable development.

CONCLUSIONS

Microcredit emerges as a powerful and versatile tool to promote sustainable and inclusive development in line with the goals of the 2030 Agenda. It is not simply a matter of granting loans, but of offering a true path to economic and social empowerment, capable of generating positive multiplier effects on multiple fronts. Thanks to its ability to empower the most vulnerable, microcredit makes a concrete contribution to the fight against poverty, gender equality, quality education and the creation of decent work.

Formally, microcredit as an operational and financial tool is mentioned in Article 8 of the 2030 Agenda, which aims to support the development of decent work. However, through the 'Italian way to micro-credit', defined and implemented by the National Microcredit Agency, this instrument supports the realisation of several goals (SDGs). It is much more than a simple loan: it becomes a real agent of social and financial education and emancipation,

as well as a tool for education and progress. The expertise and projects, implemented at national level by ENM, represent international best practices for capacity building and development cooperation and can be taken as an example of success and innovation. The idea is to offer a point of view that can facilitate the emergence of many other micro-credit agencies in different countries. Its role as a training and capacity-building agent makes it possible to strengthen local capacities, creating a virtuous circle of growth and autonomy. In this way, micro-credit becomes a tool not only for financial inclusion, but also for empowerment and building a system of integrated services that foster the sustainability and resilience of communities, reducing inequalities and strengthening the local economic fabric.

Through access to capital, many people can start businesses, diversify their sources of income and improve their living conditions, while also contributing to the economic growth of often marginalised territories. The effectiveness of the microfinance instrument is strengthened when it is accompanied by training, advisory and support services, which increase the sustainability of projects and the ability of people to better manage the resources obtained. In addition, microcredit is embedded in a context of international and local partnerships, stimulating public-private collaborations, and fostering the use of innovative technologies to extend its reach. This integrated approach makes it possible to strengthen financial inclusion systems and to promote more equitable and sustainable development at global level.

Ultimately, microcredit is a bridge between the social and economic challenges of the present and the opportunities for a fairer and more inclusive future. Investing in this instrument means not only fighting poverty and inequality, but also building a world in which every individual can have the same opportunities for growth, autonomy and participation. It is a concrete example of how, with commitment and collaboration, ambitious and lasting goals can be achieved, contributing to progress that is truly sustainable for all. The Italian way structured by the National Microcredit Agency is a concrete and virtuous example of how states can strive to truly achieve the millennium goals.

SOCIAL AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMY



IRENE BERTUCCI *ENM Board Member*

MICROCREDIT AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOWARDS EXPO 2025: SOCIAL INNOVATION FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE WORLD

In a global context characterised by increasingly rapid economic, social and technological transformations, new development trajectories are emerging that require a rethinking of inclusion and innovation policies. In this scenario, three distinct but interconnected fields assume particular strategic relevance: social microcredit as a tool for economic emancipation, Expo 2025 in Osaka as a platform for international cooperation and the promotion of social innovation, and artificial intelligence applied to credit access processes.

Although operating in different contexts, these elements share a common goal: to promote fairer and more sustainable development models, capable of enhancing the centrality of the individual and reducing structural inequalities.

The historical origins of microcredit: emancipation and inclusion

Microcredit was born as an instrument of social emancipation, the child of the pioneering experience of Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. This model, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, has shown how small loans can transform the lives of millions of peo-

ple, especially women, enabling them to start businesses and escape poverty.

Although Italy introduced microcredit with some delay compared to other European countries, it can now boast a unique record: it is the only nation on the continent to have established, with a specific law, a national body responsible for coordinating and promoting microcredit.

National Microcredit Agency (ENM), operates as a non-economic public body with the task of promoting, guiding, facilitating, evaluating and monitoring the microfinance instruments promoted by the European Union and the activities carried out with EU funds. The organisation, which has a widespread network throughout the territory and a clear regulatory framework, represents an institutional model that is unprecedented in Europe. In other countries, in fact, microcredit is often managed by private entities, NGOs or local public bodies, without a centralised framework.

The ENM works closely with the Bank of Italy and coordinates a network of tutors and financial intermediaries, providing technical support and accompaniment to beneficiaries. From 2015 to date,

the ENM has disbursed more than EUR 431 million, supporting around 45,000 work units through more than 18,000 operations. The trend is growing: in 2023 alone, some 3,200 operations with a total value of more than EUR 90 million were guaranteed. The average loan amount has increased from EUR 24,500 in 2020 to EUR 34,000 in 2023, also thanks to the revision of the maximum amount that can be granted. The average age of beneficiaries is 37: 60% are between 30 and 50 years old, 29% under 30 and 11% over 50.

Expo Japan: social innovation, international cooperation and art

The Osaka Expo 2025, entitled 'Designing Future Society for Our Lives', has given new impetus to global reflection on the role of social finance. Among the protagonists of this reflection is the Nippon Foundation, which has highlighted the potential of Social Impact Bonds (SIBs), innovative financial instruments introduced in Vietnam back in 2016 in collaboration with the Vietnam Bank for Social Policy. Involving public and private actors, SIBs have shown how sustainability, replicability and social impact can coex-

ist in a single strategy.

A significant symbolic element will be the presence of the Holy See in the Italian Pavilion, which for the first time in Expo history will host a space dedicated to the Vatican. A masterpiece personally selected by Pope Francis will be exhibited here: according to official sources, it will be Caravaggio's Deposition of Christ. The project, entitled 'Beauty brings hope', is conceived as a bridge between Christian spirituality and Japanese culture, aimed at conveying a universal message of inclusion and harmony. Beauty, in this context, becomes not only an artistic expression, but also a lever for social innovation. The Japanese experience has also been studied in academia: Takashi Kubota and colleagues (2019) have highlighted the importance of creating international partnerships to develop forms of microcredit capable of adapting to local contexts. The example of the Nippon Foundation shows how Asia can inspire new models of cooperation in Europe as well, suggesting innovative paths in the name of inclusion.

Artificial intelligence: a new frontier for microcredit

Technological developments have opened up new perspectives for the microcredit sector. According to a Bank of Italy report (2022), 68% of Italian financial intermediaries already use machine learning algorithms to assess creditworthiness. These techniques make it possible to reduce analysis time, improve

accuracy and customise offers based on unconventional data, such as digital behaviour or recurring expenses.

Artificial intelligence (AI), therefore, represents a strategic resource to support micro-businesses that often do not meet the criteria required by traditional credit. However, the adoption of AI also brings with it potential critical issues; there is a risk that algorithms, if not designed with strict ethical criteria, perpetuate systemic biases, unknowingly penalising the most vulnerable segments of the population. Such biases can arise from the quality of data used for training and the lack of transparency in decision-making models.

To avoid these distortions, it is essential that financial institutions adopt shared ethical principles, ensuring transparency, accountability and inclusiveness in decision-making processes. In this sense, ENM could play a leading role in promoting the ethical use of AI within the Italian microfinance ecosystem.

Challenges and prospects: towards an inclusive and innovative microcredit

Looking ahead, microcredit faces crucial challenges. On the one hand, international cooperation must be strengthened to define common ethical standards on the use of artificial intelligence. On the other, there is an urgent need to invest in financial and digital education to bridge the technology gap and make innovation ac-

cessible to all.

According to ISTAT, 23% of Italian micro-enterprises are still excluded from traditional credit. The integration of models such as Social Impact Bonds and the potential of AI could represent a decisive breakthrough in meeting this need. In this context, the sharing of good practices at international level - such as those promoted by the Nippon Foundation - may help to build fairer and more effective instruments.

Conclusion: microcredit between historical memory and the challenge of the future

Born to respond to social justice needs, microcredit today is at a crossroads. From the campaigns of Bangladesh to the Osaka Expo, passing through the Italian experiences, the red thread linking these stages is the tension towards a more inclusive, sustainable and humane economy.

Artificial intelligence, if used with awareness and responsibility, can become a powerful ally in extending access to credit and multiplying its social impact. But the real challenge will be to preserve the social soul of this tool, combining innovation and justice.

As Yunus himself recalled, 'credit is a human right'. The microcredit of the future will be all the more effective the more it can remain faithful to this vision, bringing real opportunities where before there was exclusion.

OSAKA, MUCH MORE THAN AN EXPO



An unrepeatable and unmissable opportunity to strengthen the competitiveness of our companies on the global stage.

And since Confimprese Italia has always paid great attention to internationalisation, we are going to Expo Osaka 2025 to leave our mark.

It must be said, in relation to the Japanese Exhibition, that there is a 'before', there will be a 'during' and then an 'after'. The agreement we have signed with Mario Vattani (Commissioner General for Italy at Expo 2025 Osaka) has allowed us to better prepare the 'before'.

As for the 'during', it is clear that our delegation (twenty businessmen and women) will be able to achieve the objective of putting companies in the 'shop window' and at the centre of the system.

A bit like the church at the centre of the village. We are talking about businesses that encompass all dimensions at every level.

Let me summarise: from micro enterprises in the confectionery sector to Geko (the giant in the field of sustainable energy, of course). Finally the 'after': it will depend on how much we are able to do in Osaka, but we are aware of the absolute goodness of our excellence. 26 August will be an important day. Inside the Italian Pavilion our confederation will have its own exhibition space. The ambition? To amaze, to convince, to capitalise for the future. It is a space dedicated to Italian companies and in that context we will have to deploy all our skills, all our intelligence, all our commitment. By being a team. The 'mission' of Confimprese Italia will last from 23 to 30 August. The 26th will be the crucial date. We must be aware that after the presentation, the 'B2B' phase will open for our companies, an acronym that stands for 'business to business'. This is a funda-

mental and decisive moment in terms of business relations, but also in terms of relationships. First and foremost with Japanese companies. But not only. We represent the territories and the small and medium enterprises that those territories interpret and characterise. We want to guarantee them the best possible representation in a context of global value such as the Expo. This is why the meticulous work of Confimprese Italia began in February, with the signing of the memorandum of understanding with Ambassador Mario Vattani. From that moment on, there have been numerous initiatives and there will be others. Hundreds of companies have been involved, many of them of absolute excellence. Our employers' organisation, founded in 1996, is now considered among the most representative at national level. Through its representations throughout the country, Confimprese Italia carries out daily activities based on objectives, strategies and details. On training, for example by stimulating companies, especially smaller ones, to use funded training for employees, and on environmental and social governance to comply with European directives. Participation in Expo Osaka is not an occasional event in the actions of Confimprese Italia, which was already a signatory in 2020 of the Export Pact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and which has numerous foreign delegations and boasts excellent relations with institutional representations, particularly those of China, Tunisia, Hungary and Albania, with which it periodically cultivates import-export initiatives to the advantage of member companies. Last but not least, we play a leading role in the Mattei Plan for Africa, in constant relations with the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

Made in Italy, that of micro and small enterprises, especially those representing local communities, finds in Confimprese Italia a valuable partner. We will certainly keep the context of the event in Japan in mind. In this regard, we believe that 'Art Regenerates Life' is not just a slogan, but rather represents a design vision that holds together and 'merges' aes-



Guido D'Amico

thetics, ethics and sustainability. We are talking about the *leitmotif* of the Expo 2025 in Osaka, in which Italy certainly does not limit itself to participating, but wants to tell its story, get involved and dialogue with the world. It is also for this reason that the Pavilion dedicated to our country presents itself inspired by the Renaissance. Noble roots of the past but also a modern vision of the future. So that Made in Italy is affirmed and declines along the road of sustainability and innovation, constantly looking into the future.

Our ambition is to tell the story of Sistema Paese and the virtuous reality of Confimprese Italia. Through the dissemination and planning of scientific and cultural initiatives linked to innovation, growth, and the internationalisation of small and medium enterprises. The Expo is a unique showcase, capable of bringing together industry, creativity, art, and work. We have an extraordinary opportunity to show how much we focus on innovation, new technologies, and integrated promotion projects. This is what we will do inside the Italian Pavilion on 26 August. It is worth remembering the words of Ambassador Mario Vattani: 'Expo 2025 Osaka is an unmissable opportunity to strengthen the competitiveness of our companies on the global stage. Thanks to the Protocol with Confimprese Italia we are committed to promoting innovation, growth and

internationalisation of our entrepreneurial fabric. The micro, small, and medium-sized Italian companies that characterise our production and manufacturing system can once again become protagonists by bringing the excellence of our know-how to the world. Words that make us feel proud and at the same time give us a great deal of responsibility. We will know how to live up to them, increasing the visibility and competitiveness of our companies on a global scale. Naturally, a coordination made up of representatives from both sides was appointed to implement the Protocol. It is a document that also focuses on actions for the integrated promotion of tourism, involving companies, investors, start-ups and stakeholders in concrete internationalisation opportunities, including through workshops and 'B2B' of participating companies. We know that we will have to move in a context of international investors. This is the challenge to be overcome. Special attention will be paid to companies in the spa sector, which is strategic and highly attractive in terms of tourism.

We will have a busy agenda and we will have to be ready. Not only: we will have to move within the framework of what the Italian Pavilion represents and inspires, because it is among the most visited and narrates the charm of the country with the typical places of its urban and social identity. Porticoes, piazza, theatre and Italian-style garden. It is already considered among the most beautiful. A meeting, exchange and enhancement space for productive realities, therefore, which on 26 August will be tinged with the colours of Confimprese Italia, with a day entirely dedicated to the association and Italian entrepreneurial excellence. An event, this one, that follows the signed protocol of understanding. The main objective underpinning the document is the dissemination and planning of initiatives related to innovation, growth and internationalisation of local industrial realities. The delegation will consist of about twenty participants, including managers and entrepreneurs, from various Italian regions, with a strong representation from Ciociaria and the Latina province. The day will be divided into two parts: the morning will be devoted to an institutional event, with a conference dedicated to the role of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, an ex-

pression of excellence that is widespread and rooted in the Italian economic fabric, while in the afternoon there will be meetings between the delegations and with Japanese buyers and others present at the Expo. In the following days, the delegation will move to Tokyo for a series of institutional meetings with all the reference bodies of the Italian government, starting with the Embassy, the Consulate, Simest and Sace. After this series of appointments, which represents a strategic opportunity to strengthen international relations and promote Italian products, the delegation will leave for Italy on 31 August. This is why we are proud of this mission and will try to represent our territory in the best possible way in what is set to be the most important international context of 2025. We will carry the insignia of the territories in the highest planetary context.

On the Ministry's website, the Osaka 'mission' is described as follows: 'Italy will be present at the event with its own Pavilion designed by architect Mario Cucinella as a modern interpretation of the Ideal City of the Renaissance, with its theatre, porticoes, piazza and Italian-style garden, typical places of Italy's urban and social identity. Italy's participation in Expo aims to expand and complete the image of Italy in the world through excellence, cutting-edge technology, scientific research, classical and contemporary works of art, design and craftsmanship, music and live daily performances. Expo 2025 Osaka will offer Italy a global stage for the integrated promotion of the country system and Made in Italy in the Asia-Pacific area'.

Confimprese Italia will have to move within these boundaries, but never losing sight of its role of representing micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. On every occasion I have repeated that the circular economy and sustainability are now central issues for the future of businesses, the territory and the environment. In an ever-changing global context, companies are called upon to renew their business models, adopting practices that reduce environmental impact, optimise resources and promote responsible use of materials. What better opportunity than to participate, as a key player, in Expo 2025 Osaka? Because there is no doubt that concepts such as trade diplomacy and the exchange of experiences are indispensable in today's economic



landscape. Our confederation would like to proudly highlight its commitment over almost 30 years. A commitment that has unfolded through the accompaniment of our member companies in obtaining financing, particularly in micro-credit formulas, up to the international marketing and promotion services carried out at the confederation's foreign offices, which are permanently present in countries related to the development of sectors of expertise. I am thinking of tourism, services, and the manufacturing industry. That is why the 'mission' to Osaka represents both a starting point and an arrival point. We are going to promote our cultural and commercial traditions, our technological excellence. Showing that the solidity of the present is the best basis for planning the future.

As far as I am concerned, the factor that makes the difference is the focus on the territories. It should be borne in mind that in very small, small and medium-sized enterprises there is a virtuous synergy between production and attention to workers. In the economic context in which we live, shared policies and choices must necessarily be made. There can be no divisions. At Confindustria we all row together. On 26 August we will be able to show that all this... can be done. Even on a larger scale. We will put on the ground the areas identified in the signed Protocol. Let us remember them: 'The culture of design, craft skills, creative thinking, the nature-technology relationship, and humanity have always

linked cultures and artistic expressions in Italy and Japan, with particular reference to local productions, which have always contributed to the promotion of their territories in the world; to the expressions that in wellness and well-being find a meeting and a parallel in the Italian and Japanese realities (with particular attention to the thermal activity and development of small realities and villages linked to the peculiarities of development of some areas that become national excellences) in the culture of welcoming the valorisation of differences through the meeting of economic, social and artistic realities, the comparison and the creation of international networks for the support of tourism activities". But also space for research, artistic experimentation in a broadly interdisciplinary sense, with the ability to represent social issues such as diversity, sustainability and inclusion.

I repeat: all the sectors represented by our confederation will have the opportunity to show what they produce, what they are worth, what they represent. Everyone, no one excluded.

The symbol of Expo 2025 Osaka is 'the Grand Roof - Ring'. Designed by Expo designer Fujimoto Sou, it represents the philosophy of the World Expo: 'United in Diversity'.

Here, united in diversity. With the strength of our history and our achievements, always in the field, always in the trenches, always ready to amaze. We will also do this in Japan.

ITALY - JAPAN: THE EXPORT RACE



According to the latest figures released by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and reworked by ISTAT, in 2024 Italy reached a historic and strategically important milestone in the context of the global economy, ranking sixth in the world in terms of value of goods exports, surpassing Japan. This achievement, enshrined in WTO and ISTAT data, signals a structural evolution of the Italian System towards value-added-intensive models, confirming its ability to compete on a global scale despite the size fragmentation of enterprises and using quality as its main levers, specialisation and industrial resilience; this is ensuring good results even in adverse macroeconomic contexts.

EVOLUTION OF ITALIAN EXPORTS

The structure of Italian exports is highly diversified, with a preponderance of the instrumental mechanics sector (35 percent), a sector in which Italy is recognised as a global leader in terms of manufacturing capacity and know-how.

Fashion, agribusiness and automotive represent further pillars of exports, thanks also to the perceived quality of “Made in Italy.”

The figure confirms a “vertical specialisation” that allows the country to preside over high-margin market niches. In addition, the growing contribution of the pharmaceutical and chemical sectors reflects a trend towards technological reconversion and greater sophistication of industrial supply.

More specifically, Italy recorded exports of more

than **660 billion euros**, thanks to a differentiated product composition. (see Tab. 1)

THE CAUSES OF OVERTAKING JAPAN

Italy’s overtaking is partly explained by exogenous factors that penalised Japan, including:

- The slowdown in Chinese demand (Japan’s main partner)
- The devaluation of the yen, which has increased the cost of energy imports
- A Japanese production structure that is less flexible and more exposed to technology-intensive sectors but subject to cyclical slowdowns

WINNING INDUSTRIAL AND TRADE STRATEGIES

Italian success is not the result of chance, but rather of the combined action of several elements:

- **Capillary presence of specialised SMEs**, with high capacity to adapt to international demand.
- **Territorial industrial districts**, which foster innovation, logistics synergy and local development. The district system generates economies of agglomeration, fosters technology transfer and production flexibility.

Tab. 1 -Sector	% share of total exports
Instrumental mechanics	35%
Fashion and design	20%
Agribusiness	15%
Automotive	10%
Pharmaceutical and chemical	8%
Others	12%



- **Leveraging EU free trade agreements**, particularly with Canada (CETA), South Korea, Vietnam and Latin America.
- **Investment in sustainability and digitisation**, also promoted through the NRP, Transition 4.0 and green economy in primis.

GEOGRAPHY OF ITALIAN EXPORTS

Export growth is supported by a strategy of geographic diversification.

In addition to the EU, Italy has strengthened exports to high-potential markets outside Europe: North America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Latin America.

This reduction in dependence on mature markets has enabled greater export stability in the medium term.

GLOBAL COMPARISON

In the global ranking, Italy ranks sixth in the world with \$720 billion in exports, surpassing Japan (\$700 billion) due to a combination of growth and stagnation in Japanese exports. This ranking is the result of organic rather than episodic growth.

The top positions remain occupied by continental-scale economies (China, the U.S., Germany), but Italy's performance is particularly remarkable considering its smaller population and industrial size. The data confirms the high productivity of Italian exporting companies and their ability to generate value. (see Tab. 2)

Tab. 2 - Country	Export goods (2024, bn \$)
China	3.500
United States	2.100
Germany	1.800
Netherlands	900
Hong Kong	850
Italy	720
Japan	700

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Italian case represents a **successful economic paradigm in the 21st century**, based on:

- **Vertical specialisation**
- **Incremental innovation**
- **Strong national brand**
- **Flexibility of value chains**

The data must be interpreted in light of economic models such as *comparative advantage*¹ and the *new economic geography*².

Italy excels in sectors where qualitative differentiation and supply chain efficiency play a decisive role. The combination of "value added manufacturing"³ and resilience of the diffuse production structure (SMEs and districts) is a strategic asset.

In addition, the ecological and digital transition, supported by European funds (PNRR), has boosted export competitiveness.

NOTE

1. The economic theory developed by David Ricardo, states that countries should specialise in producing the goods for which they have a lower opportunity cost than other countries, even if they have a lower absolute cost in producing all goods. In other words, a country benefits from international trade by focusing on producing and exporting the goods in which it is relatively most efficient, even if it is not necessarily the most efficient in absolute production of all goods.
2. The New Economic Geography, promoted primarily by Paul Krugman, is a field of study that analyses how economic forces, such as economies of scale and costs of transportation, influence the location of economic activities and the geographic concentration of industries. In essence, it seeks to explain why firms and people tend to concentrate in specific geographic areas, creating industry clusters or specific economic regions
3. Value-added production refers to the process of transforming raw materials or components into products that have a market value greater than the sum of their individual parts. It involves adding features, functionality or other improvements to a product to increase its desirability and price to the customer.

READ MORE:

https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/statis_e.htm

<https://www.istat.it/statistiche-per-temi/economia/commercio-estero/>

https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teoria_dei_vantaggi_comparati

https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/temi-discussione/2007/2007-0624/tema_624.pdf

WHAT IS MADE IN ITALY

Knowing how to make and knowing how to do. Two concepts, not to be confused with each other, which fully represent the essence of Made in Italy. A set of characteristics, traditions, flavours - for some time now, attempts have been made to regulate the Italian sound, i.e. the mispronunciation of the names of food and wine products to pass them off as ours - that make the Belpaese the Bengodi of lovers of luxury, goodness and beauty. And not only that. Because if 'Know-How' tells of expert hands in sewing leather or precious silks, chiselling gold and creating perfect objects of desire, it is Know-how that has consecrated small and medium-sized Italian companies in the Gotha of world excellence, even in very specialised sectors that are almost always unknown to most.

That of '**De Lorenzo**' is, for example, an exemplary story. Present in 140 countries around the world, it is based in Rozzano on the outskirts of Milan and exports **training** wherever there is a need for qualified personnel or to start a new business. It does this with 55 passionate employees - who get together to dance, go out and celebrate work successes -, with an agent in every corner of the globe and with an idea that is as simple as it is ingenious: to reproduce to scale without the slightest margin for error any industrial machinery that comes to mind. Wind tur-

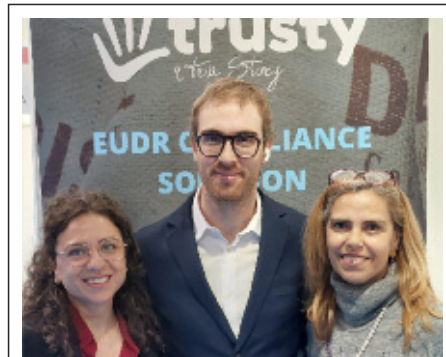
bines and wind tunnels included. Their simulators, designed primarily for vocational schools, allow - for example - aspiring electricians to practise on real electrical circuits designed - in reduced dimensions - as flat rooms or real industrial premises.

Founded in the 1950s from the intuition of Ugo De Lorenzo, a former soldier, after a brief handover to a bank holding company, it was taken over in the 1980s by **Luciano Prosperi**, who still runs it today with his sons **Filippo** and **Matteo**. And if an authoritative brand name is not changed so as not



Filippo Prosperi

to lose a legacy of credibility in a highly specialised market, the only change made by the new owner was the adoption of the colour yellow (immediately recognisable, says Filippo) to distinguish their models and simulators. Two thousand teaching modules (their material assets) are available to technicians and aspiring technicians all over the world - updated and expanded to follow the inevitable evolution of production - from Mexico to North Africa, all the way to the Maldives because, explains Filippo Proserpi, wherever there is a need to create a business, one needs someone who knows how to do it and who knows how to teach it to those who will work in it. And it is to him that we ask the reason for this 100% Italian success. *"Having tested the validity of our all-inclusive package - simulators + trainers - we are perceived as competent, serious and honest. An all-Italian characteristic is to be able to listen and solve the specific needs of each individual customer. We are elastic, as no one else can be".*



Alessandro Chelli
Rossella Guarnieri, Sara De Grossi

Elasticity and vision are also the basis of the second story chosen to tell 'the other made in Italy'. English name 'Trusty', Italian heart for the benefit company specialising in the traceability of agri-food chains and the regulatory compliance of these chains.

If for us European consumers it is taken for granted to find on food packaging, thanks to a now standardised software, all the information relating to the production cycle - and by the end of the year also the guarantees of compliance with the environmental and social ethics of the EU directives against deforestation - this is not the case for the rest of the world. This is where the vision of a group of thirty-year-olds led by **Alessandro Chelli** (in the photo with project manager **Rossella Guarnieri** and communication manager **Sara De Grossi**) comes into play. This started with the idea of tracing the entire route taken by cocoa beans and coffee beans to arrive on tables and in supermarkets. *"Offering this information,"* explains CEO

Chelli, *"increases the market value of the products given the increased consumer awareness of green issues, and rewards truly virtuous companies. 60 thousand particles - farmers and small entrepreneurs - connected in the network created by the young Italians between Ivory Coast, Colombia and recently also Asia to respond to the requests of 150 customers among the main European and world producers.*

We asked the co-founder of Trusty why their company represents an example of Italian excellence.

'For the demonstrated ability to solve problems in different contexts,' he replies, 'which clashes with the rigidity of other developers. We are tenacious, and everyone abroad recognises this, because if there is no solution, we build it'.

Let's go back to the initial premise, namely that we don't just export luxury but also ex-

pertise. And to demonstrate this, it is interesting to recount the **'Dubai case'**.

The first image we all think of is that of luxury par excellence, from cars to jewellery, from leather goods to clothing. All true, but it is above all high-tech products - along with agri-foodstuffs - that drive exports to the Arab Emirates' city of nightlife. Artificial intelligence, robotics and blockchain are the emerging fields that see the Tricolour among the most reliable partners for a very demanding clientele.

And then there is Culture, the intangible and universal heritage of humanity with great potential, including economic potential. **Benedetta Paravia**, philanthropist and entrepreneur daughter of art (her family was a pioneer and leader in the production, installation and maintenance of lifts) who decided to invest in art and beauty, knows this well. It was her idea of the **'La Dolce Via Festival'** to tell the story of Italian cinema in the Emirates. An event that gave rise to the idea of a film masterclass to promote careers in the sector among young Emiratis and encourage study paths in Italy.

Your testimony on what is needed to support 'the other made in Italy' abroad

What support can the country system give to those who, like you, are committed to promoting the Italian brand?

The first step is to stop acting like an absent-minded genius and start structuring everything that can be summed up in the word 'enchantment'. We are the country of excellence but we often seem to forget this by letting others tell - or worse imitate - what only we know how to do with authenticity

In concrete terms?

Three fundamental things are needed. The first is the political courage to strategically invest in economic-cultural diplomacy because today promoting Italian products does not only mean exporting products, but exporting vision, values and lifestyles. Even in the construction of an Expo, narrative is used, and there is no narrative without a system. The second thing is concrete support for women's creative entrepreneurship. Italian women carry on tradition and innovation with a pioneering spirit that deserves tools, visibility and credit, in every sense. Thirdly, the ability to act as a nation-company with a central direction that is able to coordinate excellence, avoid dispersion and present itself to the world with a single, authoritative voice. If Italy were managed as a global brand, with an integrated and measurable strategy, Made in Italy would become the country's first export value.



Benedetta Paravia

This is what Expo is for: showcasing

It is a good sign that Mario Vattani has been chosen for Osaka to promote a strong idea of Italy: a country that does not limit itself to recounting beauty but plans, defends and exports it with collective intelligence.

So as not to get too carried away with praising ourselves too much, it is the numbers that give us an objective idea of the desire for Made in Italy that exists in the world. While in the rest of Europe, micro and small enterprises with their exports account on average for 1.6 % of GDP, Italian ones travel at double speed with a percentage of 3.3%. This growth is a direct consequence of having understood, for years now, that it is possible to remain small or very small, as long as you network, especially through territorial districts.

A few more figures to understand the Italy of know-how. Last year 83,586 craft businesses were set up, at the rate of 321 per day, and in the last six years, 502,000 young people under 30 have been trained and started work with an apprenticeship contract in craft businesses (Confartigianato data). A world on a woman's scale since 99.7% of women's enterprises are micro or small.

At an institutional level, to help SMEs that want to explore markets beyond the borders, as well as trade associations, there is **the Export E-book**. A veritable digital handbook developed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, designed - explains the Farnesina website - for companies that are not yet present in foreign markets or are not yet present in a stable manner.

In practice, a reasoned list of public tools to support those who wish to export.

It is worth making a brief reflection at this point: it is **STILE ITALIA THAT** is driving **ITALIAN-MADE** products in the first place. It sounds like a play on words but it is not. Because if it is true that the products, whether tangible or intangible, of Italian companies focus on flair and quality, the best ambassadors of Italian style are Italians abroad.

Salvo Iavarone, president of Confindustria and Asmef (Associazione Mezzogiorno Futuro), tells us.

There are many Italians who have achieved success, having worked with imagination and ingenuity. Without going to the trouble of bothering the likes of Amadeo Giannini (the founder of the Bank of America), many have charted successful paths. One example? Awarded the Premio Eccellenza Italiana in Washington in 2019, **the Marra family**, originally from Santa Lucia in Naples, who have been making pizza ovens in America for 12 years, in the state of Maryland, just outside Washington

DC. Born with food imports from our country, they have also developed Pizza University and Culinary Arts. But I could also mention Ettore Colussi, who started from nothing and created a tourist empire in Santo Domingo, with hotels and resorts, employing 1,500 people.



Salvo Iavarone

Excellent examples and then what?

The Italians registered with AIRE (Anagrafe Italiana Residenti Esteri) number around six million, but if we go exploring the vast world that associates second and third generation Italians, we arrive at an estimated 70 to 80 million, according to studies by the Farnesina. A population larger than that contained within national borders. We are talking about people born in Argentina, in the States or in many other countries and whose father or grandfather was born in Italy. And in many cases they retain a strong Italic identity. In the sense that they cultivate the memory and love for their country of origin, but they also love and respect the nation that welcomed them and gave them economic and social success.

An idyllic world...

A world with many facets. From the **CIM** (Confederazione Italiani nel Mondo - Confederation of Italians Worldwide), of which I am vice president, we have often launched messages and ideas to keep the Italian identity alive. An interesting proposal seems to me to be the one launched to the Italian Chambers of Commerce Abroad. An archipelago of 93 offices in the world under Unioncamere, to which it was proposed to create structures to be put in synergy with the many Italians wishing to buy a few flats in their home villages to recover their roots but also a historical and architectural heritage of great attraction for those who dream of their corner of paradise in the Belpaese. We presented an ad hoc project. After the first positive comments, we are now waiting for developments.

Another interesting reality to be explored is that of the Chambers of Commerce, which from their initial vocation as territorial promotion bodies

through real showcases of the 'best of' are increasingly evolving into meeting points for entrepreneurs looking across borders. A forerunner of an international vision, **Eurochambres** was established back in 1958 to connect the trade representations of

the founding states of the European Union. Today, its numbers are impressive: 20 million companies connected through a network of 1,700 regional and local chambers of commerce throughout Europe. And the enterprises associated with the chambers of commerce - over 93% of which are SMEs - employ over 120 million people. (*data provided by Eurochambres*)

It was in May this year that the French Chamber of Commerce opened a representative office in Rome - following the one in Naples in 2023 - adding to the historical presence of the organisation that has been open in Milan since 1885. *"Because if for those who do business, the economic capital of Italy remains the Lombard capital,"* said CCI France Italie president **Denis Delespaul** at the inauguration, *"Rome is not only the geographical heart of Italy, but above all its institutional nerve centre. The decision to open our office here is the result of our desire to consolidate our role as a credible economic interlocutor, alongside companies and institutions, to support internationalisation, development and innovation in the territories."*

President Delespaul's three words: internationalisation, development and innovation, suggest the way forward for SMEs that want to grow in foreign markets while maintaining high quality standards. To do this, and this is where the role of politics comes in, what small, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs are asking the government for as a priority is the unbureaucratisation of procedures and active policies for the professional training of young people.

So that we do not die buried by folders and do not lose a heritage of know-how and know how that remains the secret of 'Made in Italy'.



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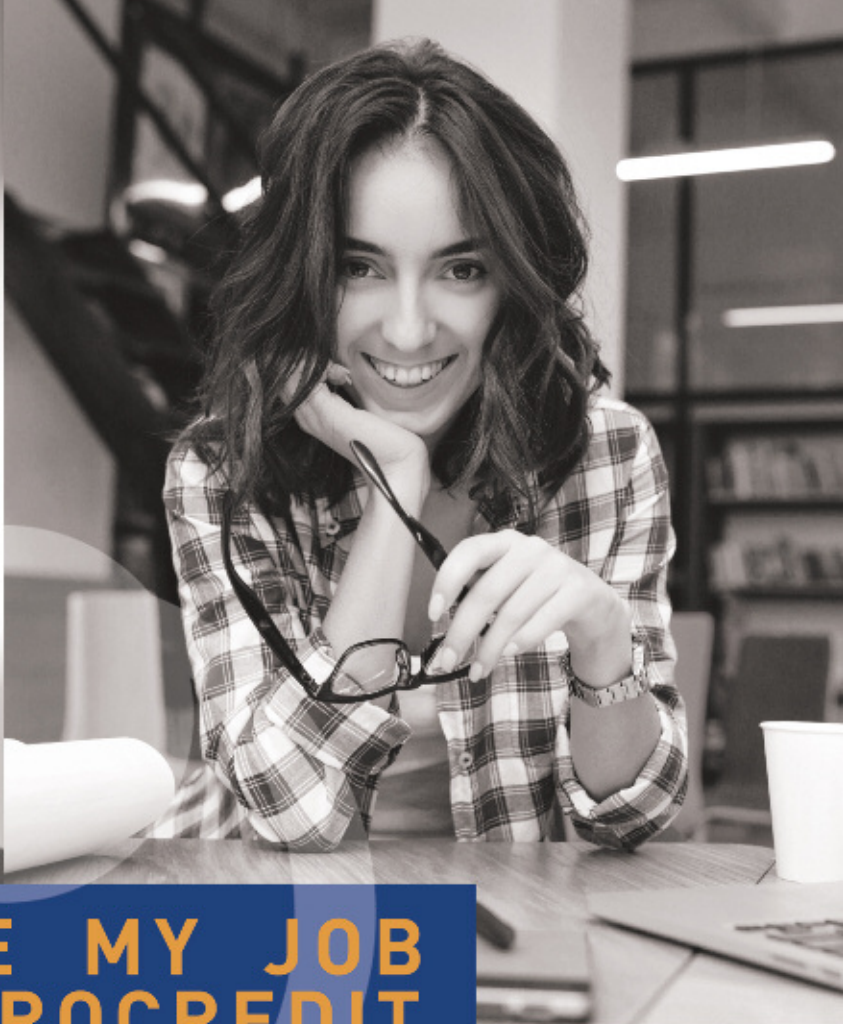
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