LANCET COUNTDOWN: TRACKING PROGRESS ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE
In collaboration with Wellcome

A decade tracking progress on health and climate change

ITALY

LANCET COUNTDOWN ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE
DATA SHEET 2026

Health and Climate Change in Italy

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change tracks the connections between health and climate change. In its tenth iteration, the 2026 Global Report shows that the health impacts of climate change have escalated and frequently accelerated in the decade since the Paris Agreement came into force.

This document presents key country-level findings from the 2026 Lancet Countdown report for Italy.

Extreme heat is placing a growing burden on health and livelihoods in Italy, with sharply higher heatwave exposure among young children and older adults, rising economic losses from heat-related deaths, and substantial losses in labour capacity, particularly in construction.

Fossil fuels continue to dominate household energy use and road transport in Italy, air pollution imposes major economic costs, and fossil-fuel subsidies continue to outweigh carbon-pricing revenues.

Emissions from red meat and dairy are falling in Italy, but deaths linked to eating too few healthy plant-based foods are rising, highlighting the need to support healthier, plant-rich diets.

Italy's latest NDC includes health for the first time, but its high-level political engagement on climate and health has been inconsistent.

Heat and Health

Exposure to high temperatures increases the risk of heat-related illness and mortality. Vulnerable groups, including older adults, young children, pregnant women, and those with pre-existing conditions, face the greatest risks.

82.7% of the heatwave days that people in Italy were, on average, exposed to between 2021 and 2025 would not have been expected to occur without climate change. (Indicator 1.1.1)

Children under one year of age and adults over 65 experienced an average of approximately 18 additional heatwave days per year between 2016 and 2025. This was an increase of 288% and 271%, respectively, compared with the 1986–2005 baseline. (Indicator 1.1.1)

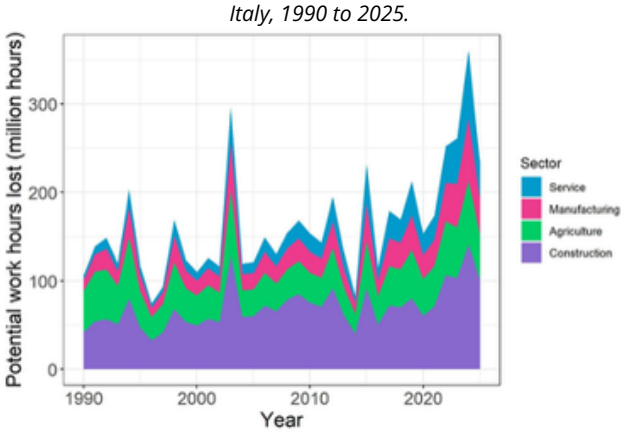
People were exposed to 197 more hours of moderate or higher risk of heat stress if undertaking moderate outdoor physical activity (e.g., brisk walking) per year in 2016-2025 compared with the 1990s. In total exposure to hours of moderate or higher risk of heat stress reached 475 hours per year. (Indicator 1.1.2)

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF HEAT

Heat stress reduces labour productivity, undermining livelihoods and the social determinants of health. In Italy, this has direct implications for income, food security, and access to care.

- The average annual economic value of heat-related mortality losses in those over age 65 was US$7.3 billion between 2021 and 2025, which is equivalent to 418,137 average incomes of Italy. This is a 169% increase since 2000 to 2004. (Indicator 4.1.2)
- The potential income lost from reduced labour capacity due to heat was US$4.6 billion in 2025. Workers in the construction sector were the most severely affected, incurring 44% of the losses. (Indicator 4.1.3)

Annual potential work hours lost, disaggregated by economic sector. Italy, 1990 to 2025.



Heat exposure caused an annual loss of 211.4 million potential labour hours on average, between 2016 and 2025, which is 63% higher than the average year in the 1990s. The construction sector accounted for 40.7% of losses and the agriculture sector 23.7%. (Indicator 1.1.3)

People in Italy lost on average 33.3 hours per year of sleep due to high night-time temperatures between 2021 to 2025, an increase of 3.2 hours from the 1986 to 2005 annual average. (Indicator 1.1.4)

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Air Pollution, Energy Transition, and Health Co-benefits

Fossil fuel combustion contributes to harmful air pollution, increasing the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and premature mortality. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Italy's annual mean concentration of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) was 14 μg/m³, almost three times the WHO's recommended annual guideline of 5 μg/m³. Reducing dependence on polluting fuels can improve air quality and protect health, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2023, the carbon intensity of Italy's energy system decreased to 50 tCO_2/TJ, which is 2.8% lower than in 2016. As of 2023, coal made up 3.6% of Italy's total energy supply, down 49% since 2016. Renewables accounted for 7.4% of total energy supply and 23% of electricity in 2023, up 21% and 43% since 2016 respectively. (Indicator 3.1.1)

In 2023, 20.4% of household energy came from electricity; however, 54% still came from fossil fuels (liquid fossil fuel and natural gas). (Indicator 3.1.2)

In 2023, fossil fuels still accounted for 95.5% of all road transport energy, and electricity accounted for only 0.2%. (Indicator 3.1.3)

Italy had a net-negative carbon revenue in 2024, indicating that fossil fuel subsidies were higher than carbon prices. The country saw a net subsidy of US$17.2 billion, which is equivalent to 8.4% of the national health budget. (Indicator 4.3.2)

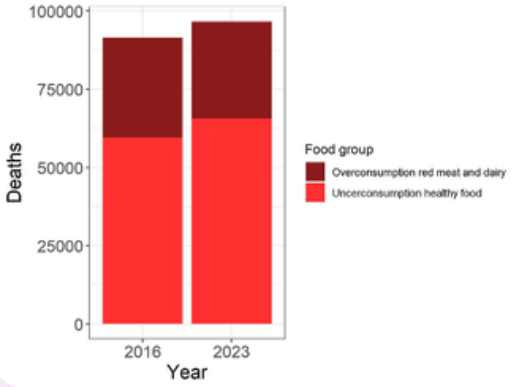
Diet and Health

Shifting to healthier, plant-rich diets can reduce agricultural emissions and improve health outcomes. In Italy, diet-related risks contribute to preventable deaths and chronic disease burden.

The emissions associated with demand for agricultural food products decreased by 12.6% between 2016 and 2023. Red meat and dairy emissions decreased by 15.4% in the same time period and accounted for 67% of all consumption-related emissions in 2023. (Indicator 3.3.1)

In 2023, 65,569 deaths were linked to not eating enough healthy plant-based foods, like fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains, nuts, and seeds, up from 59,467 in 2016. Another 31,056 deaths were linked to eating excessive dairy, red meat, and processed meat, a decrease by 3.1% (1003 deaths) from 2016. (Indicator 3.3.2)

The graph shows the number of deaths attributable to dietary imbalances in 2016 and 2023 - namely high intake of red meat and dairy and low intake of nutritious plant-based foods.



Planning and Resilience for Health

Building resilience to the health impacts of climate change depends on sustained political commitment, private sector engagement, climate information for health and strong health emergency preparedness. In Italy, greater and more consistent integration of health into national climate policy and planning is needed to protect the population from growing climate-related health threats.

In 2025, Italy noted the intersection of climate change and health in its UN General Debate after no mention for 2 years (2023-24), while it had mentioned it for 3 consecutive years before that (2020-22). (Indicator 5.4.1)

Of 389 companies in Italy that submitted reports as part of their participation in the UN Global Compact (the world's largest voluntary sustainability initiative for companies), 162 (42%) referred to the health dimensions of climate change in 2024. (Indicator 5.5)

Italy reported that its national meteorological and hydrological services provide climate information for the health sector. This is essential for an effective health response to climate-related risks. (Indicator 2.2.1)

A nation's readiness to general health emergencies serves as a proxy indicator of its overall ability to withstand and adapt to climate change. In 2025, Italy reported high implementation of health emergency management capacity, unchanged from 2023. (Indicator 2.2.4)

Romanello M, Walawender M, Israelsson J et al. The 2026 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: A decade of escalating health harms and a decisive moment for all. The Lancet 2026; published online October 2026. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(26)01779-4

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