



# AFEcò

EMPOWERING OLDER ADULTS TO APPLY AFFORDABLE  
ECO- AND AGE-FRIENDLY SOLUTIONS TO AGE IN PLACE

## AFECO – National Report of Italy

A1 literature review /A2 comparative analysis of barriers and facilitators  
/A3 good practices



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## About this publication

This report summarises the results of the research activities carried out in Italy within the Erasmus+ project AFECO – Empowering older adults to apply affordable eco- and age-friendly solutions to age in place (cooperation partnership in adult education, project number: 2022-1-NL01-KA220-ADU-000086242). More information is available at <https://afeco.eu/>.

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## Definitions

### Definition of age-Friendly principles

Any practical solutions that are linked to one or more of the eight domains of the age-friendly cities framework that older adults themselves or with the support of others can implement in their own home or community. Any practical solutions linked to one or more of the eight domains of the age-friendly cities framework that in AFECO older adults can implement themselves or with the support of others in their own home or community. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2007, 2016, 2023) developed the age-friendly cities framework to encourage and support active and healthy living by enhancing opportunities for health, participation and security to improve the quality of life of the ageing population. The eight domains of the framework are as follows: outdoor spaces and buildings; transportation; housing; social participation; respect and social inclusion; civic participation and employment; communication and information; and community support and health services.

According to (Menec et al, 2017), Age-friendly principles “(...) support and enable people to age actively (...) with the notion of “active aging” broadly defined in terms of health, participation, and security.”

### Definition of eco-friendly principles

Any practical solution that older adults themselves or with support of others can implement in their own home or community to act more sustainable or environmentally friendly. Environmentally friendly means that the practical solutions should aim to reduce, minimise the impact on, or do no harm to ecosystems or the environment (Webster).

According to Ragheb et. al (2016), a building to be considered “green” or “eco-friendly” needs to have:

- Ventilation systems designed for efficient heating and cooling
- Energy-efficient lightning and appliances
- Adaptive reuse of older buildings
- Water-saving plumbing fixtures
- Landscapes planned to maximize passive solar energy
- Minimal harm to the natural habitat
- Alternate power sources such as solar power or wind power
- Non-synthetic, non-toxic materials
- Locally-obtained woods and stone
- Responsibly-harvested woods
- Use of recycled architectural salvage

## Introduction

The aim of this report is to give an overview of current state of the art in the occurrence and policies regarding affordable age-friendly and eco-friendly solutions in the partner countries. The report consists of the findings from the literature review, the comparative analysis and the reporting of good practices. It aims for the consortium as a whole to gain an understanding of the state of the art and on affordable age and eco-friendly solutions in partner countries and particularly the home and community fields, and to present that knowledge in the form of a written report.

The literature review, the analysis of barriers and facilitators, and the survey on existing or even planning good practices in the project countries, will help the partners to build and update a strong knowledge base in these fields. To be closer to the practical issues that define the adaptability of eco and age-friendly solutions in community, the consortium decided to use mostly grey literature and websites for tools and advice, such as governmental pages. Common grey literature publication types include reports (annual, research, technical, project, etc.), working papers, government documents, white papers and evaluations, which will help all partners to reach conclusions around the common field between age and eco-friendly developments.

Barriers and facilitators found in each project country will be used for stipulating the right consequence of actions needed, to propose a sound methodology that could – in combination with other actions and stakeholders – promote the implementation of age and eco-friendly principles into the public and private sphere of care for older people.

Finally, the selection of representative good practices by each project country can be the basis for a report, and a publication, that depicts the level of maturity and progress of the notions of age-friendliness and eco-friendliness, as well as their impact on the care of older people.

## Results for Italy

### Current Situation

An ISTAT (the Italian Institute for Statistic) survey of 2021 shows that Italy's resident population is decreasing: while in that year the population was 59.2 million, the forecast for 2050 is 54.2 million. In this context, the over-65 population accounts for 23.5% and by 2050 this age group would reach 34.9% of the total population. In this scenario, the impact on social protection policies will play a

key role, as they will have to cope with the needs of an increasing share of older people, with 5,3% already living in poverty (ISTAT 1, 2022). In 2021 the share of adults over 65 living alone represented half the total, in 2041 it would reach 60% and according to ISTAT, with more than 10 million people living by themselves (ISTAT, 2022).

By 2020, the estimated number of **not self-sufficient people** were almost **4 million** (Fosti, Notarnicola, Pierobelli 2023) and the number of people living with a chronic disease or impairment reached circa 8 million (ISS, 2023). In 2021, 2.28% of people over 65 in Italy required at least one hospitalisation in a nursing home (UNEBA, 2022).

Regarding this last point, we can distinguish between two different kinds of assistance for the older population: **informal** and **formal care**.

This first one is generally provided by a family member or a caregiver, while the latter can be provided at home (e.g. meals preparation, doctor visit, cleaning, transport) or at a residential facility.

It is estimated that the number of caregivers in Italy is around 2.1 million, but only 920.000 of them work with a regular contract (De Luca, Tronchin, Di Pasquale, 2021). The majority of caregivers come from Eastern Europe (68,8%) and in the 87,6% of cases are women.

In the formal sector, the number of professionals is way less significant, with 343.000 employees and 35.000 volunteers (ISTAT 1, 2020).

In Italy there are circa 9.000 facilities dedicated to assisting the older population, mostly in the North of Italy, and the residents of these structures are mostly women and people over 64 (ISTAT 1, 2020).

A distinction must therefore be made between three different categories of facilities:

- **Casa di Riposo** (Rest Home) is intended for people in later life who are still partially self-sufficient and do not want to or cannot live alone. The nursing staff is not constantly present in these facilities since the residents have a certain degree of autonomy.

Conversely, RSA are socio-medical facilities that house non-self-sufficient people in later life, with medical and nursing staff always present.

- **Casa di Cura** (Care Home) is designed for partially self-sufficient people who suffer from acute illnesses and need specialist care.

Recreational and socialisation activities are organised in all facilities, and fees vary according to the facility and its management (Fondazione Onda, 2023).

## Age-friendly principles in Italy

The concept of the age-friendly principle is **relatively new** in the Italian political agenda and debate. It is important to notice how the topic is developing at a **different speed** on these three main levels: national policies, regional policies and local plans.

Only in 2019, in fact, the **national** authorities started to map and evaluate policies on Active Ageing (Barbella et al., 2022). The process of mapping and evaluating required three years to be completed, resulting in a series of guidelines to be implemented at national level, that will see the light in the next years (DFP, 2023).

A major policy that has been implemented in Italy in recent years is the National Recovery and Resilience Plan – NRRP. Introduced in the 2021 to halt the economic recession caused by the Covid pandemic, the plan provides a series of investments aiming to sustain the economy by improving the social and infrastructural conditions of the Italian State.

In the plan, an indirect reference to the theme of Age-Friendly Environments is possible. The NRRP, in fact, allocates 300 million Euros to converting nursing homes into co-housings in order to foster the autonomy and independence of older people (NRRP, 2021).

At a **regional and local** level, the implementation of policies and best practices is not homogeneous due to the lack of a central coordination and to the fact that regional and local institution have the possibility of adopting their own set of policies.

In a 2021 study, Sarlo, Costa and Quattrini pointed out that all the initiatives developed in the Italian territory as a support for ageing in place focuses on three main areas: projects that help people in later life **inside their home** (e.g providing home services, new technologies and home automation, removal of architectural barriers); projects that provide support for people in later life in the **outside environment** (e.g services for fostering participation in social community; projects of urban redevelopment) and policies focused on **education** (Sarlo, Costa and Quattrini, 2021, p. 21).

In the following list it is possible to identify good practices related to these three areas of interventions:

- **CAAD – Centri per l’adattamento dell’ambiente domestico** (Centres for the Adaptation of the Home Environment), **Emilia-Romagna Region**. The CAAD Project resulted in creation of twelve local centres whose tasks are to provide information and counseling to individuals and private or public entities that want to adapt their environment in a more age-friendly way (CAAD, 2023).
- **Coabitazioni solidali, Tuscany**. This initiative matches together two frail (but self-sufficient) subjects to live together and help each other with everyday activities. The main aim is to consent the ageing in place and the fight to economic difficulties (AUSER Toscana, 2023).
- **La Finestra sul Cortile** – The Window on the Courtyard, **Bologna Municipality**. The project aims at preventing social isolations by creating moments of interaction (e.g.workshops, birthday parties, etc.) between seniors living in the same neighbourhood (AUSER Bologna, 2023).

In the context of age-friendly practices, it is possible to identify also dementia-friendly solutions that can be implemented at home. Italy, in fact, is partner (along with the Netherlands, Denmark and Taiwan) of the HAAN Project, whose aim is to develop technologies to support people with dementia and their caregivers in living at home.

The Project has co-created and designed different solutions such as medicine dispensers, sensors for fall detection and interactive games used for cognitive training (HAAL Project, 2023).

### Eco-friendly principles in Italy

Similar to age-friendly principles, the topic of eco-friendly principles is treated in the national debate as separated issues and not exactly as a singular concept, with substantial differences between national and local level, although in recent years there has been a lot of attention on the general “green” subject.

The Italian State developed the first specific body of laws regarding environmental issues in 2006, with the approval of the Law n. 152. In the document it is possible to find measures adopted to evaluate the impact of building activities on the environment, in order to make them as sustainable as possible.

This law was followed by Law n.221 in 2015, whose aim was to promote and integrate in the national *corpus* of laws European directives and international standards on the environment. The *ratio* behind this Law was to create a more structured strategy for a sustainable environment, by creating indicators to monitor and evaluate the situation of the soil exploitation in Italy.

In 2022 the Italian Ministry of Sustainable Infrastructures and Mobility published a series of guidelines entitled: “Cities with zero climate impact: strategies and policies” (Tilche et al., 2022). The document collects a series of guidelines and studies to be used by Regional and local administrations, in order to align their environmental policies with the European Green Deal. The paper examines three different areas, starting from analysing the emissions of building and transportations in the urban context and then proceeding in explaining green infrastructures and their roles in mitigating climate changes and in creating a better environment for citizens to live in. The last part of the review is dedicated to a series of suggestions on how to implement the policies and changes at a local level.

Italy has also subscribed the UN Resolution Agenda 2030 and has established a National Agency responsible for supervising the progresses made to reach the SDG.

When looking at Academic and Local context, it is possible to find a series of initiatives that actualize eco-friendly principles in concrete actions. In 2017 a group of architects and public/private institutions created the Green Cities Network and subscribed the Manifesto for Future Cities, a document that places Green Economy at the center of a vision for building and developing sustainable cities (Green City Networks, 2017).



Since then, a growing number of Italian cities has joined the network, conducting urban regeneration operations, as in the case of the cities of Milan, Pordenone or Rome, where degraded neighborhoods have been re-designed to be accessible for the citizens (Green City Networks, 2023).

Examples of best practices where eco-friendly principles meet architecture can be found in the following projects:

- **The Vertical Forest, Milan.** The project consists in two blocks with trees and vegetation incorporated in the *façade*. Aim of the project is to increase urban biodiversity while reducing air pollution (European Commission 1, 2023)
- **Green Housing Unit, Turin.** Similar to the Vertical Forest, this housing complex integrates trees and plant into its elements, in order to provide insulation from noise and heat. At the same time, the vegetation is able to produce oxygen and absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. (European Commission 2, 2023)
- **Biocasa\_82, Treviso Municipality.** This building is made 99% with recyclable materials and has a system that allows the reuse of rainwaters (Fabris, 2014)

### Age- and eco-friendly principles combined

Due to the recent entrance of the theme of age-friendly and eco-friendly principles in the Italian scenario, it was possible to identify only two projects combining them.

The first example can be found in the work of Tartaglia et al. (2019), in which the consequences of climate change are addressed in relation with the theme of accessibility. The study observes how the city of Milan is often hit by urban heat islands (UHI), and the formation of this phenomenon prevents frail people from accessing and living in some parts of the city. The paper suggests **nature-based solutions** to avoid the creation of UHI and, in particular, addresses the case study of the **Lodi-Corvetto neighbourhood** in the South-East of **Milan**. The area has a population consisting in 30% of seniors and it is provided with one main pedestrian zone that during summertime is often hit by UHI.

To avoid the creation of UHI, the project planted a row of trees on both sides of the road and provided it with draining pavements in order to reduce the asphalt temperature.

In 2017 the **Municipality of Sorradile**, in the Sardinia Region, decided to adopt a plan to contrast the effects of climate change, proposing a set of interventions to be made on public and private buildings.

The measures focused on improving the climate conditions of the already existing houses and buildings, favouring systems able to use natural lights, reuse raining water and to reduce heat temperature.

To support the frail population, the Municipality created an *ad hoc* plan to contrast heat islands, by installing air-conditioning systems to cool the temperature of private and public spaces and solar panel to balance the emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>. The projects include also a set of interventions to make public recreational centres for seniors more age-friendly (with special measures for contrast the summer heat) and the possibility to instal systems of remote assistance in the houses of frail subjects (Green City Networks 1, 2023)

## Analysis

According to a Censis study of 2022, 70,8% of Italian families own the house they live in, with the 26% of the population over 65 living in under-occupied dwellings (Socci, Principi, Lamura 2021) and 87% of house owners are completely satisfied with their house (CENSIS, 2022).

Nevertheless, implementing age-friendly and eco-friendly principles encounters a series of obstacles in the Italian scenario.

The first can be identified in the presence of **architectural barriers** inside and outside the houses of people over 65, representing a strong limit for participation in social and community life.

Inside their own home, older people recognize the bathroom as the room with more accessibility problems, mostly related to the presence of a bathtub and, in general, some spaces are deemed too small to use mobility devices such as wheelchairs (Socci, Principi e Lamura, 2021).

People who live in flat complexes report problems when the building has only stairs and not an elevator (Socci, Principi e Lamura, 2021).

The presence of outdoor architectural barriers is a topic that has been discussed in the Italian political panorama since the 1980s, when the Plan for the Elimination of Architectural Barriers has been introduced in the Italian national legislation with the Law n. 41/1986. The plan gives local authorities the tools to monitor and evaluate possible areas of intervention in order to reduce obstacles to the mobility and the fruition of public spaces by citizens (Fantini et al. 2019, p. 59). Nevertheless, up to these days, architectural barriers are still a huge problem in the Italian context, preventing the emergence of more accessible and inclusive spaces.

A second factor that complicates the implementation of an organic intervention on age-friendly environment is the presence of a **fragmented context** in the Italian **regions**.

According to the report of Socci, Principi e Lamura (2021), the quality of houses in Southern regions is lower than the ones in Central and Norther Regions, with around 11% of Southern householders reporting problems of damaged building, humidity and lack of proper lighting.

In Italy, 1,8% of population above 75 lives in overcrowded houses with structural problems or lack of basic services (running water, hygienic services, proper lighting) (ISTAT, 2020).

Another difference in the housing context can be found in the access to outdoor spaces such as gardens or terraces. A 2020 ISTAT report shows how the 58,4% of the population in the North-East of Italy has a garden, with this percentage reducing to the 29,2% in the South of Italy.

A 2021 survey from SWG identifies the problems related to the implementation of eco-friendly principles in the Italian context.

The first one is a general **lack of awareness and misinformation** regarding eco-friendly principles. The report shows that the majority of house holders are not conscious of the energetic class of their own home or are convinced of wrong information.

The 40% of the interviewed declared that the house they live in is not eco-friendly and does not meet the sustainability criteria regarding energy saving and respect for the environment.

Nevertheless, the survey highlights a positive trend: the 60% of the participants declared to be favourable to install solar panels and thermal insulation systems, but lament **high cost** and **lack of economic incentives** to do so.

## Gaps and challenges

The literature review on the state of eco-friendly and age-friendly principles shows a **fragmented reality** in the Italian peninsula, with **substantial differences** in the interventions conducted at a national, regional or local context.

In the Italian national legislation, indications of “ageing” are part of more general legislation addressing the whole community or the fragile person, usually emanating from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and mostly addressing health, disabilities and economic sustainment. Therefore, there is not even a law/specific policy framework targeting older adults as an independent category.

The first attempt made to elaborate an organic *corpus* of interventions and laws started in 2019, with the launch of a 3-years project by the Department of Family Policies (DFP - a Department of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the national government), in collaboration with the National Institute of Health and Science on Ageing (IRCCS INRCA). The main aim of the project was to create a national coordination between all the major stakeholders (national and local governments; hospitals; research centres; etc) to map the policies that have already been implemented, to define new political objectives and to create interventions at a regional and local level (DFP, 2023).

The Italian Constitution (1947) provides Regions with some autonomy in administrative and legislative terms. Particularly, the organisation of health and social service is strictly connected

with regional government as defined by the Decree of the President of the Republic No 4 of 14 January 1972.

A photograph of the state of the art regarding Regions and age-friendly related policies, is given by Lucantoni (2022), who divides the 20 Italian regions into **three groups**, according to how well the policies regarding Active Ageing are structured.

The first group includes the Regions that have consolidated a *corpus* of policies regarding Active Ageing (Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Umbria and Veneto), while in the second group it is possible to find those Regions that are gradually bringing the theme of Active Ageing inside their political agenda but do not have a specific legal framework for Active Ageing laws (Basilicata, Bolzano, Lazio, Liguria, Marche, Puglia, Toscana, Trento, Valle d'Aosta).

Lastly, in the third group are gathered all the Regions that do not have a specific area of intervention regarding the topic of Active Ageing (Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania, Lombardia, Molise, Piemonte, Sardegna e Sicilia).

This irregularity is the result of two interconnected factors: the **different social and economic background** of each region, and the **absence of a national policy** that regulates the interventions to be made, leaving to each region the possibility to dictate their own set of actions.

## Examples

### **Age-friendly project: "Casa di Quartiere" in Bologna Municipality**

The city of Bologna has created a network of community centers called "Casa di Quartiere" that are designed to be inclusive spaces for all ages. These centers offer a wide range of services and activities, including social gatherings, cultural events, health services, and educational programs. The centers are also designed with accessibility features such as ramps and elevators to ensure they are accessible to people with disabilities (Bologna Municipality, 2023).

### **Eco-friendly project: Casa 100k in Lodi Municipality.**

The Project was developed by architect Mario Cucinella in 2007. The idea behind this initiative is to create houses that could be affordable to a large portion of the population in terms of costs and able to guarantee zero CO2 emissions. The houses are built with prefabricated, flexible materials that can be moved to adapt the space to any climatic situation, favouring air circulation or heat retention. The houses are equipped with photovoltaic panels that make them energy self-sufficient, and outside there are plants to promote passive room cooling (Cucinella, 2023)

## Education

In the Italian panorama, people over 65 interested in lifelong learning programs can turn to **Universities of Third Age**, cultural institutions in all the Regions that offer practical and theoretical courses.

Nevertheless, it is quite difficult to find classes on the topics of age-friendly environments or eco-friendly principles.

For this reason, when designing training materials on these topics it is important to consider that the Italian older adults **could not be particularly aware** of these themes.

Another important factor to consider is the relationship between older people and technology. According to a 2019 ISTAT study, **only 41,9%** of the population between 65-74 knows how to navigate the Internet and only the 34% have access to a broadband connection.

This analysis also points out a **gender-based** difference in the use of technological devices, highlighting how men are more interested in technology than women (71% versus 64%, regardless of their age).

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