

# Dementia and disability: the right to rights

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In 2009, Italy ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) approved by the UN in 2006. In defining **disability** as the **result of the interaction of physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments with behavioural and environmental barriers**, this document indicates a new approach to protecting, promoting and guaranteeing the human rights and fundamental freedoms of disabled people; to valuing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination; and to implementing policies and interventions in line with these principles in all areas of life.

Disability as an **interaction between health conditions and the ecosystem or social model**, rather than as a health deficit in itself, is the new paradigm from which actions aimed at social inclusion and a welfare system that places the person and his or her specificities at the centre of interventions must arise.

While ISTAT is working on the creation of a Register on disability, it is important to stress that people suffering from dementia are, to all intents and purposes, disabled, although this is difficult to quantify because of the variable progression and duration of the disorder. The degradation of cognitive functions and the behavioural symptoms of the disease lead to an irreversible **loss of autonomy of the person**, have a **profound impact on the family structure** (it is estimated that in Italy about 3 million people are directly or indirectly involved in the care of family members with dementia) and a **social and health cost** that rises

to about 10-12 billion Euros per year in Italy. The ISTAT report on the health conditions of the elderly in 2019 states that in Italy there are 600,000 over-65s with dementia living in the family (4.2% of the elderly; with peaks of 15.4% for women over 85) out of one million cases of dementia registered in the territory. **This value is destined to increase due to the global ageing of the Italian population**, which has in fact recorded an old age index of 165.9% in 2017 and 179.4% in 2020 (with a projection of 280% for 2051), and a dependency index of the elderly that has risen from 35% to 36.4% over the same period of time.

In terms of planning, a record linkage could bring these data together with those of ISTAT, which estimates that there are over 3 million people with disabilities, of which 1.5 million are over 75 (22% of this age group). However, it is already clear that there is a need to put into practice at all levels - legislative, administrative, technological, financial, educational - welfare and policies that protect and guarantee the right of people with dementia to dignity, non-discrimination, inclusion, accessibility and equality; that develop technologically advanced therapies, tools and devices for them; that raise awareness in society, combating prejudice and discriminatory behaviour and **promoting a more positive perception of people with dementia**; that adapt access to information, care, cultural and recreational life; that ban inhuman, degrading or inappropriate treatment; that are able to create tailor-made projects aimed at increasing hope and quality of life, according to disability but also residual abilities.

## Ageing of the Italian population

YEAR	OLD AGE INDEX	DEPENDENCY INDEX
2051	280%	
2020	179.4%	36%
2017	165.9%	35%

