

Italy joins top longevity nations, Istat data shows

Posted on April 7, 2026 by Newsdesk

ROME — Italy has cemented its place among the world's most long-lived countries, with life expectancy reaching 83.4 years, according to a new Istat report published on 7 April.

That places Italy ahead of the United States, where life expectancy reached a record 79 years in 2024, and above the Western European average of 82.7 years, though behind top-ranked Japan at around 85 years and the micro-states of Monaco and San Marino.

The drivers of this longevity revolution are well documented. Infant mortality collapsed from 230 deaths per 1,000 live births in the 19th century to 2.7 per 1,000 in 2023, one of the lowest rates on earth. The establishment of a universal healthcare system in 1978 accelerated and consolidated those gains. The share of Italians reporting poor health has fallen from 8% in 1995 to 5.5% in 2025.

Between 1990 and 2024, life expectancy rose by approximately eight years for men and 6.5 years for women, reaching 81.5 and 85.6 years respectively. The Istat report, "*La salute: una conquista da difendere*" (Health: an achievement to defend), attributes these gains to improvements in nutrition, hygiene, medicine, and the widespread adoption of vaccines.

The role of diet

Italy's Mediterranean diet, traditionally associated with healthy longevity, is also being increasingly recognised by experts for its preventative and therapeutic benefits across chronic conditions from cardiovascular disease to cognitive decline. The Cilento region of Campania is home to roughly 300 residents aged over 100 and in robust health, and has been a benchmark for longevity research since American physiologist Ancel Keys first studied the area in the mid-20th century. Higher

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adherence to the Mediterranean diet is also associated by medical professionals with a reduced risk of all-cause mortality , according to Italy's national dietary guidelines published last month.

The gains, however, are not uniform. The median age at death in 2023 ranged from under 82 years in Campania to over 86 in the Marche region. "The fact that quality of care can vary from region to region plays a role in the territorial differences in life expectancy," said Giovanni Rezza, epidemiologist and former head of the prevention department at Italy's Ministry of Health, according to local media reports.

Longevity also comes with new pressures. The number of Italians living with *multimorbilità* (simultaneous multiple conditions) has grown from 10.3 million in 1993 to 13 million today. Cardiovascular conditions now account for 30% of deaths and cancer for 26.3%. Rezza called Italy's national health service "a great achievement" while cautioning that fiscal pressures make maintaining its efficiency an ongoing challenge.

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