

Chapter 9

Budget Sustainability and Integrity as Essential but Not Exhaustive Aspects of the Control of the Superior Institutions of Control (ISC) on Health

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ABSTRACT

The health emergency led in 2020 to the definition of numerous measures involving interventions on the health system: measures with a specific financial allocation and aimed at affecting the most problematic aspects of care, which were mainly attributed to the choices made in recent years. This chapter analyses the measures launched to face the crisis. The chapter, moreover, emphasizes how the Italian healthcare system, despite the difficulties encountered, has withstood the impact of the crisis.

INTRODUCTION

The health emergency led in 2020 to the definition of numerous measures involving interventions on the health system; measures with a specific financial allocation and aimed at affecting the most problematic aspects of care, which were mainly attributed to the choices made in recent years.

The measures launched fall into four main areas of intervention

- Areas aimed at increasing staffing levels in health facilities that have been under severe pressure since the beginning of the pandemic and that had already suffered from a reduction in permanent

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staff and an increasing use of fixed-term contracts or consultancy services that did not allow them to maintain an adequate quality of supply;

- Areas aimed at immediately adjusting the availability of hospitalisation facilities in terms of intensive and semi-intensive care beds, in line with the growing numbers of the pandemic, interrupting the downward trend that had characterised the last decade in particular. These measures were accompanied by more structural measures for building and technological upgrading entrusted to specific programmes;
- Areas intended to strengthen the territorial structures that proved to be more exposed and fragile in the face of a sudden and unexpected phenomenon such as Covid;
- Areas aimed, finally, at reducing the undesirable effects of the strong concentration of assistance on Covid subjects and the blockage of activity due to lockdown. Particularly high costs in terms of the postponement of screening, the lengthening of waiting lists for specialist services, the postponement of non-urgent hospitalisation activities that have become necessary and which represent, after the loss of human life suffered, perhaps the most negative legacy that this crisis has left us from the health point of view. Naturally, these areas of intervention have been supplemented, starting in 2021, by that aimed at making it possible to implement the Vaccination Plan, which should enable us to emerge from the crisis in the coming months, but of which it is still too early to propose an assessment, even a partial one.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHCARE

The emergency that the country is currently facing has made clearer, if there were any need to do so, the importance of being able to count on efficient healthcare that is capable of responding to threats made more insidious by an increasingly open and globalised economic system. This experience has also highlighted its strengths and weaknesses, making it clear that, beyond the extraordinary emergency caused by an unexpected ‘enemy’, choices had to be made.

The success recorded in recent years in reabsorbing imbalances in the use of resources has not always prevented the emergence of critical points that must now be overcome:

- The unacceptable differences in the quality of the services offered in the different areas of the country;
- The lack of personnel due to the constraints imposed during the restructuring phase,
- The limits in the planning of the necessary professional resources, but also to a progressive flight from the public system;
- The inadequacy of territorial assistance in the face of the growing phenomenon of non-self-sufficiency and chronic illnesses;
- The slow progress of investments sacrificed in face of current needs.

These difficulties are made even more acute in perspective by the growing demographic imbalance with an ageing population with one of the highest life expectancies in the world and lower birth rates (as shown by the analyses released by ISTAT (2021) – Italian Institute of Statistics - in February 2021) and the consequent burden on workers. It is well known that in just 20 years’ time, looking at the forecasts, the ratio will change to one pensioner for every two people of working age, reducing the wealth generated

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