



Italians and Official Development Assistance

Research report prepared by
DISPOC/LAPS (University of Siena) and IAI

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METHODOLOGICAL NOTE and AUTHORS

The survey was conducted by the Political and Social Analysis Laboratory ("LAPS") of the Department of Social, Political and Cognitive Sciences ("DISPOC") of the University of Siena between 7 and 13 September 2022. In the period of the survey, a sample of 3,021 individuals were interviewed, all of Italian nationality and at least 18 years old, having access to Internet. That sample was selected within an "opt-in" online panel kept and managed by CINT. For the extraction of the sample a sampling method was used involving stratification by gender and age bracket, area of residence and level of education, based on parameters of the Italian adult population with access to Internet (source: ISTAT 2019). The questionnaire was constructed in modules. There was one common module for all 3,021 interviewees, plus various modules for the three sub-samples of approximately 1,000 respondents each, extracted respecting the same stratification by portions of the overall sample. Moreover, questions with different formulations were assigned randomly to different groups of respondents. The survey was self-administered using the CAWI method (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing). The data presented in this report were further weighted using socio-demographic characteristics (gender and age group, area of residence and level of education) based on the distribution of the Italian adult population with access to Internet.

This report was drawn up by Davide Angelucci and Gianluca Piccolino (LAPS) in collaboration with Daniele Fattibene, Irene Paviotti and Matteo Cianforlini (IAI).

Principal results

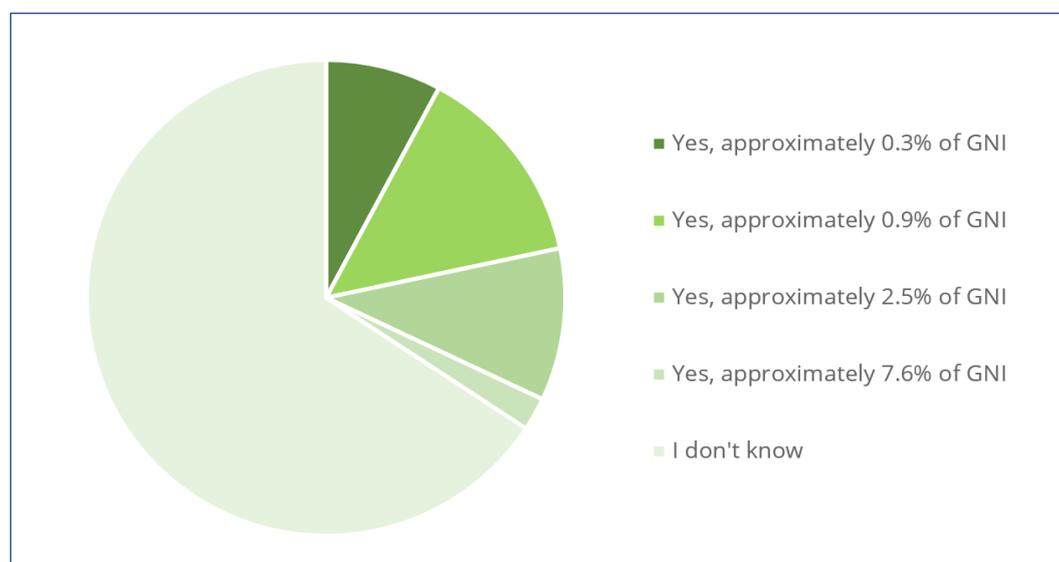
- 65.74% of the Italians interviewed in the IAI-LAPS survey of September 2022 do not know the percentage of GNI destined to Italian Official Development Assistance (ODA). Only 7.82% of respondents were able to identify the correct approximate figure.
- 57.8% of the Italians interviewed believe that the Ministry of Economic Development is the entity principally responsible for ODA, while 20.3% think that it is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.
- 53.9% of those interviewed are able to correctly identify the Sustainable Development Goals.
- A relative majority of those interviewed (around 40%) think that the levels of ODA should remain stable; less than 40% favour an increase. Among centre and left voters, there is majority support for an increase in ODA; among right voters, those in favour of maintaining the status quo are predominant.
- Official development assistance is seen positively by public opinion, that believes it helps the economies of the beneficiary countries, increases their self-sufficiency, and supports the most vulnerable groups. Yet there are doubts regarding its effectiveness, in particular due to management of the aid by the partner governments.
- For 41% of those interviewed Italy's international prestige would benefit from an increase in aid spending, while 31% think that the same could be said of an increase in defence spending.
- 41% of those interviewed have not participated in any activities of solidarity with developing countries in the past year; among those who have, donations, the purchase of fair-trade items and petitions are the principal activities undertaken. Among active persons, support for official development assistance is greater.

In collaboration with the LAPS, the IAI conducted an opinion survey on Italian foreign policy, which included a questionnaire on development aid. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 1,000 individuals of Italian nationality at least 18 years of age, having access to Internet, selected with a sampling method that ensures representativeness.

The issue of development cooperation, and in particular of Official Development Assistance (ODA) was analysed from various points of view. First of all, the citizens' knowledge was tested regarding three aspects relating to Italian development aid: the percentage of gross national income (GNI) allocated to ODA; the ministry responsible for the management of ODA; and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹.

Most of the respondents stated that they did not know what percentage of GNI is allocated to ODA (65.74%); 13.84% said 0.9%, and only 7.82% indicated a share close to 0.3% (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Knowledge of percentage of GNI in ODA

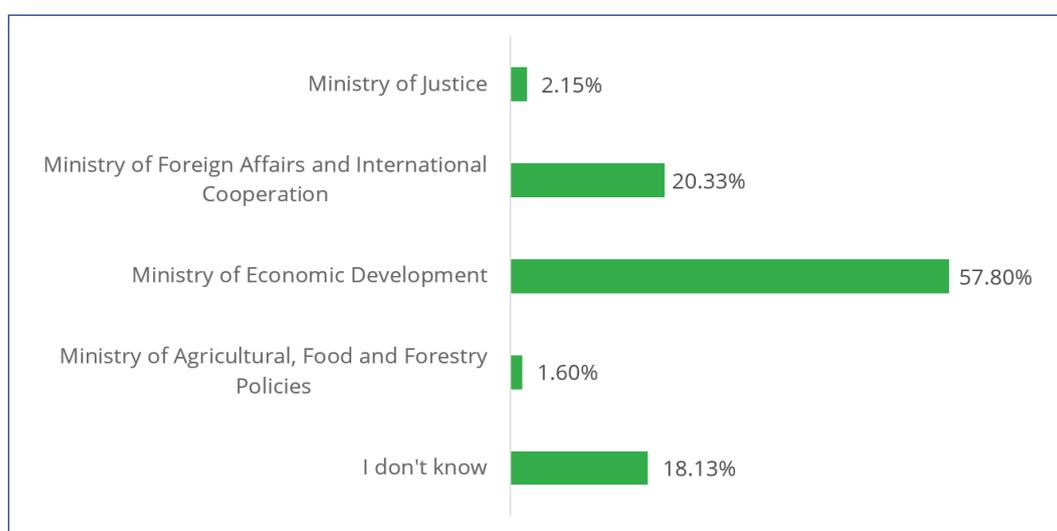


Question: *Could you indicate the approximate level of spending that Italy allocates to official development assistance as a percentage of Gross National Income (GNI)?* Source: IAI-LAPS 2022. Elaboration by IAI.

¹ These survey questions were administered to the entire sample of respondents, including those who received the module on development cooperation. The percentage thus refers to a total of n = 3021.

Thus, in general, citizens do not have a precise idea of the public financial resources allocated to development cooperation. Secondly, a clear majority of respondents (57.8%) indicated the Ministry of Economic Development as the main manager of ODA, followed by a lower share (20.3%) that attributed this role to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (Figure 2).

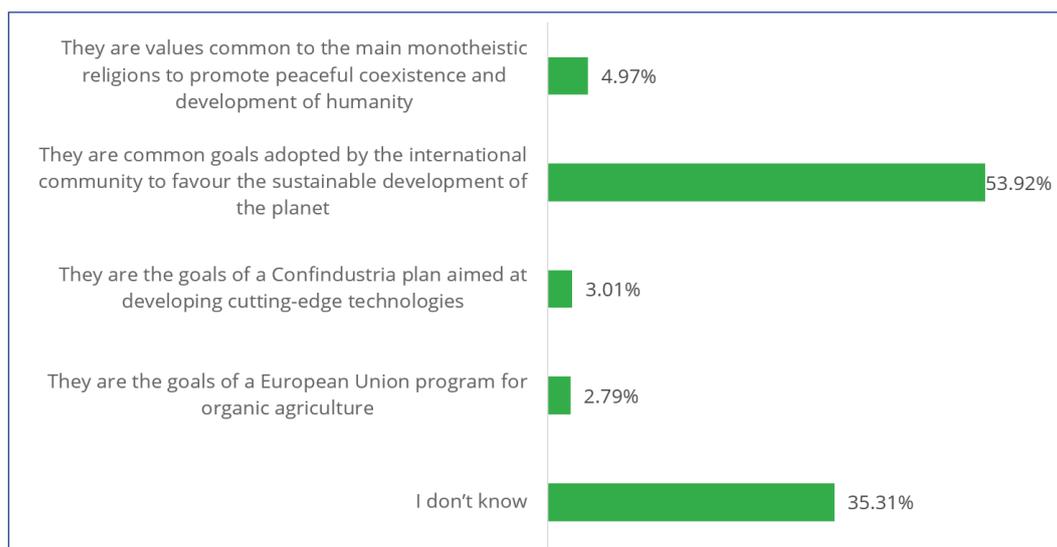
■ **Figure 2. Knowledge of ministry responsible for ODA**



Question: *Which among the following ministries is principally responsible for managing development aid?* Source: IAI-LAPS survey 2022. Elaboration by IAI.

On this aspect as well, public opinion is thus poorly informed. Finally, the SDGs do not seem to be particularly well-known. A relative majority (42.5%) of those interviewed say that they have never heard of them. However, in a question where various definitions of SDGs were offered, 53.9% chose the correct response (Figure 3).

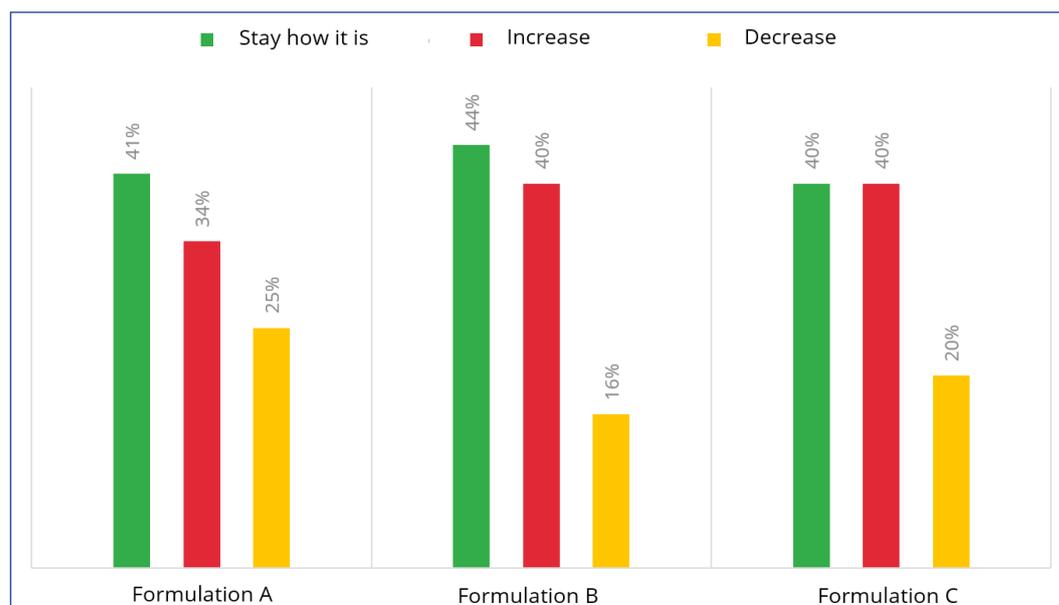
■ **Figure 3. Knowledge of SDGs**



Question: *There is increasing discussion of Sustainable Development Goals (or SDGs), known in Italian as Obiettivi per lo sviluppo sostenibile. Do you know what they are?* Source: IAI-LAPS survey 2022. Elaboration by IAI.

Public support for ODA was also tested, with a specific question on aid formulated in three different ways. The first text of the question refers to the DAC commitment to reach 0.7% of GNI in ODA; the second includes a comparison with other OECD countries; and the third provides a comparison between resources for cooperation and those allocated to military and social spending. The distribution of the responses (figure 4) shows that the formulation of the question does not have a large impact in determining the orientation of the respondents. In both the first and second cases, in fact, a relative majority thinks that spending for development aid should remain where it is, with percentages of 41% and 44%, respectively. In the last case, in which data is cited relating to military and social spending, that percentage drops to 40%, equal to those who say they are in favour of an increase in aid. Even when the text of the question specifies that Italy is in 18th place among countries that provide development aid, those in favour of an increase do not exceed 40% of the total. Those in favour of a decrease are 25% of the total when the obligations assumed by our country are cited, while they drop to 16% when the text of the question mentions Italy's position among countries that provide ODA.

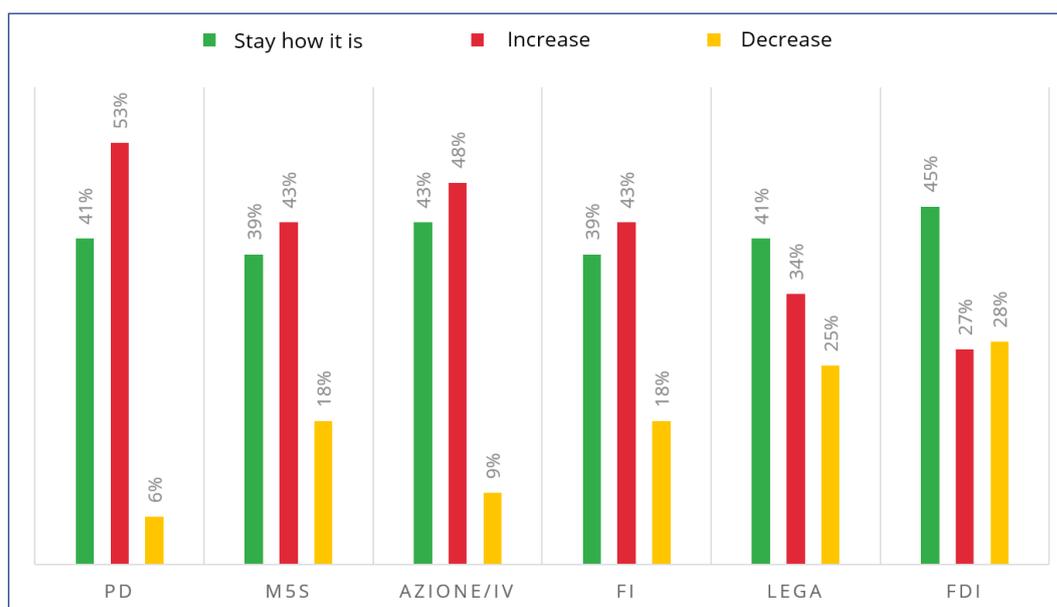
■ **Figure 4. Italians and support for ODA spending**



Question: a) In 2021, the Italian government spent 0.28% (7.688 billion, to be precise) of its Gross National Income (GNI) in international aid to developing countries. But like other developed countries, Italy has committed to spending 0.7% by 2030. In your view, should spending for public development aid be increased, decreased, or remain at the current level? b) As the figure shows, Italy is in 18th place among countries that give development aid to poor and developing countries. In your view, should spending for aid to poor and developing countries...? c) In 2021, Italy spent 0.28% of its Gross National Income to assist developing countries, 1.4% for military spending and 28% for social spending. In your view, should spending for aid to poor and developing countries ...? Source: IAI-LAPS survey 2022. Elaboration by IAI.

These responses were then compared with the support for the various political coalitions that the respondents had indicated in the previous sections of the questionnaire. As illustrated in Figure 5, the largest percentage of those in favour of an increase in spending for development aid is found among voters of the Democratic Party (PD) (53%), among whom only 6% think that such funding should be reduced. A significant percentage of respondents (48%) among voters of the so-called third pole (Azione/Italia Viva) also think that the sums allocated to development aid should be higher. Those in favour of an increase in spending fall to 43% among Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) voters and Forza Italia (FI) voters, and in both cases 18% favour a reduction of such spending. A different orientation is found among those who vote for the Lega and Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi): the relative majority of respondents (41% Lega, 45% Fdi) would prefer spending for aid to developing countries remain at the current level. Moreover, about one-fourth of them – 25% of Lega voters and 28% of Fdi voters – favour a reduction of the amount to be allocated to ODA.

■ Figure 5. Support for ODA spending by party



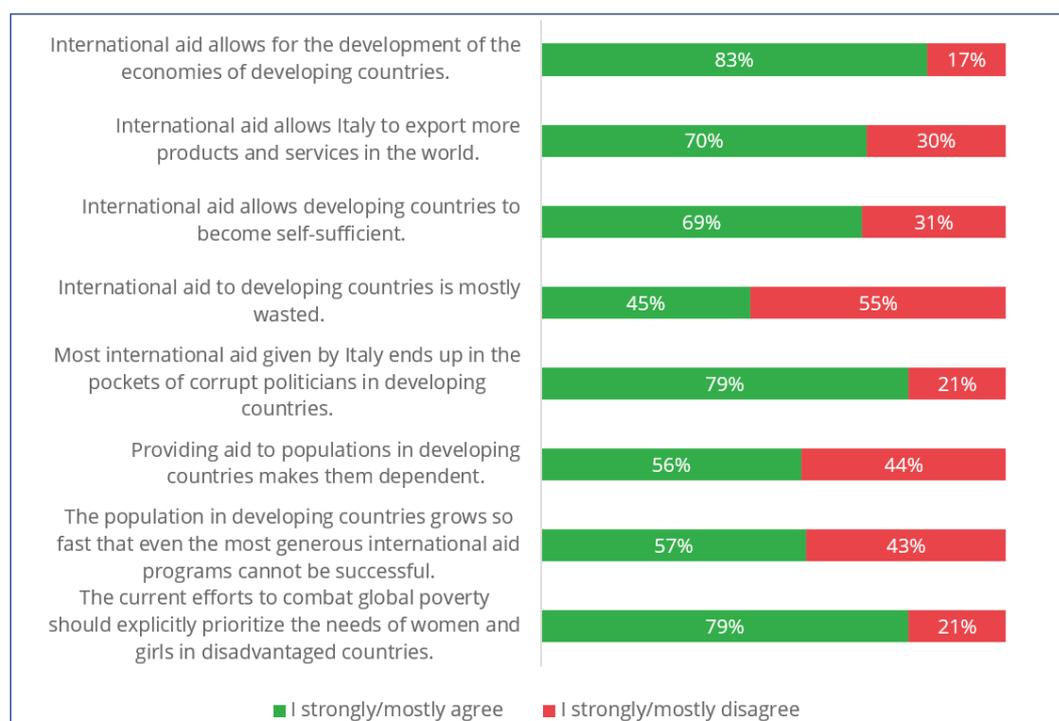
Source: IAI-LAPS survey 2022.² Elaboration by IAI.

The general orientation of Italians towards development aid was then measured through a series of statements with which to express agreement or disagreement (Figure 6). The results of this analysis are conflicting. A large portion of the sample thinks that aid is useful; they believe that it contributes to sustaining the economies of the beneficiary countries (83%), allows them to become self-sufficient (69%) and allows Italy to export more products and services in the world (70%). In addition, a large majority (79%) favours giving priority in aid to particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, such as women and adolescents. The responses to other questions, however, show marked scepticism on other aspects, in particular relating to the effectiveness of aid. There is a high, although not majority percentage who believe that aid is mostly wasted (45%). There is an even higher share who think that aid is not successful because population growth in these countries makes it ineffective (57%), and those who believe that aid makes the beneficiary countries dependent on charity (56%). Finally, there is a very large percentage who state that aid ends up mostly in the hands of corrupt politicians in the partner countries (79%). A generally positive attitude towards aid is thus countered by doubts on

² The three questions in Figure 5 on public development aid are presented in aggregate form because the differences between them were not significant.

its actual impact, that regards in particular the ability of beneficiary countries to derive advantages and the distortions that can be generated.

Figure 6. General orientation on development aid

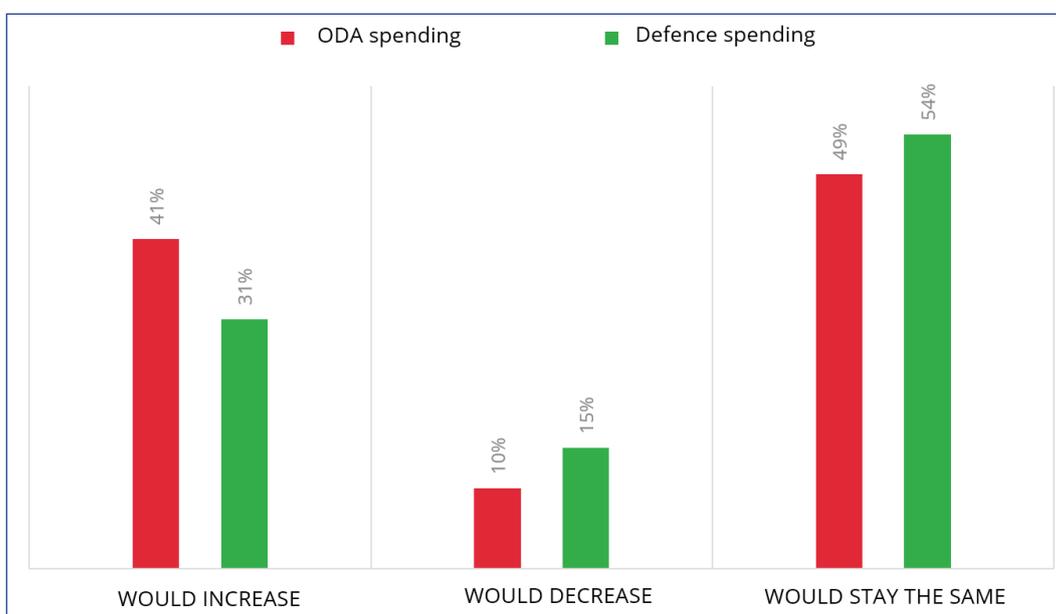


Question: *To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?* Source: IAI-LAPS survey 2022. Elaboration by IAI.

This general orientation is reflected in the opinions of the respondents on the ability of ODA to increase the international prestige of Italy (Figure 7). This particular aspect was investigated by posing a question with two different formulations to two independent sub-samples. A first group was asked if greater spending for development aid could increase the international prestige of Italy. The same question was posed to a second group, but this time surveying the potential effect on Italy’s international prestige of an increase in public spending in the defence sector. A relative majority (49%) of the respondents believe that an increase in ODA spending would have no effect on Italy’s international prestige. This is even more pronounced in the case of an increase in public spending for defence. In this case, an absolute majority of those interviewed (54%) believe that an increase in public spending in the defence sector would not produce any benefits for Italy’s international reputation. At the same time, however, interesting differences

emerge between the two different formulations of the question. A non-negligible 41% of the respondents think that an increase in ODA spending would increase Italy's international prestige; this percentage drops by a full 10 percentage points (31%) when referring to an increase in defence spending. Likewise, only 10% of respondents believe that an increase in public spending for ODA would damage Italy's reputation; while this percentage increases by 5 percentage points when referring to an increase in defence spending.

Figure 7. Development aid and Italy's international prestige

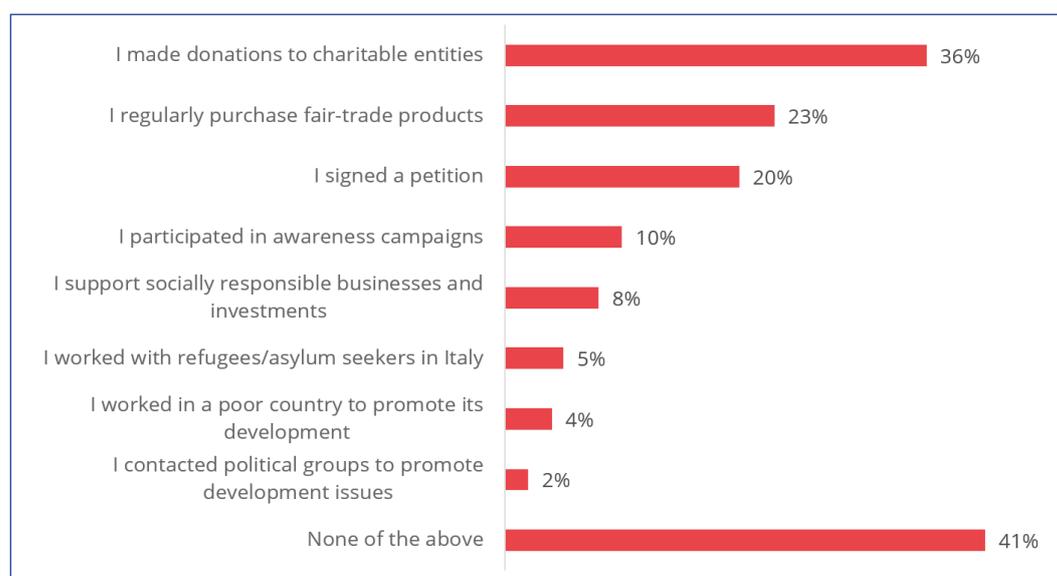


Question: *There are various factors that contribute to increasing or decreasing a country's international prestige. In your view, if Italy were to spend more in [development aid]/[defence], would its prestige on the international scene increase, decrease or stay the same?* Source: IAI-LAPS survey 2022. Elaboration by IAI.

The survey also sought to determine how much citizens' propensity to carry out activities to support developing countries impacts their attitude towards development aid. Figure 8 shows the distribution of the respondents on a question relating to what activities of solidarity they have performed in the past year. Of the sample, 41% said they have not performed any of the activities mentioned. Among those who indicated at least one activity, the majority (36%) made donations to charitable entities. This was followed by the purchase of fair-trade products (23%)

and signing petitions (20%).³

■ **Figure 8. Activities to support developing countries carried out in the past year**



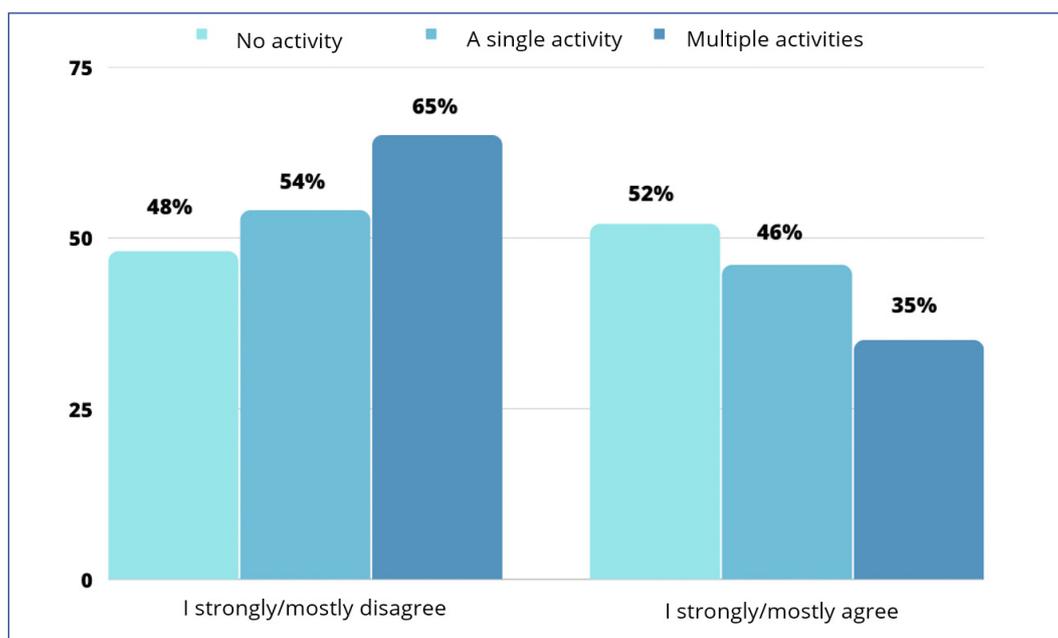
Question: *Did you perform any of the following activities to help the populations of developing countries in the past year?* Source: IAI-LAPS survey 2022. Elaboration by IAI.

These questions were used to create an index to group the respondents into three categories: those who did not perform any activities (41%), those who performed only one (28%), and those who performed more than one (31%). The propensity to perform activities in support of developing countries was then compared with the responses to the questions regarding general orientation that had divided the sample the most, i.e. the question on how development funds are mostly wasted; a statement with which, as noted, 45% of the sample agreed and 55% disagreed. Figure 9 shows the results of this comparison.

It is in fact possible to identify a certain link between propensity to solidarity with developing countries and support for aid. Among those who performed no activities of cooperation, 52% believe that development aid is wasted. To the contrary, a majority of those who performed only a single activity among those cited (54%) disagree with the idea that these funds are wasted. The position of those who performed more than one activity of solidarity was even stronger: almost two-thirds disagreed with this statement.

³ The total exceeds 100% because it was possible to give more than one answer.

Figure 9. General orientation on development aid and international solidarity activities (%)



Question: *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "International aid to developing countries is mostly wasted".* Source: IAI-LAPS survey 2022. Elaboration by IAI.

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