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How to keep children occupied for three months away from the classroom can be a challenge

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Italian parents seek psychological help to cope with school holidays

The traditional long summer break of 13 weeks is a growing strain on many modern families and can cause simmering tensions

Tom Kington, Rome

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As millions of Italian schoolchildren celebrate the start of their three-month summer holidays this week, Italy's parents are turning to psychologists to cope with the ordeal.

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cent every summer compared with the rest of the year as mothers and fathers juggle jobs while keeping bored children busy.

“It’s expensive, complicated and guilt-inducing since parents feel inadequate if they cannot dream up activities for their children over the holiday,” said Valentina Di Mattei, head of Lombardy’s association of psychologists.



Psychologists in Lombardy reported a 40 per cent rise in demand for psychological help from parents

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Along with Malta and Latvia, Italy has the longest school summer holidays in Europe, stretching to 13 weeks, more than double the typical six in the UK.

The tradition dates back to when farmers’ children needed to be on holiday by July to help out with the wheat harvest. Even with less demand for farm labour today, keeping pupils in hot classrooms during Italy’s long, scorching summers presents a challenge.

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Mothers who could once supervise children at home during the summer are more likely to be working today, while grandparents who were once available to babysit for working parents are less likely to live close by as Italians move further away from their childhood homes.

“Once you would send your children to play in the courtyard of your building, but families are less accustomed now to let their children do nothing,” Di Mattei said.



Summer camps in cities such as Milan were a popular solution but costs are now more prohibitive

ALEXANDER SPATARI/GETTY IMAGES

If parents can manage to spend time during the long summer with their children, simmering tensions can emerge, she added. “That applies to parents and children but also husbands and wives,” she said.

The 40 per cent rise in demand for psychological help was

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63 per cent of working Italian mothers claim they are “exhausted” during the summer.

Privately run city summer camps have long been a solution but prices have risen by nearly 23 per cent since 2023 and now cost €1,800 for eight weeks in [Milan](#), Lombardy’s capital.

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“It’s stressful and needs to change,” said Federica Fiore, a campaigner who has delivered a 70,000-signature petition to the Italian senate demanding a switch to a shorter, British-style school summer holiday.

Over the course of the academic year, Italy actually has fewer school holiday days than the UK but has shorter Easter holidays and does not have half-term breaks, focusing instead on the summer.

An Italian schoolteacher told The Times that it was unwise to shorten the summer holiday. “The debate comes around every year and teachers respond, ‘Have you been in a classroom in June when it’s 36C?’ Children cannot function,” said the teacher, who declined to be named.

There was one easy solution, she added. “Perhaps the Italian government would consider installing air conditioning.”

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