# SOUTHERN ITALY CHECK-UP, THE SOUTH IS OUTPACING THE ITALIAN AVERAGE: GDP +8.3% SINCE 2019, DRIVEN BY INVESTMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

The South is consolidating its growth path and continues to outperform the national average across several key indicators. According to the **Check-up Mezzogiorno 2026**, carried out by Confindustria and SRM *(a research centre linked to the Intesa Sanpaolo Group)* and presented today in Bari, Southern Italy continues to strengthen, supported by investment, employment and a more resilient business base, while still needing to bridge the structural gaps that limit its development potential.

**The South is growing faster: since 2019, GDP has increased by 8.3%, compared to +6.3% for the national average. The Southern Economy Summary Index surpasses the North and reaches 643.**

The summary index of the southern economy compiled by Confindustria and SRM in 2025 reaches 643, exceeding the North's score of 622.7, and approaching the Centre (661.8). Following the slight decline recorded in 2024, the index has resumed growth with an increase of 8.2 points, driven in particular by investments. The medium-term picture is even clearer: compared to 2014, the South has gained 143 points, compared to 122.7 in the North.

Southern GDP grew by 8.3% from 2019 to 2025, compared to +6.3% for the national average, and estimates for 2026 confirm the trend: +0.6% in the South compared to +0.5% for Italy.
Employment also continued to improve: the Mezzogiorno has over 6.52 million people employed, with a year-on-year increase of 0.6%, three times the national average increase of +0.2%.

**The remaining challenges: exports, employment gaps and the implementation of cohesion policy.**

The overall picture, while positive, is not without its challenges. Southern exports, which in 2025 were worth more than €64 billion (10% of the national total), recorded a 1.1% decline in the first quarter of 2026 compared to the same period in 2025, while national exports grew by 1.3%, largely due to the decline in exports from Sicily and Sardinia. Employment gaps also remain wide – such as the employment rate of 50% compared to 62.5% nationally – and GDP per capita remains the lowest among Italy's macro-regions despite growth in recent years. Furthermore, foreign-controlled companies, which, although they represent a limited share of the national business base, make a significant contribution in terms of value added, exports, employment and research, remain underrepresented in the South compared to the area's potential. The implementation of the European cohesion policy is also proceeding with significant delays in the southern regions, confirming that the availability of resources is not sufficient without a greater capacity to quickly transform them into investments and concrete projects.

**The Single SEZ as a development accelerator.**

The Single SEZ remains one of the most important instruments for supporting investments and the growth trajectory of the South in recent years. By mid-2026, the 1,402 Single Authorisations issued had **generated approximately €9.2 billion in direct investments**, with **an estimated 24,596 direct jobs created**. The overall impact is even greater when indirect and multiplier effects are also taken into account.

Growth has been driven less by the number of authorisations than by the value of investments, a sign that the projects supported by the SEZ are increasing in average economic size and that the initiative is supporting an increasingly solid development trajectory for the area.

A second element confirms that the SEZ is not merely an administrative measure but also an industrial policy tool: new production sites represent 45% of the authorisations, but account for 65% of the investments and 55% of the employment impact. The SEZ, therefore, does not merely expand what already exists, but creates new production capacity. However, expansions remain significant (38% of authorisations, 25% of investments, 32% of estimated employment), and the main beneficiaries are well-established local supply chains – agri-food, high-quality Made in Italy products, automotive, electronics-ICT and tourism – while the presence of high-tech sectors, such as aerospace and biotechnology, is still limited.