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Dipartimento  
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# Expanding VET at higher levels and the implications for excellence and inclusion

*Perspectives from Italy*

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# VET system in Italy

In a country like Italy, where there is a significant number of **early school leavers (12%)**, high proportion of **NEET** (Not in Education, Employment or Training) individuals aged between 18 and 24 years (**22%**), and high levels of **youth unemployment** (approx. **28%** at the national level), VET is of paramount importance.

Despite progress made in recent decades, the Italian VET system has its shortcomings and displays some contradictions, being divided between national and regional levels.

The Italian 'dual' VET system is still weak and unbalanced across the country.

→ VET pathways at the secondary level have often been viewed as educational routes for disadvantaged students and early school leavers... [*inclusion*]



# Higher Technical Institutes – ITS Academy

Born in **2008**, ITS Academy (Higher Technical Institutes) were established to provide professional tertiary education, training highly specialized technicians in technological areas deemed strategic and innovative at the national level.

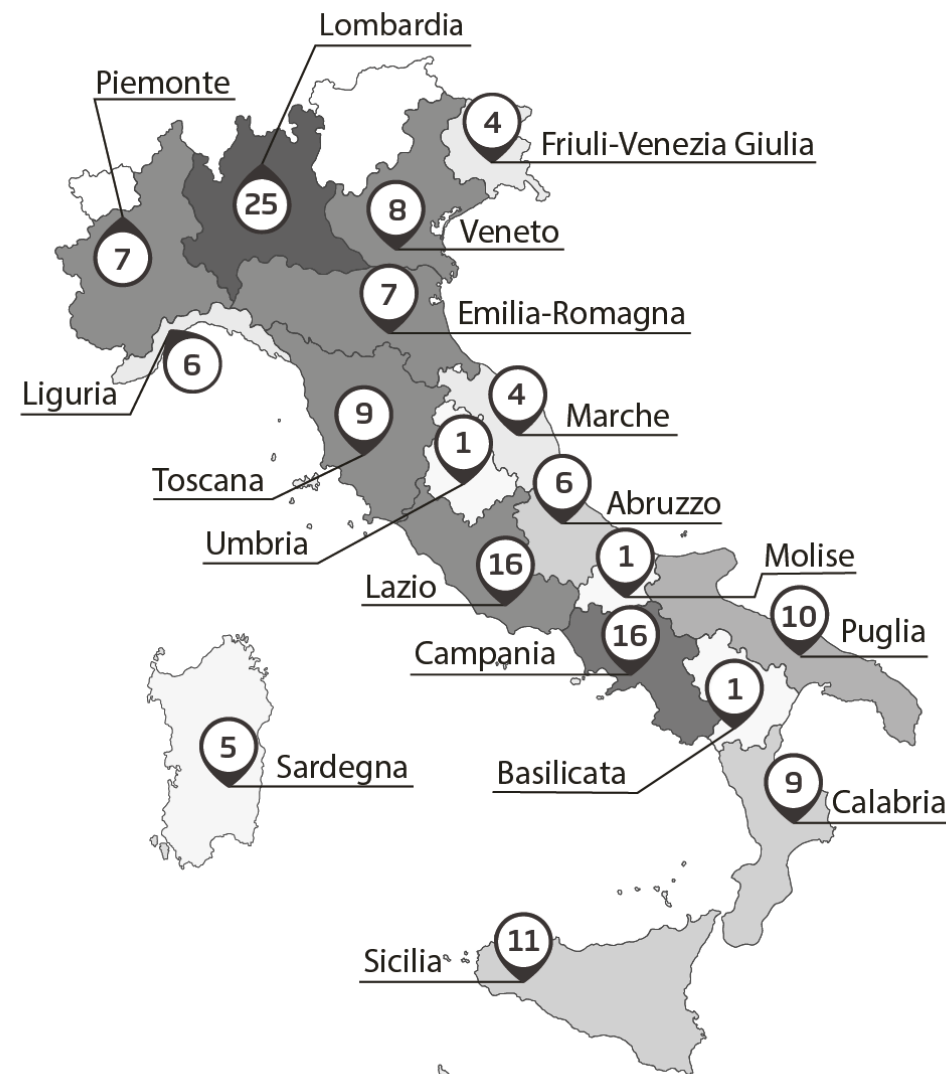
- **flexibility** and **modularity** to meet diverse training needs;
- offer **personalized paths** for young people and working-age adults;
- encourage participation of **employed adults**;
- align with national standards for quality and employability, integrating skills within the EU framework.



# ITS Academy: an overview

There are **146 ITS Academy** across the country related to **10 technological areas** considered “strategic” for the economic development and competitiveness of the nation:

- Energy
- Sustainable Mobility and Logistics
- Chemistry and New Life Technologies
- Agri-food System
- Housing System and Built Environment
- Mechatronics
- Fashion System
- Services to Businesses and Non-Profit Organizations
- Technologies for Cultural and Artistic Heritage and Activities and for Tourism
- Information, Communication, and Data Technology



# ITS Academy: an overview

ITS are set up as **foundations**, a model of **public-private management** of non-profit activities, which entails collaboration between companies / universities / technological research centers / local authorities, schools and the training system

Programs last two (**EQF level V**) to three years (**EQF level VI**) (4-6 semesters, 1.800-2.000 hours); min internship requirement: 30% of total hours. At least 50% of teachers must come from the professional sector.

| EQF Level   | Title/Qualification  |
|-------------|--|
| <b>I</b>    | Final diploma of the first cycle of education – primary level  |
| <b>II</b>   | Compulsory education certificate – primary level   |
| <b>III</b>  | Initial education and vocational certificate (IeFP) (Professional operator) – secondary level  |
| <b>IV</b>   | High School<br>Initial education and vocational diploma (IeFP)<br>Higher technical specialisation certificate (IFTS) – upper secondary level |
| <b>V</b>    | <b>Higher technical education diploma (ITS Academy – 2y)</b><br>Diploma in applied technologies  |
| <b>VI</b>   | Bachelor degree (3y)<br><b>Advanced Higher Technical Diploma (ITS Academy– 3y)</b>   |
| <b>VII</b>  | Master degree (2y)   |
| <b>VIII</b> | Research doctorate (Ph.D.)   |

# ITS Academy: an overview

- Work-based learning
- Innovative teaching/learning methods: project-based learning, and real-world problem-solving tasks, integrating both soft skills (e.g., teamwork, communication) and technical competencies.
- The aim is to create a learning environment where **theory** and **practice** are inseparable, overcoming the divide between **study** and **work**.

## Tertiary level of VET

In 2023, **43%** of the EU population aged 25-34 years had tertiary education.

Together with Romania (23%) and Hungary (29%), **Italy (31%)** is one of the European countries with the lowest share of young graduates.

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| <b>ITS Academy</b>                              | 146    |
| <b>Total Courses</b>                            | 1.002  |
| <b>Total Students Enrolled</b>                  | 25,800 |
| <b>Partnership</b>                              | 3.500  |
| <b>% of Employed Graduates</b>                  | 87.0%  |
| <b>% of Graduates with Job Matching Studies</b> | 93.8%  |

# ITS Academy: recent reforms and future perspectives

[Law No. 99, 15 July 2022] *Establishment of the Tertiary System of Higher Technological Education*

- **New Technological Areas.**
- **Program Levels Based on European Qualification Framework (EQF):** Level 5 EQF: Two-year / Level 6 EQF: Three-year
- **Strengthening Connections:** enhanced collaboration between ITS Academy, companies and universities.
- **Enhanced Industry Collaboration:** increasing internship hours and at least 60% of the training hours are delivered by professionals from the industry.
- **Accreditation System:** establishing an accreditation system as a prerequisite for accessing public funding [accreditation may be revoked based on negative monitoring and evaluation results].
- **Tax Incentives:** introduction of a 30% tax credit for donations to ITS Academy, increasing to 60% in regions with high unemployment %.

Promoting and financing – through PNRR (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) funds - a tertiary level of non-university higher education is a signal of the design of vocational education and training (VET) not only for students with difficulties (*inclusion*), but also for the education and training **of the most deserving and excellent students**, by offering them **high quality** post-secondary/tertiary educational pathways.



# ITS Academy: recent reforms and future perspectives

[Law No. 121, 8 August 2024] *Establishment of the Technological-professional Education System*

- New idea of «Campus»

High schools, technical schools and VET courses at secondary levels, universities, ITS Academy, local authorities, companies, networks, foundations, and non-profit organisations all together in one place and within one educational project.

- “4+2” model

The main point of the proposed reform is to reduce the technical and vocational schools pathways at secondary levels, into a four-year programme. At the end of the four-year regional VET/technical/vocational pathways (IV EQF level), students who have obtained a secondary school state diploma have direct access to the **ITS Academy** (V EQF level), or a **university** course (VI EQF level) or access to labour market.

- Other main points

Personalization and flexibilization of learning pathways / specific career guidance facilities / internationalization / strengthening of the basic subjects (especially Italian and mathematics) / apprenticeship training and work-based learning (up to 400 hours in the last three years) / additional lectures by experts from the productive and professional world.



# A flexible and excellence educational pathways for all learners

ITS Academy higher education courses offer students the opportunity to gain specific skills in **innovative fields** like new technologies, social mobility, green energy, and cultural activities.

These courses focus not only on skill acquisition but also on the **holistic growth** of each person.

The approach integrates **critical thinking, creativity, and active learning**, encouraging students to use initiative and problem-solving **in real-world contexts**.

This holistic method ensures that skills are not taught in isolation but are developed through continuous interaction with the work environment, emphasizing their relevance in specific space-time contexts.

Professionalizing training paths in ITS Academy not only blend theory and practice but also the possibility of providing all those young people who live on the margins of society or in educational poverty with a training path that can accompany them in the discovery of their “hidden” talents and the development of their still “unexplored” skills.



# Inclusion meets excellence

- **Excellence** is achieved through strong partnerships with companies, ensuring that curricula and training are closely aligned with innovation and labor market needs.
- **Inclusion** is fostered by actively engaging young people from diverse backgrounds, including those facing educational poverty or marginalization in traditional academic settings. Financial support and mentorship programs are often available to reduce barriers for disadvantaged learners (NEET) or high school graduates who prefer a practical, career-oriented education over the traditional university path.



# Thank you for your attention!

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