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ITALY



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1. Introduction

This VET policy brief produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training policy developments in Italy between 2020 and the beginning of 2023. It presents the context and the challenges the country faces, a selection of the latest VET-related statistics, as well as the national priorities until 2030 identified in [Italy's national implementation plan](#). This VET policy brief provides information from Cedefop monitoring and analysis on the implementation of the [Council Recommendation on VET](#) and [Osnabrück Declaration](#). It offers stakeholders a regular source of information on VET policy developments that could be used for future policy making.

2. National VET context and challenges

2.1 National VET context

Vocational education and training (VET) is characterised by multilevel governance with broad involvement of national, regional and local stakeholders. Ministries of education and labour have overall responsibility for the VET system. Regions and autonomous provinces oversee VET programmes and most apprenticeship-type schemes. Social partners contribute to the development of employment policies relevant to VET and lifelong learning. VET schools are in charge of upper secondary VET school pathways (EQF 4, ISCED 354). There is permeability across VET programmes and within the general education system.

VET for adults is offered by different public and private providers. It includes programmes leading to upper secondary VET qualifications and ensures up- and reskilling opportunities targeting specifically the low-skilled. These programmes are provided by provincial centres for adult education (CPIA) under the supervision of the education ministry (Cedefop; National Institute of Public Policy Analysis-INAPP, 2022). Continuing vocational training (CVET) to meet enterprise, sectoral and regional needs is either part-funded by the European social fund, or directly funded by regions and autonomous provinces. The social partners manage the [joint inter-professional funds](#) ⁽¹⁾.

Apprenticeship is available at all levels and programmes, has three types and is defined as an open-ended employment contract ⁽²⁾. Validation of non-formal and informal

(1) The joint inter-professional funds for continuing education are associations founded and promoted by both worker and employer organisations, through specific national multi-industry agreements stipulated by major national trade unions and employer organisations. In CVET Italy is strictly perceived as up- and reskilling activities targeting employees (Cedefop; National Institute of Public Policy Analysis, 2022).

(2) Type 1 apprenticeship is offered in all programmes at upper secondary level and the [higher technical education and training courses](#) (IFTS- *istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore*). Type 3 apprenticeship (higher training/education apprenticeship) is offered in [higher technical institute programmes](#) (ITS -*istituti tecnici superiori*) and all tertiary education leading to university degrees, ITS diplomas, and doctoral degrees. Type 2 apprenticeship does not

learning was introduced in 2013 with the Legislative Decree No 13 (Cedefop; National Institute of Public Policy Analysis-INAPP, 2022).

The main policy development defining the Italian VET system was the adoption of the [Good school reform](#) in 2015. This reform emphasised alternance between classroom work and periods of workplace training; it paved the way for the integration of key competences in VET curricula and introduced a dual training system, known in the national context as Initial regional vocational education and training pathway (IeFP- *Istruzione e Formazione Professionale*). The Good School Law has also been the key driver for the adoption of a National plan for digital education (PNSD) (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

2.2 Challenges

The main challenges that Italy faced between 2020 and 2023 include labour market shortages and mismatches, poor educational outcomes, with evident regional and local disparities, and low adult participation, especially of young adults, in education and training despite the range of training possibilities that are offered. The Italian adult population is also characterised by an insufficient level of basic digital skills (European Commission, 2023; Government of Italy, 2022; Cedefop, 2024).

Although the Italian labour market is demonstrating a dynamic upward trend compared with COVID-19 rates, employers still struggle to find suitable workers. This is part of a multifaceted and complex problem that comprises demographic trends, undeclared work and the shadow economy, which seem to be the case especially in the southern regions of Italy. Italy has one of the lowest birth rates in the EU, with a negative demographic balance (European Commission, 2023). This problem is further intensified by an increasingly ageing population and by the international and internal/domestic migration which hinder short and long-term economic growth and affect the skills levels of the population ⁽³⁾.

Despite major reform of the education system and some improvements, educational outcomes remain low in Italy. The percentage of 15-year-old low performers is close to the EU average in reading and maths, but higher in science. Italy demonstrates geographical variations in terms of underachievement with students in the north of the country performing above the EU average in reading, and students in the south and islands below. Underachievement is also associated with the type of school, with students in general upper secondary education performing better than those in upper secondary VET (European Commission, 2022). Early school leaving remains a persistent challenge for the country, with the true scale being a debatable issue ⁽⁴⁾.

correspond to any education level but leads to occupational qualifications that are recognised by relevant national sectoral collective agreements (Cedefop; National Institute of Public Policy Analysis-INAPP,2022).

(3) Brain drain is a phenomenon that has been the case for the country for many years. Higher-skilled workers usually migrate abroad or they move to Northern Italy, hindering the economic development of the southern regions and affecting skill levels (European Commission, 2023).

(4) The national institute for the evaluation of the education system, INVALSI, introduced the concept of 'hidden' or 'implicit' early school leaving. It refers to the share of students who, at

Italy also struggles with the low participation of adults in training. Low participation of women, young people and migrants from non-EU countries in both the labour market and in training exacerbates the problem and poses a threat to the sustainability of economic development (European Commission, 2023). The average of tertiary education graduates is also a problem for the country (European Commission, 2022). The adult population with basic level digital skills, at 45.6% in 2022, is low compared to the EU average of 53.9% for the same period (Cedefop, 2024).

3. National VET policy priorities

The [Italian Recovery and resilience plan \(PNRR\)](#), approved in 2021, is the national strategic reference framework which sets the basis for the national implementation plan (NIP) the country prepared in response to the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#). Among the priorities considered in the NIP, the following can be highlighted.

- (a) Increasing the attractiveness of VET provision. In this respect the current VET system reform is regarded as a major priority for the country. Raising awareness of the benefits of vocational training is another area that needs to be addressed. Regional cooperation is also seen as area that needs strengthening.
- (b) Personalising/customising education and training provision making it more flexible, and learner-centred. Italy plans to adapt its learning and training provision by making it more tailored to the individual's learning needs, to invest further in the acquisition of digital skills by its population and to [expand the dual system including apprenticeships](#), with the aim having at least 90 000 additional enrolments by 2025.
- (c) Strengthening skill validation and certification services (IVC) and increasing adult participation in VET. Having a long tradition in validating prior knowledge, Italy has set as a priority strengthening its skills validation and certification services and increasing adult participation in VET. More specifically, Italy has set a quantitative national target to increase the participation rate of adults in VET to 60% by 2030. In support, the country plans to mobilise regional and local actors and ensure their involvement in developing a skills intelligence mechanism which would align training provision with the regional and local needs.

4. Main policy developments between 2020 and 2023

4.1 Increasing the attractiveness of VET provision

the end of upper secondary education, have not achieved the corresponding learning objectives. These learners face the same limited employment and social prospects as early school leavers (European Commission, 2022).

Italy is continuing its efforts to increase the attractiveness of its VET system, by continuing to reform its VET system, raising awareness and promoting the benefits of VET and by strengthening cooperation at regional level.

In 2022, the [reform of the VET system continued](#) with Law No 99 which introduced the tertiary system of higher technological education and changed the status of former post-secondary [higher technical institutes \(ITS\)](#). The institutions have been renamed to ITS Academy (higher technological institutes) and their role is seen as ensuring close connections with local and regional labour markets.

In 2022, the education ministry has continued its [cooperation with sectoral stakeholders](#) by signing several memoranda of intent, including the Association of Italian Maîtres, Restaurants and Hotels, the Italian Sommelier Association, and the Italian Union of Hotel Conciergerie (UIPA) on different kinds of cooperation to strengthen links with regional and local labour markets in the relevant sectors.

The National repertory of education and training and professional qualifications, which was legally established in 2013, served as the basis for the development by the education ministry, regions and the National Institute for Public Policy Analysis (INAPP), of the [Atlas of work and qualifications](#). In 2021, the labour ministry, in agreement with the education ministries, and the public administration, issued a decree that makes operational the *Guidelines for the interoperability of awarding bodies of the National system of the certification of competences*. The guidelines were prepared in agreement with the regions and autonomous provinces. In 2022, two additional sections were added to the Atlas, and a video that explains its maintenance procedure was produced ⁽⁵⁾.

In June 2022, Law No 79 and the [implementing Decree](#) defined new [requirements for teachers](#) that now include VET teachers. The law regulates the process of initial teacher training, required qualification(s), and access to the profession of teacher in secondary schools, including tests and trial periods.

4.2 Making VET provision more flexible and learner-centred

Italy continues its efforts to making VET provision more flexible and personalised and responsive to individuals learning needs, adopting a learner-centred approach.

In 2022, the Unified Conference, a body which promotes cooperation between the State and regions and autonomous provinces, approved the [guidelines for regulating dual VET](#). These guidelines identified potential learners, eligible training providers and administrative actors for conducting dual training, explaining methods for the organisation and funding of dual training. Also in 2022, following consultation with relevant

⁽⁵⁾ Until 2020, the Atlas comprised three sections: the work atlas section, which included the work descriptions of the 24 professional economic sectors; the Atlas and qualifications section, the national repertory of educational and training qualifications and vocational qualifications; and the Atlas and professions section, which includes a collection and description activities of professions, apprenticeship professions and regional regulated professions. In 2022, the Atlas for research and innovation and the Atlas for the design of qualifications sections were added.

stakeholders ⁽⁶⁾, the labour ministry, issued a circular to clarify regulations related to [type 1 apprenticeship](#). A manual for employers intending to hire apprentices was published.

The main strategy for improving learner digital skills (VET learners included) is the [National plan for digital education \(PNSD\) \(2016\) that comprises 35 actions divided into three areas of intervention](#):

- (a) tools: actions aimed at transforming schools to innovative learning environments based on new digital technologies, where innovative teaching methods can be tested and implemented;
- (b) skills and content: actions aimed at promoting and improving students' digital skills and fostering the development of quality content for digital education;
- (c) training: actions designed to support learning and digital innovation through training courses for school staff.

The implementation of the PNSD continued, and in September 2022, a Technical-Scientific Expert Committee was set up to assess the PNSD implementation, to support the systemic organisation of the activities included in the plan and to improve the digital innovation strategies developed by schools. Other events, discussions and surveys took place.

4.3 Strengthening skills validation and certification services (IVC) and increasing adult participation in VET

The first regulatory framework on skills validation and certification services was introduced in Italy in 2013. On 5 January 2021, the labour ministry, issued a [decree](#) that put in place the guidelines for the interoperability of awarding bodies of the [national system of certification of competences](#). This legislative act completed the architecture of the national system of the certification of competences and provided a common reference framework for awarding bodies as regards:

- (a) minimum standards of the system;
- (b) essential performance levels;
- (c) criteria for the implementation and regular updating of the National repertory of educational and training qualifications and vocational qualifications;
- (d) the interoperability of central and territorial databases for the workers' electronic booklet.

In 2022, the regions and autonomous provinces started refining the implementation of skills certification in alignment with the 2021 Decree.

⁽⁶⁾ The circular was drawn up following intensive discussions with the education ministry, the regions, the social partners, the National Institute of Social Security (INPS), the National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (INAIL), the National Labour Inspectorate (INL) and the National Agency for Active Employment Policies (ANPAL). It specified that apprenticeship type 1 ends when the results of the final examination of the apprentice are published.

Italy has in place [several strategies/initiatives](#) to increase adult participation in VET and lifelong learning (LLL). More specifically, in 2020, the New skills fund was set up to support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, more initiatives were launched:

- (a) the National strategic plan for the development of skills of the adult population;
- (b) the New skills plan (PNC), which is developed in line with the above plan and defines a strategic coordination framework for upskilling and reskilling pathways;
- (c) the Employability guarantee reform programme (GOL), a pivot of the active employment policies reform action. Related to GOL, are the PNC's measures that are directed to the vocational training beneficiaries of the GOL. In 2022, several components of the GOL programme started being implemented and additional functions were taken over by the New skills fund: in addition to managing skills needs relevant to the twin transition the fund is now managing skill needs for the industrial transition.

The Transversal competence and guidance pathways (PCTO) focus on guidance and counselling systems as an integral part of the curriculum to help all individuals to develop their full potential. [PCTO are compulsory for all](#) in the last 3 years of upper secondary school. In October 2022, the *Guidelines for the implementation of the competence guarantee pathways of the adult population* were revised and approved by the P.A.I.D.E.IA. National Working Group. These guidelines were developed for the CPIAs so that they organise training activities aiming to assist adults to acquire basic and transversal skills.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

Employment prospects for IVET graduates do not seem favourable in Italy. In 2022, the employment rate was 60.7%, which is well below both the EU-27 average of 79.7% and the 82% target set by the VET recommendation. Also in 2022, the exposure of recent IVET graduates to work-based learning experiences was 25.9%, well below the target of 60% set in the VET Recommendation for 2025.

The participation of adults (25 to 64-year-olds) in training was 29% in 2022 against the EU-27 average of 39.5% and the EU target of 47% for set for 2025 in the Council Resolution on the European Education Area.

The early school leaving rate of 11.5% in 2022, even though showing a decreasing trend, is still higher than the EU average of 9.6% and the target of less than 9% by 2030 set in the [Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-30\)](#).

The NEET rate of the age group 15 to 29 was 19% in 2022, which is above the EU-27 average of 11.7% and above the target of 9% by 2030 set in the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action plan](#).

Table 1. European vocational education and training policy dashboard: Italy

Type of indicator (7)	Indicator	Last available year	IT	EU-27	Policy Document	EU target (year)
VET for developing a lifelong learning culture						
Progress	Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)*	2022	29.0 ^b	39.5	Skills Agenda	50% (2025)
					Council Resolution on EEA	47% (2025)
					ESPR Action Plan	60% (2030)
Progress	Low-qualified adults with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)	2022	10.3 ^b	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2022	6.7	13.2	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds (%)	2022	64.8	74.6	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2022	11.5	9.6	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15--29 year-olds (%)	2022	19	11.7	ESPR Action Plan	9% (2030)
VET for Resilience, transitions, sustainability and excellence						
Progress	Adults (16-74 year-olds) with at least basic digital skills (%)	2021	45.6	53.9	Skills Agenda	70% (2025)
					ESPR Action Plan	80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%)	2022	60.7	79.7	Council Rec on VET	82% (2025)
Progress	Recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%)	2022	25.9	60.1	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25 --34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2022	29.2	42	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2022	19.7	10.7	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2022	14 305	95 284	ESPR Action Plan	15 million decrease (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2022	898.3 ^e	9 370.2 ^e	2030 Digital Compass	20 million, with convergence between men and women (2030)
VET for the European Education Area						
Progress	Learners in IVET who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%) **	2021	3.5	2.1 ^{dv}	Council Rec on VET Skills Agenda	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2021	1.5	1.2		

Available flags: b-break in time series, d -definition differs, e -estimated, V- Cedefop estimate, Special value: - not available

* Eurostat data (Adult Education Survey, special calculation excluding guided on-the-job training)

** Provisional estimates affected by the Covid19 pandemic

Source: Cedefop. [European VET policy dashboard](#)

(7) [Definitions](#) on the type of indicators are available.

6. Conclusion

Italy has taken steps to increase the attractiveness of its VET system, to make it more personalised and learner-centred, and to strengthen the skills validation and certification mechanisms. It also continued its efforts to increase adult participation in VET.

The country has reinforced the status of former post-secondary higher technical institutes, giving them a tertiary education status and renaming as [ITS Academy \(higher technological institutes\)](#); it has promoted [dual training](#) and facilitated cooperation at sectoral, regional and local levels by [signing various memoranda](#). The [legislative framework governing the teaching profession has also been amended](#). The ITS Academy reform is expected to increase tertiary attainment, with the objective of reaching 40 000 enrolments by 2026. The country could benefit by speeding up the implementation of this reform to reach its ambitious target and concentrate its efforts on producing more ITS Academy graduates, which will increase their employability prospects ⁽⁸⁾ (European Commission, 2021a and 2022).

Italy is investing in promoting a more learner-centred approach aligned with individual needs in learning. A [National plan for digital education \(PNSD\)](#) was introduced before 2020 and is still in force, constantly evolving. Two committees work to monitor and improve the implementation and to support innovation and coordination among governmental organisations dealing with digital and technological developments. The digitalisation of Italian VET is substantially part-funded by the [Recovery and resilience facility](#). The [European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#) allocates EUR 4 billion to education and skills and, overall, EUR 2.17 billion to digital skills. The country should concentrate its efforts on up- and reskilling activities to support the acquisition of digital skills by its population, and to reach the EU-27 average, and the targets set by the European Commission (ReferNet Italy; Cedefop, 2023; European Commission, 2023).

Italy has continued strengthening skills validation and certification services (IVC) and increasing adult participation in VET. The existence of a comprehensive and region-based system for the [validation of prior learning](#), the adoption of [several flagship initiatives](#) aiming specifically to up- and reskill the adult population, both unemployed and employed, and the existence of a [comprehensive career guidance and counselling system](#) aiming to enhance key competences regardless of age, demonstrate that the country has a potential to increase the adult participation in LLL; however, it still lags behind the EU-27 average. The country could benefit by focusing on up- and reskilling activities of its adult population and by providing more training opportunities to women and vulnerable groups (ReferNet Italy; Cedefop, 2023; European Commission, 2023).

⁽⁸⁾ The number of enrolments in ITS Academy institutions was estimated to be fewer than 20 000 in 2021. The number of graduates was about 5 000 in 2021. According to 2022 data from the National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (INDIRE), 80% of graduates from ITS Academy are employed within 1 year of graduating, 91% in occupations consistent with their training (European Commission, 2022).

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