

Italy

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National context

Population, economic and social characteristics

The Italian territory, with the exclusion of Republic of San Marino and Vatican City State, covers an area of 301 336 square km. Italy's population is 60.820.800 (Eurostat, 2012). Foreigners regularly residing in Italy were 4 570 317 (7.5% of the resident population), reference year 2010. The majority of foreign citizens comes from EU countries (29.2%), whereas the highest number of migrants, who come from non-European countries, are from northern Africa (14.9%) (Istat, 2011).

Description of the types of education and training (formal and informal) that occur in a country

General information

The Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) is responsible for the general administration at national level. As for school education, at the decentralised level the MIUR works through the Regional School Offices (Uffici Scolastici Regionali, USR), which are organised at provincial level in the Local Offices (Ambiti territoriali). Complimentary to the MIUR, function several bodies and agencies that represent, consul, assess the operations at every level of education. Starting from late fifties, there has been an effort of organisation's decentralisation, which was put under the umbrella of the law 59/1997, where the distinction was made between the tasks assigned to the State and the regional offices, with a clear emphasis on schools' autonomy (Eurypedia, 2013). School's autonomy concerns teaching, research activities, experimentation and development, and involving the possibility to implement specific actions or projects in the single school or in school networks, or develop particular didactical programs (in the general respect of ministerial guidelines). However, Italian educational system is characterised as rather centralised with low levels of autonomy at the school level (Agasisti, Catalano, Sibiano, 2013).

Description of the Educational System

The Italian education systems has been under reform for years, being a critical field where changes in government have been reflected in a series of reforms being not always on a continuity line. Compulsory education in the Italian system Thanks to recent reforms dating back to 2007, education in Italy is now compulsory for ten years (up to 16 years of age), whereas each person has to remain in education or training up to 18 years of age or for a total of 12 years.

Specifically, compulsory education includes the first cycle of education (5 years of primary school followed by 3 years of lower secondary school, with no exam in-between) and the first two years of the second cycle of education. The latter can be accomplished either in upper secondary schools (“licei”, technical and vocational institutes) or within vocational training, namely in three-years courses run by the Regions which in Italy are responsible for managing and delivering vocational training. As far as upper secondary general education is concerned, a reform of 2010 has recently introduced a systematisation of upper secondary schools, in order to make clearer and more transparent the existing educational supply to students and parents, hereby counteracting a trend which in the last decades had produced - by means of experimentations - a huge number of different upper secondary school paths.

Overall organisation of the education system

Overall the Italian education system includes:

- Pre-primary education “Scuola dell’infanzia”, which is for children between 3 and 6 years of age and is not part of compulsory schooling;
- The first cycle of education lasting 8 years, and organised in
 - Primary education (6-11)
 - Lower secondary school (11-14)

It is worth stressing, that unlike several European school systems, primary and lower secondary education remains two different education levels in Italy, each with its’ own specificities, due to a quite recent re-organisation of school cycle dating back to 2003.

- Second cycle of education consisting of two different pathways (with possibility to move from one to the other):
 - Upper secondary school, falling under the responsibility of the State, lasting 5 year and addressing students aged 15-19 (provided by high schools, technical and vocational schools)
 - Initial vocational training (3-years courses) for students who have completed the first cycle of education, organised by the Regions and leading to a vocational qualification of first level.

The three-year vocational qualification obtained at the end of a vocational training path allows access to second level vocational training, which can be accessed also with an upper secondary education leaving certificate. Access to both tertiary education and AFAM (high level artistic, musical and chorus education), is reserved to students who passed the state exam at the end of upper secondary school. Educational level Schools Pre-primary schools: 13.476 Primary schools: 15.417 Lower secondary schools: 7.270 Upper secondary schools:

5.397 Total 41.560 Fig.1 School settings per educational levels – State schools – School year 2012/2013 (Source: Miur, Servizio Statistico)

Type of school Schools Classi Licei: 489 Sciences Licei: 960 Pedagogical Licei: 301 Arts Licei: 135 Technical Institutes: 1.897 Vocational Institutes: 1.454 Arts Institutes: 161 Total: 5.397 Fig.2: School settings at upper secondary level per type of school - State schools - School year 2012/2013 (Source: Miur, Servizio Statistico)

Degree of Italian education system selection

The Italian education system remains critically affected by the issue of “selectivity”, despite the recent integration between primary school and lower secondary education in one comprehensive cycle, which has provided increased continuity by cancelling the formerly necessary exam.

The passage between school levels remains however critical. As mentioned above, the integration in a comprehensive first cycle is rather recent and has maintained most of the differences amongst the two levels, the related teaching/learning methodologies and subsequent difficulties which pupils have to face in the passage. However the real critical and sensitive passage remains that between the first and the second cycle, when students are asked to make a choice between different learning paths where to complete compulsory schooling up to 16 years of age. Although students cannot (in principle) “drop out” from the education and training system, they are however still obliged to make a rather early choice on their education paths (Licei, technical or vocational school, vocational training). Although theoretically, the system provides for permanent pathways from one path to the other, this critical stage put students in front of new challenges of different educational environments, with highly different requirements in terms of effort, expected performance and social demand. In order to respond to this challenge, the two compulsory years of second cycle are meant to provide students, in whatever type of school, with a common set of knowledge and transversal competences for lifelong learning, active citizenship and employability (see section 2.2), so as to ensure more equality, no matter which learning paths has been chosen. Nonetheless, the problem of “natural selection” of the Italian school system still persists, as great differences in school performance and school failure arise after the choice of the different upper secondary school and vocational training, producing in many cases subsequent “drop out” from education and training. This highlights as to what extent pupils needs to be equipped since the earliest stage of compulsory schooling with learning to learn competences and skills to effectively face further learning with autonomy and motivation.

Teacher training (formal provision and non-formal) focused on learning to learn and motivation to learn

Teacher in service training: the institutional picture

The Italian system does not foresee any national institutional framework or top-down provision for teacher in-service training, although several initiatives, programmes and projects exist in the field. The picture is therefore once again rather confused and highly fragmented, making it difficult to provide a clear and homogenous representation of the supply and content of teacher training activities, in the absence of a centralised system of information and the abundance of scattered experiences, initiatives and experimental projects whose sources are difficult to find . From a legal perspective, teacher in-service training in

Italy is regulated by the National collective agreement, which affirms that teachers have the right to participate in teacher training initiatives in order to ensure their professional development. However they do not have the duty to go through further training once they have become teachers. Moreover this “right” consists mainly of the opportunity to take a few days off from school (usually around 5 days in a year) to attend training initiatives on a voluntary basis. On the other hand, in the absence of nationally organised in-service training and according to the principle of school autonomy, most of teacher training activities are in the organisational and financial responsibility of the single school. As reported in the Eurydice report 2009/2010, there are in fact three decision making level concerning teacher training

1. “The Ministry of education is responsible for intervention of “general interest”, above all those necessary for innovations, mobility and professional re-qualification and re-conversion, general co-ordination of the interventions. It annually establishes the priority objectives for planning and carrying out of formative interventions, the distribution of available resources, the role of different actors, bodies and institutional levels;
2. The Regional School Office guarantees, on single school request, professional service to support the planning character of schools, equalising actions and interventions related to territorial peculiarities and specific professions;
3. School or schools networks, according to school autonomy, plan training initiatives and prepare the relevant annual programme.”

In particular, the teacher assembly (including all teachers of the school) in every school decides its annual plan for update and in-service training activities, consistently with the objectives of the POF. The plan can include various types of initiatives, either organised by the educational authority (i.e. courses provide by the Ministry of Education) or designed and implemented by the single school autonomously or in association with other schools, and with the collaboration of universities, the national/regional institute for the development of school autonomy, research institutes and accredited bodies. The mentioned institutions are those who are automatically accredited for delivering teacher training, whereas other organisations such as civil society associations, professional bodies etc need a Ministerial accreditation which is released every year. The educational pathways vary according to their contents and duration. Schools, according to school autonomy, are free to plan and carry out intervention which better match their needs. The methods adopted are various and include lessons, case studies, simulations, e-learning etc. There is no compulsory verification of learning outcomes and certification of the skills acquired. Generally, it is issued a participation certificate at the end of the course with indication on the type of course, the days and hours of attendance. There is no institutionalised method of verifying whether (and how) what has been learnt in in-service training is actually applied to didactic practice.

Practices and organisations

The Italian system includes a set of institutions and organisations dedicated to promote and support quality innovation in school education, by providing educational research, organisational and financial support, capacity building and advise and by promoting nation or region-wide programmes supporting schools in creating bottom-up innovation through experimental projects and through networking. Thanks to school autonomy, school itself is in fact expected to be the place where the abovementioned concepts are primarily addressed and promoted from bottom-up, in line with national indications (as mentioned in the previous section), with external organisations and agencies supporting the successful implementation of innovation and its mainstreaming, in terms of infrastructural support, expertise and research advise, financial support, support to teachers and school staff training, mainstreaming of innovation and support to cooperation among schools. Other agencies/bodies:

National Agency for the Development of School Autonomy, (ANSAS, ex INDIRE).

This Agency was created with the introduction of School Autonomy in Italy at the end of the 90s, transforming the already existing national and regional Institute for Educational Research (INDIRE). The core mission of ANSAS is that of promoting and “supporting the autonomy of schools in the dimension of the European Union and the processes of innovation and educational research in the same institutions, as well as favouring their interaction with the territory”. The agency is part of the National Ministry of Education and has a central office in Florence and peripheral articulations at the regional level, in the Regional School Offices. The main functions of the agency include:

- educational research and pedagogical-didactical advise;
- Training and refreshing of teachers and school staff;
- Services of pedagogical and didactical documentation, research and experimentation;
- Participation in international initiatives in the matters of specific competence of the agency ;

Within the objective of overall development of school autonomy, the agency, and in particular its regional articulations, support several initiatives and projects which aim at favouring the development of innovation in school, promoting through them the concepts of learning to learn and motivation through both teacher training and experimentation in schools with students and staff. These objectives are for the most not explicitly stated as the core focus of the activities, but can be easily identified as an existing approach of many of them, aimed at introducing innovation in didactics, integrating it with the territory and promoting more experiential and laboratorial learning activities so to make learning more meaningful and effective for students. The method of “research-action”, including therefore a substantial component of analytical research is part of the agency tradition, and significant amount of research results, documentation, and project evaluations is produced by the Agency and relates to the themes above. More information can be found at www.indire.it and in the official websites of the regional agencies, where several projects and initiatives can be found, together with research projects and documentation. Leading examples can be found in the initiatives of ANSAS Emilia Romagna for instance, supporting several innovation projects in school aimed at promoting motivation to learn and better school performance by working closely with the actors and the resources of the territory and by supporting teacher training.

INVALSI, National institute for the evaluation of the educational system

INVALSI is the national institute responsible for monitoring and evaluation of the school system in Italy, with an approach oriented to enhance its quality, hence supporting students' performance with respect to international standards (namely OECD-PISA) and contrasting school failure. INVALSI has amongst its tasks "to evaluate the efficiency and efficacy of the education system as a whole and analytically, where appropriate also for each educational institution, also setting the evaluation at national level and in an international contexts" . In particular, INVALSI is responsible for systematic and periodic evaluation on students' knowledge and abilities and on the overall quality of educational supply, by managing the National Evaluation System ("Sistema Nazionale di Valutazione") and acting as the Italian reference point for the PISA survey. It furthermore studies the reasons of school failure and drop out also with reference to social contexts and typologies of educational supplies. More in general, INVALSI supplies several support services concerning the evaluation of different national and regional initiatives in education. The activity of INVALSI is acknowledged by the Italian Ministry of education as fundamental in contributing to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives in the field of education and training, with specific reference to the quality of education systems and of the levels of learning achievements. In that respect, INVALSI contributes to the promotion of learning to learn as it is the main institution responsible for analysing and assessing the organisational and teaching practice which favour the enhancement of students' performances.

Moreover INVALSI published articles, working papers and books on different subjects, including learning to learn, key competences and evaluation of school systems and projects with respect to their impact of the acquisition of competences and on school success.

Policy environment

Policies on key competencies in LLL

Since 2007, the objectives of education are in line (at least formally speaking) with the main European documents and strategies for lifelong learning and pay importance to the key competences approach and to "learner-centred education" as conducive to lifelong learning, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability. In that respect, the main reference documents are:

- the Ministerial Decree no. 139/2007 and its annexes, raising the age of compulsory schooling up to 10 year (16 years of age), providing that the first two year of upper secondary education focus and lead on the acquisition of fundamental knowledge and key competences for lifelong learning and active citizenship, in line with EU competence framework for lifelong learning;
- The Indications for the curriculum of the first cycle of education (including primary school and lower secondary school) stressing the role and responsibility of initial education in preparing the individual for learning throughout life;
- The guidelines on the implementation of the 10 years of compulsory schooling (accompanying the ministerial decree mentioned above), illustrating how to move from an upper secondary school fragmented in subjects to a more integrated teaching/learning approach oriented to competences and focused on 4 cultural axes

and 8 key competences, with the aim of preparing students for lifelong learning, active citizenship, employability and an aware choice on further education or training.

All the above mentioned documents pay in principle the utmost importance to the role of school in preparing students for lifelong learning and active citizenship and - in that context - to learning to learn and motivation, asking for a shift from subject-centred didactics to more integrated learning paths ensuring the development of key competences and smartly built around the learner's experience, which extends from school to other life contexts. In that respect, there is an explicit acknowledgement that today school is only one amongst the several learning environments experienced by children and teen-agers, and that most of information and competences are also gained outside of the school borders. School is thus recognised a pivotal responsibility and role in "promoting students capacity to give meaning to variety of their experiences and face the structural uncertainty and change characterizing contemporaneous society"

In this sense in the policy discourse, the acquisition of key competences, the ability to master one 'own learning path, and the motivation needed for it, are linked to the idea of preparing autonomous citizens for the challenges produced by social, economic and scientific transformations. This approach has been reflected in the new indications for the curriculum for the first education cycle and in the guidelines on how to implement the ten years compulsory schooling in the first two-year of upper secondary education. These two documents shall be interpreted (and implemented) with a "continuity" approach, so as to make the whole school experience integrated, meaningful and headed towards preparing autonomous citizens.

In both cases a pivotal responsibility and important role is put in the hands of teachers and school staff to innovate teaching and fruitfully use school autonomy (at didactical and organisational level) so as to implement learning paths able to match the challenges of ongoing transformations and ensure that school fulfil its objectives at the different level.

The indications for the curriculum of the first cycle: "equipping pupils with the key for learning to learn"

According to the national indications of 2007, the first cycle of education shall be designed around the learner, favouring personal learning styles and paying great importance to the group of peers and to collaborative learning approaches, favouring students' participation in a "shared educational project".

School shall provide the basis for future learning of children and equip pupils with the key for "learning to learn". To this aim, the following key approaches are to be central in the teaching practice and school organisation:

- Spending effort on a double education level: vertical: preparing for lifelong learning and horizontal: cooperating with the territory and, above all, families;
- Valuing students experience and knowledge, so as to anchor new contents and knowledge to their life and make them meaningful and relevant to the learner;
- Favouring exploration and discovery, so as to stimulate joy and enthusiasm for new knowledge;
- encouraging collaborative learning;
- promoting reflection and awareness on one' own learning processes;

- Using laboratories and practical activities, so to favour active learning and practical acquaintance with concepts which will then be consolidated at a more theoretical level and promote dialogue, reflection, experimentation and planning.

The document calls for a fruitful exploitation of the potential and opportunities offered by school autonomy and in particular for a flexible and “multi-purpose” usage of school and extra school spaces. Guidelines for the implementation of compulsory schooling in the first two years of the second cycle of education: preparing lifelong learners, autonomous citizens and employable workers As mentioned in previous sections, the age of compulsory schooling was raised up to 16 in 2007, making compulsory to attend two years in upper secondary education which shall be oriented to the acquisition a fundamental body of knowledge and competences preparing for lifelong learning and active citizenship, in line with the European competences for lifelong learning (as adopted by Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on 18th December 2006). These include the key competences (“competences for citizenship”) that students are expected to have acquired at the end of compulsory education, regardless of the school path, as well as a set of basic competences related to four 'cultural areas/axes'. The aim of this reform was to homogenise different schools' curricula in the first two years in order to ensure the passage from teaching processes which were mainly subjects-centred to learning experiences centred on competences, so as to make different school paths more equal in terms of learning outcomes and “universal” preparation for the lifelong learning, active citizenship and employability. The four axes are:

1. that of languages;
2. mathematical;
3. scientific-technological;
4. social-historical;

According to the indication of the Ministry, they “shall act as the basis to build learning paths headed towards the acquisition of related competences (including knowledge, skills and competence as in the EQF) as the result of the their integration”. The 8 key competences are on the other hand defined as “the result coming from the integration in a learning process of knowledge and skills related to the four cultural axes”. The 8 competences include:

1. Learning to Learn: defined as being able to organise one’s own learning process, also by identifying, selecting and using different sources and information and learning modalities (formal, non-formal, informal), according to time available, individual learning styles and working strategies;
2. Planning: meant as the capacity of elaborating and implementing projects concerning the development of one’s own study and working activities, using acquired knowledge to establish meaningful and realistic objectives and related priorities, being able to evaluate existing constraints and opportunities, defining strategies for action and verifying results.
3. Communicating:
 1. Understanding messages of different nature and different complexity level, and coming from different media with different languages (mathematical, symbolical, scientific etc.)

2. representing events, phenomenon, concepts, emotions etc., using different languages as above
4. Collaborating and participating
5. Acting in an autonomous and responsible way
6. Solving problems
7. Identifying connections and linkages
8. Acquiring and interpreting information

In this context, motivation is recognised as key in enabling learning and the acquisition of key competences. The technical document attached to the decree of 2007 (raising compulsory schooling) states explicitly that “Access to basic knowledge is made possible and favoured by a positive attitude towards learning. Motivation, curiosity, collaborative aptitude are the behavioural aspects which integrate knowledge, value individual cognitive styles towards personal fulfilment, facilitate the opportunity to understand one’s own aptitudes and potentialities, hence supporting self-orientation. In that respect, an important contribution can be offered – with regards to all cultural axes – by didactical methodologies able to value laboratory activities and experience-based learning. The guidelines invites to a deep methodological and organisational revision of didactic in school with the aim of moving from a subject-based towards a competence-based approach, through the integration/interaction among disciplinary areas and new activities. In that respect, school autonomy is once again elected as the core instrument and the key level where to make the innovation possible from bottom-up and move towards a school oriented to competences for citizenship. Teachers are explicitly recognised as key actors in the process, as the single school is asked to reflect on how to:

- Identify the most adequate strategies for the integration of disciplines, in order to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge
- Implement learning paths on the four cultural axes
- Organise learning processes based on the acquisition of competences;
- Fruitfully use the opportunities offered by curricular and organisational flexibility coming from the provision of “school autonomy”.

In order to support teachers in playing an active role in the transition to a competence-based approach as the one illustrated below, the Ministry committed itself in 2007 to organise multi-years plans for teacher training activities specifically aimed at supporting the innovation process. These should have been based on exchange and valorisation of experiences among schools and peers with the aim of:

- Sharing the New Vision of school;
- Identifying adequate methodologies to implement this new vision in school practice, by connecting disciplinary knowledge to cultural axes so as to lead to the acquisition of key competences
- Valuing the connection between cultural axes;
- Adapting assessment and evaluation to a competence-based approach.

Likewise, the Ministry meant to organise

- An online service for school, providing for guidance and support

- Local groups including regional school offices (which in Italy are the local representation of the Ministry of education), schools, institutes for educational research, local governments, universities, teachers associations etc., supporting schools in the implementation of the new compulsory schooling.

It remains to sort out whether these activities have been implemented and how and the effect they produced, on both school innovation and teacher training and practices. After the 2007 reform (promoted by a centre-left government), a new government was elected in Italy introducing further changes in the education system, though maintaining the indications for the curriculum of the first cycle and for compulsory schooling. A reform has been on the contrary recently introduced in teacher education, another critical field where changes in governments and longstanding structural problems have turned into a series of reforms and stop-and-go, which have made the overall picture rather unclear and still dynamic *Reducing early school leaving*

The specific national targets for Italy have been set at 16% for the early school leavers from 2007 to 2010, various interventions on the education and training system were aimed at limiting early school leaving and drop-outs. These interventions tackle drop out at various levels, from the extension of compulsory education to 16 years of age and therefrom of the second cycle of education to more strategic actions, like the strengthening of school autonomy. Support mechanisms have been put in place like the creation a local network of actors involved in guidance, while promoting a new culture of guidance among school staff consistent with national policies. The law decree no. 104, issued in September 2013, provides for a series of interventions and economic measures also aimed at fighting school drop-outs. For example, the allocation of funds to increase catering and transport services in order to facilitate access and attendance of deserving students of secondary schools in disadvantaged economic conditions has been prescribed. Last but not least, one unified national system of student register will allow students to leave their school pathways and accomplish compulsory education (up to 16 years of age) in the regional vocational education and training system. In the last year, the functioning of the National register has been highly refined (Source: Servizio Statistico, Miur, Focus 'La dispersione scolastica', and June 2013). *Lifelong Learning and Skills Certification*

Law of 28 June 2012, no. 92, 'Provisions for the reform of the labour market in the prospects for growth', has provided for a formal definition of lifelong learning: 'lifelong learning encompasses learning activity, whether formal, non-formal or informal, undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective'. According to the law, formal learning takes place in the education and training system as well as universities and High level arts, dance and music education institutes. It leads to obtain a qualification or a vocational three-year qualification or diploma, also through an apprenticeship, or a recognised certification. Non-formal learning corresponds to an intentional choice of the learner carried out outside the formal system, in organisations with educational and training aims, in voluntary settings, national civil service or private social services as well as in enterprises.

Informal learning corresponds not necessarily to an intentional choice of the learner, but to activities and interactions in everyday life situations, at work, at home and in the leisure time. Moreover, the law provides also for establishing territorial networks – including education, training and work services systematically linked to the strategies for the economic growth,

young people's access to the labour market, welfare reform, active aging, exercise of active citizenship also by immigrants - as well as for supporting the building up of peoples' learning paths in the various contexts, the acknowledgement of formative credits and the certification of learning attainments, the use of guidance services available on a lifelong basis. Territorial networks of services are also made up by universities, enterprises through unions and employers representatives, chambers of commerce, industry, handicrafts and agriculture, the Observatory for internal migration in the national territory. Eventually, law provides for a national public system for competencies certification based on minimum service standards homogeneous on the whole territory. 'Certifiable competence' is a series of knowledge and skills that can be acknowledged as formative credits; however, a special validation procedure is requested for non-formal and informal learning. Competence certification is defined as a deed aimed at assuring transparency and recognition of learning outcomes, in accordance with the European Union policy. A certificate, diploma or study title will formally prove that such competencies have been tested and validated by a public body or any other authorized and accredited entity. The Legislative Decree no. 13/2013, issued in application of what foreseen by Law 92/2012, defines the general dispositions on the national system of certification of competences. The aim of these dispositions is to make arise and develop professional competences non-formally and informally acquired, and to promote professional and geographical mobility, to facilitate the contact between of labour supply and demand, to increase transparency of learning and the recognition of certifications at national and European level.

New Skills and Jobs

The Ministry of education has acknowledged the need for greater links education and labour and has taken action for the reform of technical and vocational education, in the effort to provide to youth and their families a better future. The tools made available for this are: students' curricula available on schools websites, the link with the National labour bank, the development of digital and linguistic competences and mobility through European programmes.

From 1st September 2011 a working group is providing guidance for the re-launch of technical and vocational education and information, such as brochures and digital files introducing pupils to technical, vocational and higher technical institutes, and other multimedia products are provided through the web and the TV. Finally, the Legislative Decree n. 13/2013 is also reinforcing the Government's strategic planning the implementation of this agenda.

Learning mobility

The objective is to contribute to reach the goal of 20% of graduates with mobility experience by 2020. Mobility is based on actions of the Lifelong Learning Programme, Youth on the Move and Erasmus Mundus, jointly developed and supported by National Agencies and National Authorities. Individual mobility of students at upper secondary level, starting from school year 2010/2011 within the LLP's Comenius action has been decided. Further details are available on the Individual mobility of students (Mobilità individuale degli alunni – MIA) webpage. Additionally, certain actions have taken place to make Italian Universities more attractive and accessible also to foreign students: Admission tests delivered also in English starting from academic year 2012-2013 (in collaboration with the University of Cambridge), a single portal for enrolment (<http://www.universitaly.it/>), promotion programmes offered in English; promotion of joint or double qualifications.

Basic Skills, Literacy, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Languages

There has been recent reform of the second cycle of education (2010) aiming at fostering the mathematics-scientific area through additional teaching hours for these subjects. Regarding technical and vocational institutes, the reform suggests reinforcement of basic competences and skills as well as teaching of earth sciences, biology, physics and chemistry. Language teaching/learning in the Italian upper secondary schools is also considered priority and actions are put in place for this aim, taking into consideration that students should reach a B2 CEFR level of competence at the end of their upper secondary schooling. In upper secondary schools CLIL is used as a teaching method (3rd grade in Licei Linguistici and 5th in other Licei and technical institutes). The “E-CLIL” and the ‘Read on! for e-clil’ projects have been designed for the implementation of this reform. *Teacher education*

As anticipated above, the above illustrated educational system has been in place until 2010, when a new reform has introduced some modifications, maintaining teacher education under university control, but aligning it with the Bologna process and cancelling the specialisation schools, introducing one year traineeship in school to practice and observe the “teaching” profession at the end of the master degree. This reform is still under critical debate, and shall enter into full implementation only starting from the school year 2010/2011. According to this recent reform, starting from school year 2011/2012, teacher education shall be organised as follows:

- primary school teachers will have to attend a 5-years degree (laurea Magistrale a ciclo unico) in primary educational sciences; traineeship in school will take place starting from the first years of university, maintaining a systematic contact with the world of school and practice.
- Teachers in secondary school will attend specific master degrees, which can be accessed given the acquisition of a bachelor degree with specific credits in given disciplinary areas. The master degree will be followed by one year traineeship in school, called “Tirocinio Formativo Attivo”, during which the prospective teacher will be supervised and supported by a tutor and will work together with school teachers.

The main innovation in this reform seems to be the specific importance paid in teacher education to the difference between preparation for teaching in lower secondary school and preparation to face upper secondary school students, which will be reflected into different paths.

The debate is however sensitive, as this reform is currently criticised for decreasing the strong exchange and relationship between university and school in the preparation of teachers, which for some was well guaranteed in the specialisation schools, meant as laboratory where teachers and university professors of the pedagogical area worked together to prepare students to become teachers. Moreover while the specialisation school had an interdisciplinary approach, being organised together by different faculties, this reform seems to create isolated silos for teacher preparation, too much anchored to the specific disciplines and in the hand of the single faculty, where the influence of “subject” professor scarcely interested in the pedagogical, sociological and didactical aspects, might decrease their importance in the preparation of teachers.

Policies on ICT in the learning process

National Plan for Digital Schools The Italian Ministry of Education launched in 2007 a National Plan for Digital Schools (Piano Nazionale Scuola Digitale) to mainstream Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Italian classrooms. ICT is considered as a tool for change and introduction of innovative practices in teaching, learning and organisation. Italy's national ICT plan is based on four initiatives:

- Equipment of schools with IWB (Azione LIM in classe),
- 3 test-bed projects (cl@sse 2.0, scuol@ 2.0, Editoria digitale scholastic).

Digital management systems and resource provision

One other initiative of the Ministry of Education is to introduce ICT as a means of organisation and management for the schools. In the context of cost saving, the decree law 95/2012, art. 7 cc. 27-32 (converted into law 135/2012) demands that schools need to have in place management information systems that will record pupils' data, attendance, family-school communication, reports etc. On the same line, families need to enrol their children electronically to schools, using online forms. This systems need to be in effect from the school year 2012/2013. The ministry has provided the possibility of transfer of this data to the Anagrafe Nazionale degli Studenti, the national longitudinal information system with electronic records of individual students, aiming at interoperability of systems offered by the industry. The Anagrafe Nazionale degli Studenti is also used for school evaluation. In a similar context is the operation of the scuola in chiaro ("school uncoded"), which provides a description of each school in figures and numbers. This information is available to public. This is another policy promoted by the Ministry of Education. Along these initiative can be the compulsory provision of e-books and books in mixed format as well as the establishment of "digital school centres" in isolated villages (Crescita 2.0 decree). In parallel, catering for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), Law 4/2004, Art.5, makes special reference to provisions to support the access to information technologies for the disabled. As stated, in case that there is availability of fund, the resources made available to schools/pupils/teachers in hard copy should be offered also in digital form so that pupils with SEN will be able to access them. Despite these ambitious initiatives in ICT in Education, 'Italy lags behind most OECD countries when it comes to equipment and usage of information and communication technology (ICT) in school. For example, in 2011, only 30% of Italian students in 8th grade used ICT as a regular instruction tool in science classes, compared to 48% on average in an OECD country', OECD (2013). Although the Italian teachers appear confident in their use of ICT (close to the EU mean) and have attended formal and informal ICT training, their pupils' use is lower than the EU mean. It's worth noting that the pupil computer ratio is relatively high In Italy, as well as the school access to broadband (EUN, 2012).

Policies on creativity and innovation

Social innovation is considered a priority strategic objective within the Italian policy. Innovation in education and society, in general, and the mainstreaming of ICT are very much interconnected. Specifically, the Digital Agenda, of the National Operative Programme and projects in the framework of 'Smart Cities and Communities and Social Innovation' (one of the objectives of the European Framework Programme "Horizon 2020", due to start in 2014) work towards the same direction. Expanding on the 'Smart Cities and Communities and

Social Innovation' plan, everything that constitutes part of the society needs to be smart: cities, schools, teaching. All the possible bodies, agencies, research centres, industries etc are working innovatively and providing for a smart city, a smart community. The citizen is in the middle of this process and the services provided to her need to aim at her well-being. In this context, even school premises need to be rethought and repurposed so that they are appropriate for an innovative model of organisation, teaching and learning. In this planning, the school is part of a system, has a role in the society, reaching out to it and bringing in the trends of the contemporary world. ICT is a tool that can assist schools in succeeding this. The projects mentioned in the section 2.1 are all aiming towards this direction. Partnership with Business, Research and Civil Society

DPR no. 87/2010 foresees the possibility for State vocational institutes to activate three-year IFP (regional vocational education and training) courses, on a subsidiary basis. The Ministerial Decree no. 4 of 18 January 2011, describes the adoption of two organisational methods: the 'integrative method' and the 'complementary method', concerning the linkage between State vocational institutes and regional vocational education and training courses. According to the integrative students are provide by the State vocational institutes with competences which are necessary for the acquisition of a regional qualification (IFP) at the third year, within the five-year course of study, upon passing a Regional examination. The 'complementary method' is based on the scheme of State vocational institutes activate courses aimed at a three-year and/or a four-year Regional IFP qualification, without allowing the attendance of the fifth year of vocational training in the mainstream path. VET paths leading to a three/four-year regional vocational qualifications fall under the competences of the Regions and are included in a 'National catalogue' approved through the Agreements signed by the State/Regions Conference on 29 April 2010 and 27 July 2011. Linking all the VET systems works towards the agenda for the prevention of drop-outs; the facilitation of mobility and the recognition of credits and qualifications.

Regarding the improvement of the quality of labour force, many mechanisms have been activated and many actions are being foreseen, such as improved funds for continuing training and formative and guidance traineeships, with essential protection standards. Simultaneously, the Universities are asked by the Ministry to monitor graduates' employability, which forms part of the university's evaluation procedure and covers also for the distribution of available resources. Communication between universities and representatives of the labour world for the joint analysis of programmes and of competences students should acquire is considered as positive aspect for universities' evaluation. In addition, the Ministry has started initiatives to promote the enrolment and completion of programmes in scientific fields, usually not too attractive for students but instead leading at the acquisition of competences strongly required by the labour world.

School autonomy

One of the most important institutional element to take into account when addressing issue related to school needs, problems and innovation capacity in Italy, is the provision of school autonomy, granted by law since 1997 to single schools. School autonomy plays today an important role in bottom-up innovation of school to pursue new educational goals as defined in key political documents, and is a crucial element to take into account when analysing the Italian school system with regards to the bottom-up opportunity, capacity and innovativeness in implementing learning strategies more oriented towards learning to learn and motivation and integrating formal and non-formal learning opportunities.

A meaningful part of the potential of school autonomy resides in the possibility/ability to cooperate with the actors of the territory: students' families, social services, local bodies, enterprises, cultural bodies and no profit organization, as well as other schools. The Law supports in particular the creation of schools' network in order to share experiences through the institution of laboratories for didactical research and experimentation, sharing of documentation, teachers' training, educational and training guidance. In particular, each school autonomously elaborates its POF (piano dell' offerta formative - educational offer plan), a document including the whole school's educational offer in terms of curricular and extra-curricular activities, as well as organizational settlement, framed in the national educational objectives and taking into account students' and families' needs. A school reform of 2003 introduced in the principle of school autonomy the opportunity of formulating Personalised Study Plans (PSP, Piani di studio personalizzati) , individualised paths conceived by teachers on the basis of student's needs and allowing for a flexible design of school activities (classes, groups, obligatory and facultative hours, free choice of families, involvement of parents and students in the preparation of the portfolio and with the PSPs organisation), and open to extra-school and network activity (laboratories), aiming at applying in a concrete way the principle of "continuity of education and in education".

Policies on intercultural learning skills

The Guiding Act of the Ministry of Education of 2013, confirms the will of continuing actions to tackle drop-outs, to prevent discomforts in youngsters, drug addictions, the integration of disabled pupils and of recent immigrants, by intervening, in particular, on the teaching of the Italian language, also through multi-media programmes. *Equity and Diversity* In 2007, the National observatory for the integration of foreign students published 'The Italian way to inter-cultural school and the integration of foreign students' (La via italiana per la scuola interculturale e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri), which describes the national strategy on this issue. The main axes of the document are the 'inter-culture' element, which involves all pupils and all disciplines, and that of 'integration', addressed in particular to recent immigrant pupils for language learning. The document refers also to the organisation of future national training workshops for the exchange experiences between school managers. According to the Ministerial Circular of 28 January 2010, a maximum limit of 30% of immigrant pupils is prescribed for each class, aiming at the facilitation of the pupils' effective integration. Law Decree n 104/2013 foresees the allocation of 10 M euros for mandatory CPD programmes, especially for teachers of schools with low results and in areas at risk of social disadvantage. Regarding the integration of disabled pupils and their full inclusion in mainstream education, in 2009, the Ministry of education has published the 'Guidelines for the integration of disabled pupils at school', catering for the evaluation framework of the educational interventions made for disabled pupils and increasing the quality of provision in this way. Dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography and dyscalculia are recognised as Specific Learning Disabilities (Law 170/2010) and specific educational and didactic methodologies and actions are advised to be applied, starting at pre-primary education, to support teaching and learning. The Ministerial Directive of 27 December 2012 the role of the Local support centres is highlighted in order to assure the school inclusion through actions of information, training and counselling.

Reforms at National Level

The National Evaluation System

In March 2013, the Decree regulating the National Evaluation System has been definitively approved. According to the Decree, the National Evaluation System (SNV) is made up of three elements: the National institute for the evaluation of the education and training system, which task is to prepare tests for the external evaluation of pupils' learning outcomes, to take part in international surveys and of carry out national surveys on national standards; the National institute of documentation, innovation and research in education which is committed with the support to improvement and innovation processes, the continuing professional development of staff and the documentation and research in education; the inspectorate, which is autonomous and independent and is committed with the evaluation of schools and school heads. In fact, according to the approved regulation, the school evaluation process starts from self-evaluation, while external evaluation should be carried out preferably in critical situations needing support. The results of the evaluation should be the base of improvement plans that should be created with the support of Indire and of other qualified subjects. Increasing higher education attainment Target for Italy: 26-27% for the share of population having completed higher education Sub-objectives

1. reduce the time necessary for obtaining a degree;
2. reduce drop-outs before the second year of studies
3. rise enrolments through a reform of the rules on the Right to study
4. offer joint degrees and courses of studies in English to attract international students.

Interventions:

- the reform introduced in 1999 (Bologna Process)
- the use of the ECTS system and of students' learning attainments
- the attention paid on lifelong learning
- the guidance for future students
- the spreading of distance learning
- the introduction of part-time courses
- diversifying students' population
- increasing the attractiveness of Italian university among international students have been carried out.

Since 2010, the framework for evaluation of the education offer and of universities has been set. Law 240/2010, a new system of initial and recurrent accreditation and of evaluation of study course and universities has been introduced. Therefore, universities are expected to improve their financial management and the quality of the didactic, to increase the number of graduates and research activities. Concerning the higher education sector, a special emphasis is being put on students placements; promotion of Erasmus. Law no. 240/2010 has set up the 'Foundation for the recognition of merit', which task is the management of the Fund for merit established for the promotion of quality of learning in the school and university system by Decree no. 70 of 2011, converted into law 106/2011).

As for the system of aids to education (Legislative Decree 68/2012), the legislation establishes the minimum levels of performance to be guaranteed in the services offered to students (e.g., accommodation, canteen, guidance, tutoring, part-time activities, transports,

access to culture in general, etc.). The standard amount of grants to be awarded to students meeting the minimum requirements of academic merit and of socio-economic conditions has been established. There has also been an increase the number of grants available and to facilitate intra-Regional mobility. In addition, the reform of Doctoral studies has been approved: quality standards have been set regarding Doctoral education, Doctoral education providers and guarantees for Doctoral candidates. Synergies between research institutions, national and international, and enterprises active in research and innovation are highly estimated and form part of the Universities' evaluation.

Approval of the Regulation on the Adult Education Centres

In February 2013, the Presidential Decree no. 263/2012 containing 'General dispositions for the re-definition of the didactic and organisational asset of the Adult education centres' has been published in the Official Journal. According to the new regulation, starting from school year 2013-2014, former Permanent territorial centres and 'evening courses' will merge into the Provincial Adult education Centres (Centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti – CPIA). The Centres will provide an educative offer organised in levels of learning aimed at the obtainment of the qualifications released within the mainstream education system. The new Centres will be a kind of autonomous institutions, organised in service networks, mainly at provincial level, with the same autonomy of mainstream schools, their own staff and collegiate bodies adapted to the specific nature of the users (e.g. the 'class council' in mainstream schools will be called 'level council', as groups are organised in levels of learning, rather than by age). Centres will be built in such a way that it is possible to realise a strict link with local authorities and the labour and professions world. Centres provide their own formative offer. Italian and foreign adults, who did not finish compulsory education or do not own a first cycle (primary plus lower secondary education) certification can enrol in the Centres. Foreign adults in their working age, also if owing certifications released in their country of provenance, can enrol in literacy courses and Italian language courses. Centres can enrol 16-year olds who do not own a first cycle certificate and, upon specific agreements among the Regions and the Regional School Offices and only in case of exceptional and justified circumstances, can also admit 15-year old learners. Courses for adults are organised as follows:

1. first-level courses, aimed at the obtainment of a first cycle qualification and of the certification on the acquisition of basic competences to be acquired at the end of compulsory education;
2. second-level courses, aimed at the obtainment of a technical, vocational and artistic qualification;
3. literacy courses and Italian language courses, addressed to foreign adults and aimed at the obtainment of a language certification attesting the acquisition of a level above A2 of the Common European framework of reference for languages.

Specific measures on workload and timetables are foreseen to meet the needs of learners:

- welcoming and guidance activities aimed at the definition of an 'Individual formative agreement', for a maximum of 10% of the overall amount of hours;
- acknowledgment of credits acquired, of learners' knowledge and competences formally, non-formally and informally acquired;

- personalisation of the study path related to the level of the course, that can also be completed the subsequent year, according to what foreseen in the individual formative agreement;
- overall learning hours equal to 70% of the amount foreseen for the mainstream courses of studies;
- distance learning, corresponding to a maximum of 20% of the overall learning hours.

Past and current initiatives and projects in Schools

ICT projects

The 3 major ICT projects include schools, which have been granted entrance to the projects through a competition process. Their role is to experiment with various ICT tools/resources.

he action ‘IWB in the classroom’ (Azione LIM in classe)

It aims at the widespread distribution of IWb in schools, the change in teacher’s practice, the promotion of communication between pupils and teachers and the indispensable teacher training. The Action ‘Cl@ss 2.0’ (Azione Cl@ssi 2.0)

It aims at establishing a classroom where continuous use of ICT is taking place for teaching, as well as for personal and social communication. The action ‘Scuol@ 2.0’ involves a whole school in an innovative and groundbreaking change in the learning and teaching process. The school is promoting new educational practices, abandoning the traditional ones and aiming at a reform of the school routine, introducing the importance of a personal educational plan. The digital plan has a clear aim to engage interested teachers with tools that are innovative and practices that bring a change in teaching and learning. Professional development is also at the centre of the initiative. The principles behind the plan are solid and well grounded but its impact though has been criticised. In the OECD review of the plan (2013) it is suggested that ‘the small budget of the Plan has limited the effectiveness of its diverse initiatives’. The allocation of the Plan has been EUR 30 million annually for 4 years (less than 0.1% of Italy’s public budget for schooling).

Innovation projects

The “Innovadidattica” programme

The project has the objectives of:

- Promoting the design and experimentation of learning paths oriented towards competences;
- Favouring cooperation and “collegiality” in competence-based didactics and evaluation;
- Diffusing the practice of evaluation, with specific regards to those competences included in the OCSE PISA survey;
- Supporting continuity between school cycles;
- Evaluating the sustainability of didactical proposals on the part of the student;
- Favouring circulation of didactical instruments and material produced by schools so as to promote transferability and capacity building.

The Ambienti per l'apprendimento

Ambienti per l'apprendimento aims at providing better environments for the pupils to learn and the teachers to teach. The provision of new laboratories with improved health and safety conditions, in compliance with the energy saving regulations, for 4000 schools, from, part of this project.

Competenze per lo sviluppo

This programme aims at the improvement of the school quality, the enhancement of teachers' development, the improvement of teachers' and pupils' skills and competences, the preparation of pupils for entering adult life and the job market and the reinforcement of Lifelong learning.