

Methodology for the analysis of adult education systems. Results and policy trends in Italy between 2014 and 2019

Metodologia per l'analisi dei sistemi di educazione degli adulti. Risultati e tendenze delle politiche in Italia tra il 2014 e il 2019

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Abstract

The essay examines the status and developments of adult education policies in Italy between 2014 and 2019. The work is carried out on the basis of an analysis method inspired by the *Conceptual framework for the study of the effectiveness of adult learning policies* of the European Commission and according to the guidelines adopted by Ecorys.

Keywords: adult learning; adult education; public policies of adult education; national adult education systems; evaluation of national adult education systems.

Abstract

Il saggio costituisce un esempio di analisi dello stato e degli sviluppi dell'educazione degli adulti in Italia tra il 2014 e il 2019. Il lavoro è svolto sulla base di un metodo di analisi che si ispira al *Conceptual framework for the study of the effectiveness of adult learning policies* della Commissione Europea e secondo le linee guida adottate da Ecorys.

Parole chiave: educazione degli adulti; politiche pubbliche dell'educazione degli adulti; sistemi nazionali per l'educazione degli adulti; valutazione dei sistemi di educazione degli adulti.

1. Introduction: methodological framework

Studying the reality of adult education is a challenge that has involved all the international organizations and the best researchers in the last fifty years.

Some have dealt mainly with how the student learns. Others have also been concerned about how training opportunities can be built in different systems: organizations, communities, countries.

The first research program that aims to give methodological rigor to the study of national adult education systems was the Croasae program.

This is a research program started in 1977 (ECLE-European Centre for Leisure and Education, 1977). And that produced a methodological manual as well as a series of studies applied in various countries of every part of Europe (ECLE, 1980).

Over the next five decades the main international organizations have engaged in carrying out studies aimed at refining methods and techniques of analysis including specific aspects of this type of study (from the analysis of public and private expenditure on adult education, to the analysis of learning outcomes).

The manual produced by the European Commission in 2015 (European Commission, 2015a) is, in our opinion, an excellent reference when we intend to evaluate the meaning and fairness of the choices made by those who hold educational powers in the public and private sectors.

In these cases, researchers or politicians perform an extraordinary arbitrary act. They exercise the power to indicate what to observe, what to evaluate and with respect to whom. They choose the phenomena to be observed and those not to be exhibited.

The EC Manual defines a reference methodological framework that should no longer allow the distraction and the misdirection of researchers when examining the sense and fairness of public and private adult education policies.

We refer to this manual for each methodological and technical study and, in particular, to its *Conceptual framework for the study of the effectiveness of adult learning policies* (Figure 1).

With this article we intend to show our attempt to apply these guidelines to the reality of adult education in Italy.

The aim is to demonstrate that with a robust method, but practicable by all training professionals, based on indirect sources and second level analysis, it is possible to define:

- the state of adult education in Italy;
- its development trends over the past few years;
- possible future actions.

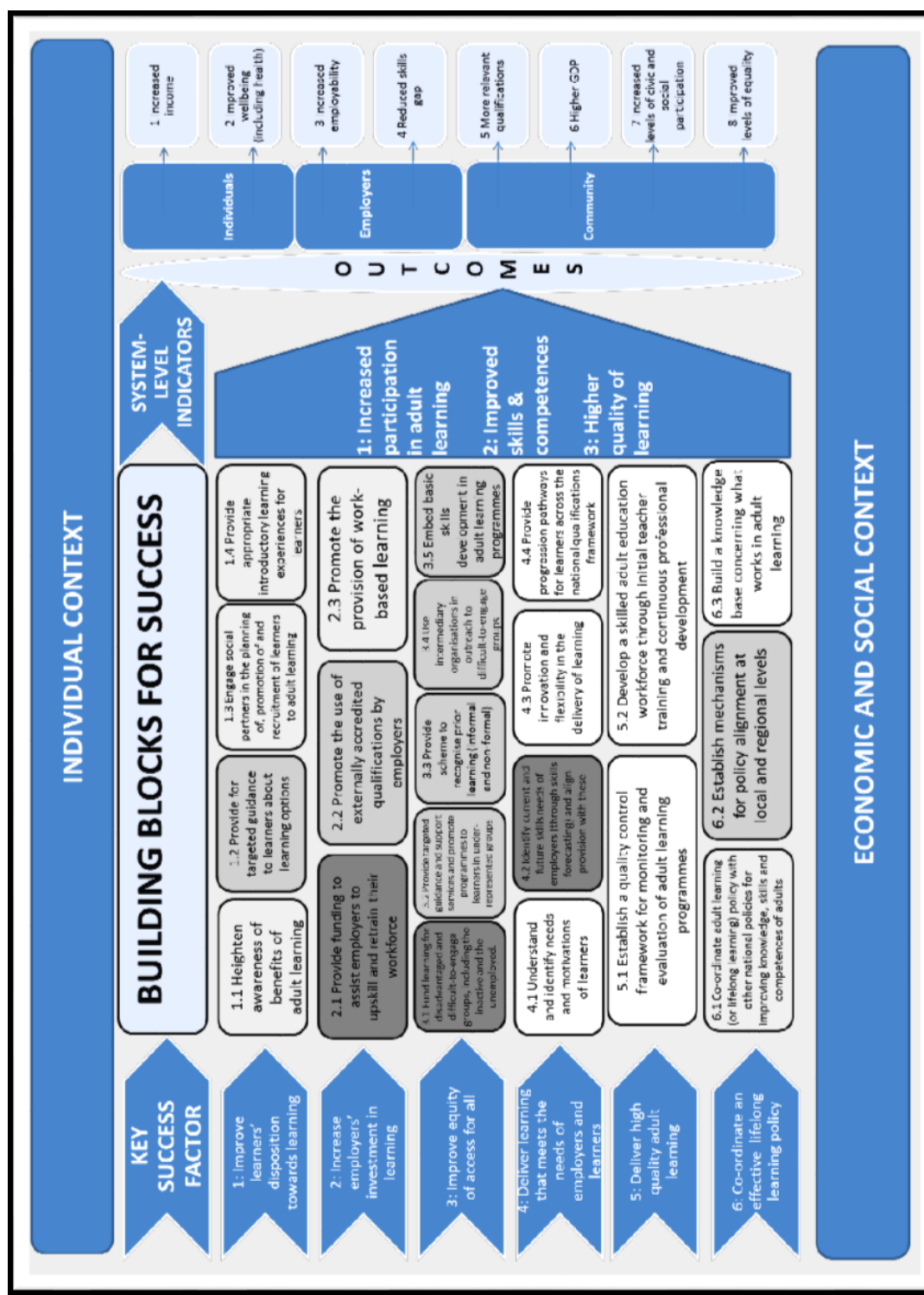


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the study of the effectiveness of adult learning policies (European Commission, 2015a, p. 86).

2. Country overview

2.1. Trends for the entire population

The paragraph explains how the 2016 employment rate in Italy compares to EU data, including EU2020 and national 2020 targets, as well as to the EU average. It also explains how employment rates have evolved in 2016 in comparison to the previous years.

- **Employment rate - entire population**

Figure 2 compares the average employment rate of the population (Isced¹ all levels) aged 20 to 64 in a given member state over the period 2000-2016 to EU targets and average, including the EU2020 target, national 2020 targets and the average EU employment rate for 2016.

Geog. Area	Years									Targets	
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	EU 2020	National 2020
EU-28 average	:	67.9	68.6	68.6	68.4	68.4	69.2	70	71	75% of the 20-64 year-olds in employment	67-69
Italy	57.1	61.5	61	61	60.9	59.7	59.9	60.5	61.6		

Figure 2. Evolution of employment rate. National average (2010-2016) compared to EU data.

Source: Employment rates by age and educational attainment level (%) Eurostat code Ifsa_ergaed, 25.04.2017.

Comparison to EU2020 target. In 2016, Italy is far from reaching the European 2020 employment rate target. However, it has recovered the pre-crisis levels of employment in 2007. In 2016 the employment rate was 61.6%, standing under the EU2020 target of 75%.

Comparison to national 2020 target. The national rate, at 61.5% for 2016 stands below the national 2020 Target rate of 67-69%. If the trend towards rising employment remains constant, the national target could be reached in 2020.

Comparison between 2016 national data and the EU-28 average for 2016. The 2016 national employment rate is 61.5% compared to 71% at the EU-28 average. In 2016, the distance to the EU-28 average is approximately 9.5 percentage points (as for the previous three years). The distance does not worsen despite the low rates of economic growth. In 2016, the employment rate grew slightly above the rate of growth for EU-28 on average.

Evolution over time. The national employment rate has fluctuated a small degree between 2015 and 2016, but overall there is a positive trend of increasing employment rate (57.1% in 2005 and 61.6% in 2016). Data indicates that the labour market is gradually emerging from the prolonged recession. This trend – which also applies to the employment rate of the low skilled – has slightly improved year to year since 2013. This trend has continued into 2016. The data show that since 2015 there has been a slight increase in employment rate.

¹ Isced: International Standard Classification of Education.

Official figures (MEF, 2016, p. 24) on the macroeconomic trend of employment rates (16-64) show a steady improvement perspective (from 57.2% in 2016 to 59.5% in 2020).

- **Participation rate - entire population**

The paragraph explains how 2016 participation rates in lifelong learning in Italy compare to EU data (EU2020 target and EU average for 2016), and how participation rates have evolved in 2016 in comparison to the previous years. Figure 3 compares the participation rate in lifelong learning of adults aged 25-64 to EU data over the period 2000-2016.

Geog. Area	Years									Targets	
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	EU 2020	National 2020
EU-28 average	:	9.6	9.3	9.1	9.2	10.7	10.8	10.7	10.8		
Italy	4.8	5.8	6.2	5.7	6.6	6.2	8.1	7.3	8.3	15% of adults in lifelong learning	

Figure 3. Evolution of participation rate in education and training. National average (2010-2016) compared to EU data. Source: Participation rate in education and training by sex and age (%), Eurostat, 25.04.2017,
http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=trng_lfse_01&lang=en.

The national participation rate in education and training (8.3% in 2016) is below the EU2020 target (15%). On the basis of progress over recent years and the distance left to travel, it is not likely that the EU-2020 target will be reached in 2020.

The national participation rate at 8.3% in 2016 stood under the EU-28 average for this year (10.8%). Between 2015 and 2016 the increase in participation was higher at the national level than for the EU-28 average.

There has been a greater degree of change at the national level than for EU-28 on average between 2000 and 2015. In 2005, the participation in education and training rate was 4.8%, which by 2016 had increased to 8.3%. Overall therefore, a positive trajectory of change can be seen, despite fluctuations over this time.

In 2016, the highest level of participation ever achieved by Italy was recorded. The data can be linked to the start of the implementation of the Jobs Act, flexicurity (flexibility and security) measures and active labour market policies. The level of increase should have been influenced also by the private training market. Considering the significant increase observed in both the EU-28 average and in relation to the national historical trends, further studies are needed.

2.2. Trends for low qualified adults

- **Share of low qualified adults**

The paragraph explains how the share of low qualified adults in 2016 in Italy compares to the EU-28 average and has evolved over the period 2000-2016. Figure 4 compares the percentage of the population with low qualifications (Isced levels 0-2) in 2016 to the EU-28 average for 2016 and the period 2000-2016.

Geographical area	Years								
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28 average	:	30.6	27.3	26.6	25.8	24.8	24.1	23.5	23
Italy	54.8	49.9	44.9	44	42.8	41.8	40.7	40.1	39.9

Figure 4. Share of low-qualified adults (Isced 0-2). National data (2010-2016) compared to EU-28 average 2016. Source: Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%), Eurostat edat_lfse_03, 25.04.2017

The share of low qualified adults as of 2016 was 39.9% in 2016 which compares unfavorably with the EU-28 average of 23% for the same year (a lower share by 16.9 percentage points).

Educational attainment levels of the Italian population (25 to 64 years-old) are therefore low compared to the EU-28 average. Between 2010 and 2015 the educational attainment levels improved, but at a slightly slower rate (in % terms) than in the rest of Europe. Between 2015-2016 the share of the low-qualified (Isced 0-2) in Italy dropped from 40.1% to 39.9% (or an 0.2% decrease), while at EU level it dropped from 23.5% to 23% (or a 0.5% decrease).

The national share of low qualified adults was 54.8% in 2000 and 39.9% in 2016. The share has dropped continuously and consistently over this period with a 0.87% decrease per year. During the years 2015 and 2016, the change in the proportion has slowed down. The percentage of improvement has fallen to 0.6% in 2015 and 0.2% in 2016. The decline in percentage of the population with low qualifications is generally thought to be mainly influenced by the generational replacement. The contribution of the public adult education system is weak and marginal in terms of addressing this particular challenge (in the eyes of the country expert). In fact, between 2007 and 2014, there were approximately 5.8 million participants (MLPS, 2015b). This means that of the total of 6.5 million adult learning participants about 800,000 are supported by the ESF (European Social Fund). In addition, approximately 400,000 adults annually access education for adults offered by the State (Indire, 2013). Therefore 80% of participants access opportunities for adult education through private and/or third sector funding.

- **Employment rate of low skilled adults**

The paragraph explains how the employment rate of low skilled adults in 2016 in Italy compares to the EU-28 average for 2016 and has evolved in comparison to the previous years. Figure 5 compares the employment rates of those with low qualifications (Isced levels 0-2) to the EU average over the period 2010-2016.

Geographical area	Years								
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28 average	:	55.7	53.8	53.4	52.7	52	52.6	53.2	54.3
Italy	49.3	51.6	50.2	50.5	50.6	49.5	49.6	50.2	51.2

Figure 5. Employment rates of low skilled adults (Isced 0-2). National data (2010-2016) compared to EU-28 average 2016. Source: Employment rates by age and educational attainment level (%) Eurostat code lfsa_ergaed, 25.04.2017.

The employment rate of low skilled adults is lower (3.1 percentage points less) than EU 28 average. However, the figure is close to the European average (51.2% vs. 54.3% in 2016).

The employment rate of low skilled adults in Italy has shown only a marginal rate of change between 2000 and 2016. Over this period the rate changed from 49.3% to 51.2%. Despite small fluctuations over this period, the overall employment rate can be seen to have increased by 1.9%.

Employment rate are directly linked to educational attainment levels and are the lowest among the low skilled. However, in 2014, 2015 and 2016, the employment rate has progressively improved and almost reached the level of the 2007 crisis. In particular, in 2016, the employment rate grew in the past years (+1%). It should be noted that the increase of 1% is identical to the overall employment increase average. This demonstrates the existence of a consistent low-skilled job supply.

- **Participation rate of low skilled adults**

The paragraph explains how the participation rates of low qualified adults in lifelong learning in 2016 compares to the EU-28 average for the same year and how participation rates have evolved in 2016 in comparison to the previous years. Figure 6 compares the participation rate in lifelong learning of adults aged 25-64 with low qualification levels (Isced levels 0-2) to EU data and over the period 2000-2016.

Geographical area	Years								
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28 average		3.7	3.9	4	3.9	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.2
Member State /Italy	1.4	1	1.3	1.2	1.6	1.5	2.2	2	2.3

Figure 6. Participation rate of low skilled adults EU average in comparison to national average. Participation rate in education and training by sex and educational attainment (%). Eurostat code and trng_lfse_03, 25.04.2017.

The participation rate of low skilled adults in education and training is lower than the European average. The national rate was 2.3% in 2016 compared to 4.2% at EU-28. However, across 2016 the gap in the national and EU-28 average decreased. In addition, while the European average of the participation rate in education and training has decreased slightly between 2015 and 2016, the Italian average has increased over this period. This national level growth occurred at the same time as an increase in the participation rate in education and training for the entire population (not just low skilled adults). This trend can potentially be related to the positive impact of flexicurity measures.

The participation rate of low skilled adults has increased between 2000 (1.4%) and 2016 (2.3%) overall. However, the rate has fluctuated over the last 16 years. For instance, the rate fell to 1% between 2000 and 2005, and then increased to 1.3% in 2010, reduced to 1.2% in 2011. In four years the rate then doubled to 2.2% in 2014 only to see further fluctuation in 2015 (2%) before the 2016 level of 2.3% was reached.

Low qualified adults are under-represented with respect to participation in education and training. They constitute more than 40% of the Italian population and just 27.7% of the participants in education and training activities (MLPS, 2015b). Only 2.3% of participants in 2015 were low qualified adults compared to 8.3% from the overall

population. However, it should be noted that the weight of low qualified adults on the whole group of participants increased by 0.3% in one year (from 27.4% in 2015 to 27.7% in 2016). The increase is modest, but significant. Analysis is needed to determine its connection with public policies and in particular with active labour market policies.

3. Brief overview of adult learning system

3.1. Main features and a concise summary of historic development

The Italian Parliament has provided – with Law n. 92/2012, art. 4 co. 51 – 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”² (an institutional definition of adult learning or adult education does not exist). According to the law, formal learning takes place in education and training systems as well as universities and high-level arts, dance and music institutes. It leads to a qualification or a vocational three-year qualification or diploma, also through an apprenticeship, or a recognised certification/qualification.

Non-formal learning occurs outside the formal education 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 does not necessarily imply an intentional choice of the learner, but rather activities and interactions in everyday life situations, at work, at home and in the leisure time.

The Italian system of adult learning is deeply unstructured. State rules vary across parts of the system and sectors. Public intervention and private intervention are sometimes coordinated while other times they compete or operate independently of one another. Public policies are defined and implemented by various ministries. Regional governments also have powers on the matter. At regional level, adult learning chiefly operates within the framework of European funds. Enterprises are the main actor of the training of workers employed, and operate in the global education market (Zapmeta, <https://www.zapmeta.it/>)

Social economy organisations operate in all parts of the system particularly, in the field of social policies. They act in every field in which public intervention is weak or even non-existent.

As result of this policy approach, low qualified adults are under-represented with respect to participation in adult learning activities. Only 2% of adult participants in 2015 were low qualified adults in compared to 7.3% of lifelong learning from the overall population (Eurostat). The general data concerning participation indicates consistent participation by women and younger age groups. The analysis also shows how gender and age have different effects depending on the following: region of residence, type of work performed and the companies in which the people are employed. As far as the region of residence is

² The Italian version is: “per apprendimento permanente si intende qualsiasi attività intrapresa dalle persone in modo formale, non formale e informale, nelle varie fasi della vita, al fine di migliorare le conoscenze, le capacità e le competenze, in una prospettiva personale, civica, sociale e occupazionale”. The English translation is by the Author.

concerned in 2014 the gap between the more favoured areas of the country (north-east 9.2%) and those less favoured (south 6.3%) was 46%.

Participation in adult learning is concentrated on people with highly qualified professional roles. The Istat data (2013) show that those employed and participating in training were working in intellectual, scientific and highly specialised professions (15.3%) and technical professions (10.9%), Lawmakers, businessmen and top management (9.0%) were also represented followed by administrative office professionals (7.1%). For other professions, updating and/or acquiring new knowledge and competences takes place infrequently (MLPS & Inapp, 2017). The highest percentage of participation is observed in the age group 35 to 54. Nevertheless only the intellectual and highly specialised scientific professions achieve the levels of participation in lifelong learning (15.3% in 2014) consistent with the European benchmark.

The economic crisis reduced participation in formal adult education. Between 2008 and 2014, individuals over 25 years old participating in formal education courses dropped from 961,000 to 751,000 (2.3%), which was almost exclusively young people up to 34 years old (MLPS, 2015b).

Figure 7 outlines the number of participants in formal education and training by the level of education and by age. This table indicates that people with Primary and lower Secondary education have a low participation in formal education and training. Most of the participants are provided with upper secondary education and are engaged in higher education (542,082 out of 707,511).

Level of education	Age 20-24	Age 25+	Total
Primary	5,136	25,744	30,880
Lower secondary	4,086	19,860	23,946
Upper secondary	83,340	27,263	110,603
Post-secondary non-tertiary education		0	
Short-cycle tertiary education		1,443	
Bachelor's or equivalent level		237,129	
Master's or equivalent level		274,317	
Doctoral or equivalent level		29,193	
			707,511

Figure 7. Number of participants in formal education and training by level of education and age
 Source: Eurostat database table "Pupils and students enrolled by education level, sex and age (educ_uoe_enra02)", accessed 2017.08.21, *Eurostat*.

3.2. Provision

Despite the absence of a stable institutional model in Italy it is possible to identify several main areas of adult education and training provision as follows:

- **Helps adults improve their basic skills**

As stated by Eurypedia, the domain *school education for adults* is under the responsibility of the MIUR (Ministry of Education, University and Research).

The main providers of adult education are Provincial Centres for adult education (Centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti, CPIAs) and upper secondary schools, which are responsible for the organisation and teaching in second level adult education pathways.

The CPIAs provide an educational opportunities aimed at the obtainment of qualifications released within the mainstream education system, as well as at the acquisition of basic

Italian language competences for foreigners. CPIAs provide programmes corresponding to initial education up to the completion of compulsory education as well as language courses for immigrants.

People who can join CPIAs are:

- adults, even foreigners, who have not completed the compulsory education and who intend to obtain the final qualification of the first cycle of education;
 - adults, even foreigners, who are in possession of the final qualification of the first cycle of education and who intend to obtain the final qualification of the second cycle of education;
 - foreign adults intending to enroll in the Italian literacy and learning paths;
 - young people who are 16 years old and can not attend daytime classes.
- **Helps adults achieve a recognised qualification**

Regional governments are responsible for planning and financing vocational education and training courses for adults.

At the national level, the Ministry of Labor, through the Inapp (National Institute for Public Policy Analysis), has defined the *Work Atlas* (Decreto 30 giugno 2015) that provides a classification that identifies the main work processes and areas of activity of the whole set of activities working. This is accompanied by the *National Qualifications Index*, a tool that collects and classifies all education and training titles and professional qualifications issued in Italy (*Atlante del Lavoro e delle Qualificazioni*).

These tools are designed to create a common framework for a highly differentiated training framework depending on the regions.

The offer for obtaining recognized qualifications includes courses that issue certificates of fitness and qualification for the pursuit of a profession, or certificates of qualification and specialization. Courses can be funded by the regional governments or by the participants. Courses for licensing professions regulated by specific regulations (barbers, beauticians, waste management, funeral services, etc.) are usually provided by private operators.

There are no recent developments around adult learning apprenticeships.

- **Helps adults develop other knowledge and skills, not for vocational purposes**

Non-formal education for non-vocational purposes is particularly consistent across Italy even though it is unstructured. Each ministry operates independently in a given field of competence (e.g. health, culture, defence, interior, justice, etc.). This is replicated at various levels of local government. Programmes and policy measures can be identified particularly for special targets (e.g. immigrants, marginalised people, inmates, drug addicts, etc.). Appropriate forms of cooperation between the various public and private stakeholders involved only occasionally emerged from these programmes and policy measures.

A special role is played by social economy organizations (cooperatives of services, in particular), voluntary organizations, associations of all types and operating in different sectors (culture, recreation, environment, assistance, etc.). This is a large network of organizations particularly popular in some parts of the country (central and northern Italy). Between 2006 and 2012 the percentage of participation in this type of activity went from 18.1% to 31.4% for people 18 to 74 years old. Of these, approximately one third participated in activities promoted by organisations of the social economy (Istat, 2013).

- **Facilitates transition to the labour market for unemployed people or those at risk of unemployment (ALMPs - Active Labour Market Policies)**

Provisions in favour of unemployed people or those at risk of unemployment has strengthened in Italy following the adoption of flexicurity policies in support of labour market reform and active labour market policies. In this case a national law (Law n. 183/2014) has completely reformed the system. The new law is part of a range of measures aiming to reform the system of social security benefits, job services, and active policies, to reorganise the rules on employment relationships and inspections, and to protect and reconcile work-life balance requirements. The aim of the Jobs Act is to:

- support people looking for jobs;
- reduce the number of types of employment contracts;
- make employment rules simpler.

Regional governments are the main actor of the system and are involved both through the Job Services network and through public and private training agencies. In some cities, social services or work orientation for municipalities also play a facilitator role.

These are training courses for all unemployed people or at risk of unemployment. Participation is free. The training offer is varied, it may include: annual or biennial courses aimed at a basic qualification, specialization courses. Special activities are also devoted to people with disabilities, to unemployed foreign immigrants, to young people *at risk*.

Opens up Higher Education (HE) to adults. The concept of *adults* in HE as such do not exist. According to the criteria concretely adopted by the public HE institutions, the attributes of an adult person taken into consideration are: parents, working and part-time students. According to an old but still useful classification (Kyóstiö, 1972, p. 9), the Italian model can be defined as *hierarchical*. It is a model in which there is a tendency to offer the opportunity to continue their education to a growing number of young people, but where there is still setting hierarchical and, in particular, the differentiation between the education of the elite and mass education.

Policy measures supporting the recognition of prior learning have a restrictive approach. Higher education institutions are not allowed to recognise more than 60 credits at Bachelor's level and 40 credits at Master's level. Credits concern previous certificates or examina. Despite this general norm, Universities are allowed (Law n. 240/2010, art.14) to establish bilateral agreement with second parties (Army, Hospitals, Banks, etc.) to accredit the work based learning of their employees.

The basic economic support for adult students is related to the possibility to receive student grants and vouchers from the State and regional governments (in the frame of ESF, for instance). The right of tax deduction for some of the costs (fees) is also considered. The right to paid educational leave is only provided for employees within the collective agreements.

The introduction of e-learning in Italian universities is regulated by Ministerial Decree of 17 April 2003, as amended by the Decree of April 15, 2005. At the end of the course the University telematics academic issue the university certificate set by existing legislation. Participants are mainly adults.

Accredited online universities are eleven. The first is the *Guglielmo Marconi* of Rome, with six faculties activated (Economics, Humanities, Social Sciences, Law, Education

Science, Technology and applied sciences), 300 faculty members and more than 14,000 students enrolled in graduate and postgraduate programs.

- **Enables adult employees to develop their work-related skills**

The relative provisions can be distinguished in three categories:

1. regulated continuous training related to the needs of the firms. A special role can be attributed to the Joint Interprofessional Funds (Fondi Paritetici Interprofessionali). These funds are private organisations promoted by the social partners bodies representing the employers and employees). They work on the basis of the authorisation and under the control of the Ministry of Labour and finance training plans decided by companies for their employees;
2. unregulated continuous training and education corresponding to an intentional choice of the learner and organisations offered by the free market of education and training. This part of activity shows its effects in participation to the adult learning activities. The consistency in terms of organization, activities and costs is documented and can be studied just through market research reports identifying suppliers and key vendors;
3. workers individual right. Since January 1, 2017, the *subjective right to education* has been introduced in mechanical engineering companies. The Agreement between the Social Partners provides for the right to at least 24 hours of training. In the absence of training courses in the enterprise, the worker is entitled to participate in external courses, with contributions from companies up to 300 euros. In this case, the company will recognize 2/3 of the paid 24 hours (16 hours) while 1/3 of the hours will be paid by the worker.

4. Adult learning policies

4.1. Italian context

- **Distribution of responsibilities regarding adult learning**

As described by Eurydice (EC, Eurydice, 2015), the legal basis of the Italian system of adult learning is characterised by the sharing of responsibilities between different organisations. Since the end of the 1950s, responsibilities and services have gradually been decentralised, which has seen Regions, Provinces and Municipalities granted the roles and administrative tasks with the exception of those related to matters expressly assigned to the State.

The State has exclusive legislative authority on the general organisation of the education system including: general dispositions, minimum standards of education, fundamental principles, school staff, quality assurance, State financial resources, foreign schools and cultural institutions in Italy.

Regions define the school network within their own territories. Regions also have authority on the offer of vocational training courses through accredited agencies. However, Regions always work in collaboration with the State (MIUR and Ministry of Labour) through the State/Regions Conference (Conferenza unificata Stato/Regioni).

At local level, Provinces and Municipalities are responsible for the upper secondary level and the lower levels of school education, respectively. The Regions and the Municipalities can also act in all fields of non-formal adult learning.

The vertical and horizontal governance model is subject to criticism and revisions – through the reform of the Constitution – aimed at reducing its complexity and inefficiency.

- **Major national socio-economic strategies governing the provision of adult learning**

The fragmentation of the Italian system of adult learning makes it difficult to identify a national lifelong learning strategy, which includes the adult learning. The contents of a possible National Strategy can be identified from an analysis of sectoral policies.

The Italian system of adult learning depends on the range of providers and the individual demand of people and organisations.

In Italy, the adult learning policy is the result of various policies. It is not a specific political goal. The strategic guidelines related to ESF Thematic Objective n. 10 *Greater equality of access to lifelong learning for all age ranges* do not identify any clear priority (European Commission, 2014a). This example helps us to understand the reasons why the Italian policy framework is fragmented. In fact, it is potentially extended to all sectoral policies (agriculture, health, poverty, digitizing, etc.). Sectoral policies therefore lack any forms of strategic, financial and organizational coordination.

This is also reflected in legislation. In fact, national framework law is absent. Regional governments follow in this dearth of national choices. However, there are numerous laws and decrees that regulate and finance some sectorial activities and interventions. The Italian Constitution provides “the right of private individuals to establish schools and educational institutions at no cost for the State”. This has encouraged the development of a widespread system of private adult learning consisting of a strong system of social economy (including various associations) and a training market in response to business demand.

As for the individual right to adult learning it is important to remember that Law n. 53/2000 recognised the general right of the worker to *permanent* education and training throughout their life and the possibility to use paid or unpaid leave for training. At the same time, the state has introduced some *compulsory training* for employees (e.g. in the field of safety in the workplace).

4.2. Adult learning policy framework

- **A summary of major developments/ changes**

Changes in formal adult education. From 2014 the Government and the Parliament have worked on the school reform simply called *The good school*. After parliamentary approval on 13 July 2015, the draft law was issued as Law n. 107. The implementation of the law will take place gradually through several regulations.

On 7 of April 2017, the Government has approved a reform of vocational education and training (Legislative Decree n. 61/2017). The revision of vocational school education, also considering the Decree n. 92 dated from May 2018 (MIUR, 2018), has consequences on the regional offer of vocational education and training for youth adults. In fact, the decree has among its purposes the revision of study programmes in order to avoid

overlapping with the vocational training organised at regional level. Starting from school year 2018-2019, vocational institutes and regional vocational education and training providers will be part of the national network of vocational schools, created in order to have a more efficient vocational offer.

At the same time, following a law adopted in 2012 and after a period of experimentation, a new adult education system enters into force throughout Italy, in the 2015-2016 academic year (Presidential Decree n. 263/2012). The new system covers only the domain *school education for adults* (CPIAs).

Changes in Labour Market Policies. The most important change after 2010 is the introduction of active labor policies, and the adoption of a flexicurity model that enhances training. The Law n. 92 of 28 June 2012 covering *Provisions on a growth-oriented reform of the labour market* has been implemented through Decree n. 13/2013 providing general rules on the national system for competences certification. The decree makes the new national system for competences certification operational; it aims at increasing not only the professional competences acquired at work, but also those acquired in leisure time in order to promote mobility, foster the meeting together of demand and supply in the labour market, increase learning transparency and the relevance of certifications at national and European level.

In 2016 with the adoption of a bill on the Jobs Act for self-employed and *smart working* and the creation of the Agency for Active Work Policies (ANPAL) the national network of services for labour policies was established and the phase of implementation of delegation Law n. 183/2014 (Jobs Act) ended.

The new service system is based on building customised courses aimed at acquiring the necessary skills for effective placement and relocation of the unemployed in the job market. The recipients of income support benefits are obliged to participate in personalised vocational training and community services. In case of breach of duty they are subject to penalties ranging from curtailment, suspension or debarment from benefits.

According to the Council Recommendation on the 2016 national reform programme (European Commission, 2016) of Italy should take action in 2016 and 2017 to: “4. Implement the reform of active labour market policies, in particular by strengthening the effectiveness of employment services. Adopt and implement the national antipoverty strategy and review and rationalise social spending” (p. 8). In September 2016, the Government issued a number of supplementary provisions of the decrees for the implementation of the Jobs Act concerning specific supplementary measures relating to active labour market policies and increased funding to support apprenticeship. The second phase of the Youth Guarantee Program has begun, which includes, among other things, the superbonus for the transformation of internships (financial incentives). This is for employers who hire a young person between 16 and 29 years with a permanent contract. The Legislative Decree n. 185/2016 has corrective functions and has adopted changes in the procedures related to the activation of employment contracts, the establishment of a Central Inspectorate, strengthening protection for disabled workers). It also contains an interventions related to the challenge of combating poverty and unemployment thorough increasing the financial support to *socioeconomic safety nets* seeking to prevent the poor or those vulnerable to shocks and poverty from falling below a certain poverty level). This is a manoeuvre that involves substantial passive labour policy interventions (re-education of social charges for companies and increasing investments for to socioeconomic safety nets). Active policy measures are less consistent.

Third sector and social economy. The social economy in Italy is characterized by social and non-profit-making activities. They are realized by *third sector* organizations inspired by principles such as reciprocity and democracy. A large part of these organizations work in the field of education. The Law n. 106/2016 on the Third sector has been approved after the strong development of the sector that took years. The new law has increased investment of the private sector in the field as well as interventions specifically targeted to adult learning of vulnerable groups. The law delegates to the Government “the reform of the third sector, social enterprise and for discipline of universal community service”. The law draws a comprehensive reform of all that is attributable to the Third sector: associations, voluntary work, social enterprises, social cooperatives (at 2011 – according to Istat (2012) – 300 thousand non-profit organisations that employ 681 thousand personnel and 271 thousand external workers. It is estimated that it produces a total of 64 billion euros turnover for 4.3% of the GDP). Through this initiative the attraction of investing in financial risks in the social economy is favoured. This will lead to an increase in the quality of services offered and in training a new generation of employees.

Active inclusion to combat poverty. The new Law n. 33/2017 on poverty is relevant because it will act through political measures based on the integration of different educational actions, including services, and will promote active inclusion.

Recent legislation requires the government to adopt “rules for combating poverty, the reorganisation of services and the intervention system and social services” (article 1 paragraph 1, Law n. 33/2017). Families in need will be prioritised, starting with those with dependent children (i.e. less than 18 years old) the prediction of impact is 50%. The law provides for the introduction of *inclusion income* and activation of personalised services (formal and non-formal education is included). The measures are focused on the action of local communities. The fund for combating poverty and social exclusion is established (600 million Euro for 2016 and one billion Euro from 2017) to finance a comprehensive reform law of welfare policies (Social Act).

The delegation introduces a national measure to combat poverty based on the principle of active inclusion, which envisages the provision for the beneficiaries of a custom project for social, educational and labour inclusion supported by the offer of personal services (principle of *selective universalism*) and aims to overcome the fragmented nature of existing measures.

Migrants Emergency. In Italy, there is no uniform reception system (AIDA, 2016). However, in the SPRAR system (Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati - Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees), immigrants can participate in adult education activities.

The reception system is articulated in phases, distinguishing between:

1. phase of first aid and assistance, operations that continue to take place in the centres set up in the principal places of disembarkation;
2. first reception phase, to be implemented in existing collective centres or in centres to be established by specific Ministerial Decrees or, in case of unavailability of places, in *temporary* structures;
3. second reception phase, carried out in the structures of the SPRAR. During this phase adult education activities can take place. Adult education activities include: study of Italian language and culture, vocational training, participation in internships, non formal adult education.

Policy measures taken to address the emergency migration has dominated attention to the first aid and reception of migrants. The number of migrants is growing and out of control. Budget for educational activities does not grow in proportion. The interventions are defined locally by the Municipalities and are voluntary (Direttiva del Ministero dell'Interno del 11 ottobre 2016: “Regole per l'avvio di un sistema di ripartizione graduale e sostenibile dei richiedenti asilo e dei rifugiati su territorio nazionale attraverso lo SPRAR” (Rules for the establishment of a gradual and sustainable allocation system for asylum seekers and refugees on national territory)).

- **Main legislative act(s) governing the provision of adult learning**

The analysis of the legislative framework for adult learning provision in Italy leads to paradoxical results. In fact, there is no national framework law on adult learning. The same must be said for each of the 20 regions with legislative power. The rules governing the provision of adult learning are distributed in articles of a large number of laws. The main ones have been cited in the preceding paragraphs. Some regions (such as the Autonomous Province of Bolzano) have specific laws which, however, refer to sub-systems of adult learning (education and non-formal education).

In addition to the aforementioned national laws, a new law on the accreditation of prior learning needs to be added. The national system of competence certification is provided for by Art. 4 (par. 58) of Law n. 92/2012. The law defines the general regulations and the essential levels of performance to identify and validate the learning acquired in non-formal and informal contexts. Legislative Decree n. 13/2013 identifies two lines of priority intervention:

- establishing the national repertory of education and training qualifications and professional qualifications;
- defining the minimum service standards of the national system of competence certification.

4.3. National quantitative policy targets

Adult learning policies in Italy are not associated with measurable goals over the years in terms of impact. In particular, participation in adult education and training is considered to be “strongly influenced by socio-demographic factors [...], from the level of education held, age and occupational and professional status” (MLPS & INAPP, 2017, p. 14). For these reasons, probably, adult learning targets are expressed in very general terms and attention is focused on the amount of promoted initiatives, but not on the results obtained.

4.4. Quality assurance

Italy lacks a national quality system for all adult education activities. Public activities of adult education fall under the control of the Ministry of Education, while the supervision of vocational training activities falls under the responsibility of Regions.

Accreditation of organisations providing training and, in some regions of the trainers, constitutes to date the main instrument for ensuring quality of the training offered, financed with public funds. Regarding training, the regions have progressively invested in refining the accreditation system by increased selectiveness of the providers (D'Agostino, 2013). Education has its own evaluation system, as does on-going training. Both are undersized, understaffed and underfunded compared to what exists in other countries (e.g. Sweden, UK, The Netherlands). Quality control is mainly focused on the compliance

with the administrative rules and does not guarantee and control the continuous improvement.

4.5. Policy developments (before the *Government of change*)

The general strategy which drives public policy in Italy aims at strengthening policy areas where delays persist in human capital, in productivity and infrastructures, supporting them with appropriate macroeconomic stimuli implemented by four operational tools: (i) a structural reform action and stimulus for private and public investment; (ii) a fiscal policy able to reduce the ratio between debt and GDP; (iii) reduction of the tax burden; (iv) improving the business environment and the competitiveness of the Italian system (MEF, 2016).

This is accompanied, by what we can define a dual strategy of adult learning. On the one hand, for the vulnerable groups, achieving adult learning objectives is postponed until the economy grows, and the negative effects that ensue are mitigated by the State with the strengthening of social policies. On the other hand, – developing and increasing the skills of high skilled workers – the individuals and companies autonomously provide for investment in training – are supported by the state both through opportunities for tax deduction of expenses, and through public interventions to support research and innovation.

All this is accompanied by the Reform of Public Administration to make policies of quality services for citizens and companies for simplification and acceleration of administrative measures, the digital administration code, transparency in government contracts, and the reorganisation of local public services. Further action will concern the fight against corruption, and the reform of public management. This also concerns the overall governance of the education and training sector. System interventions are in place to support and assist educational institutions in improving the capacity for self-diagnosis, self-evaluation and assessment and the ability to innovate teaching, adapting it to local contexts.

At the initiative of the Ministry of Justice there is on-going preparatory work for a legislative reform of the penitentiary system aimed at lowering the level of recidivists, which in Italy is the highest in Europe, broadening penal execution outside prison accompanied by new methods of non-formal education.

In the *Partnership Agreement for Italy, 2014-2020* (EC, 2014b) the priorities adopted by the Italian government for using the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI) funds in the field of adult learning are stated thus: “The Funds will contribute to an increased employment rate (at least 67-69 %), reduced poverty and exclusion (by 2.2 million inhabitants) and improved adaptation of education to the labour market needs by 2020” (p. 3). In the ESF programme, the objectives are better specified as follows: “reinforce the equality of access to permanent learning for all age ranges in the formal, non-formal and informal contexts, updating knowledge, capabilities and labour skills and promoting flexible education paths through professional orientation and confirmation of acquired skills”. The investments foreseen by the Operational Programmes Financial Plan (which amount to EUR 278.9 million), do not seem to allow for forecasting substantial modifications.

4.6. The first period of the *Government of change* (June 2018 - April 2019)

- **Key national policy developments**

On the 4th of April 2018, two *populist* parties obtained a majority of the seats in the Italian Parliament (Movimento 5 Stelle and Lega Salvini Premier). Subsequently, on the 1st of June 2018, a new government was appointed in Italy. The new government intends to introduce a policy shift of profound *change* from the previous strategic and political directions.

Some of the measures taken in the first 150 days of the new government have a potential relevance on the field of adult learning/skills. Because of the national elections and the time necessary for the establishment of the new government, legislative activity resumed in June 2018. In April and May, the two governing parties committed themselves to a final draft of a contract laying out their vision for the *government of change*, and subsequently the enactment of norms, decrees and documents aimed at introducing such changes. In October, the Government presented the Draft Budgetary Plan 2019, which defines the strategies for the near future.

- **Policy developments**

The new government has promised profound changes in all fields. In the *Contract for the Government of Change*, no direct objectives concerning adult and continuing education are set out. The term *training* is mainly used in reference to the professionalization of some types of workers.

During the previous five years, the most significant measure was the adoption of active labour market policies. Strengthening active labour market policies has had a short-term positive impact on the expansion of participation in lifelong learning activities as well as on the progressive development of guidance services. The new labour policies adopted by the new government (Urgent measures for the dignity of workers and enterprises) do not mention new and more effective policy measures offering more adult learning opportunities.

The anti-poverty strategy could promote social inclusion processes. The key issue is represented by the *reddito di cittadinanza* (basic income measure). Several millions of people could benefit from the provision. Related to this measure there will be a relevant investment to develop the public job-placement services. The beneficiaries will have the duty to take part in training activities during the unemployment period. The Draft Budgetary Plan will likely increase educational opportunities at national level. The use of European Funds to increase basic skills/competences has been announced. However, it is unclear how to assure an adequate supply of adult learning activities across Italy (both from quantitative and qualitative points of view). An adult learning system being able to offer millions of learning opportunities does not exist. Most people will not have real learning opportunities at all. The lack of job and training supply risks transforming the *basic income measure* into a passive policy measure.

At the same time, the public job-placement services are and will continue to be too marginal in the labour market to play its expected role, as long as the cooperation with private job services is missing. It is expected that this policy measure will absorb a significant part of ESF financial support. In the short term, the interventions in favour of immigrants will suffer from drastic financial reductions and this will in turn affect the existing weak formal and non-formal educational provisions. The amount of low skilled immigrants is expected to increase as a result.

Moreover, the novel penitentiary provisions aim at reinforcing the role of some professionals (i.e. intercultural mediators). Their tasks consist mainly of facilitating relations and control. Nevertheless, there are no measures aimed at educational compensation for low skilled inmates.

The measures in favour of the third sector and the social economy are becoming more relevant due to inadequate state intervention. Educational poverty – both absolute and relative – will increase in the next few years. The basic paradigm of adult learning public policies is not changing. In Italy, the general strategy that drives public policy mostly aims at strengthening economical policy areas where delays persist in the formation of high skilled human capital. To this end, public policies intervene only in these areas with appropriate macroeconomic stimuli.

This is accompanied by a dual adult learning strategy. On the one hand, for vulnerable groups achieving adult learning objectives, the development of skills and competences is postponed until the resumption of economic growth (the negative effects that ensue are mitigated with the strengthening of social policies). On the other hand, the development and increase of skills of high skilled workers are supported by the state both through opportunities for tax deduction on expenses, and through public interventions to support research and innovation.

5. Investment in adult learning systems

5.1. Total investment in adult learning and change over time

It is impossible to provide reliable data on total investment in adult learning in Italy. The only reliable data can be derived from the analysis of the monthly average household expenditure. In Italy, every family spends € 2,524.38 per month. Of this sum, 0.6% is destined for education and 5.2% for recreation, shows and culture (Istat, 2017),

As stated by OECD (2017), public expenditure on educational institutions in Italy declined by 14% between 2008 and 2013. The decline for other public services was less than 2%. Italy fourth-lowest OECD countries in terms of total expenditures (from public and private sources) on primary to tertiary education in 2013. Italy's relatively low public expenditures on education is not due to low public spending in general, but to the fact that education receives a comparatively small share of the public budget.

Italy is in last place in the EU for the percentage of public spending on education. The OECD (2014) argues in its report that if the reduction of public spending had not been offset in part by private funding, the reduction of resources available to the institutions of the education system would have been even more important (from p.227).

Since 2004, Interprofessional Funds have managed an average of EUR 450 million per year (MLPS, 2015b). It should be taken into account then that this figure represents only a fraction of the actual costs incurred by the companies for training workers. In the automotive industry the only *direct expenses* for training can reach an average of EUR 750 per year per employee (the *indirect costs* and maintenance of the company's training system must be added to that). Funding is used to assist employers only in exceptional cases for financing special projects targeted at particular economic sectors (green economy, digital economy, etc.). As part of the Investment Plan for Europe funding was granted for innovative projects, for the development of infrastructures and the SME.

Implementation of the projects promoted by the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) is already making a contribution to reviving private investment; according to the latest data twenty-nine initiatives are recorded including financing agreements and infrastructure projects, for 1.7 billion resources. Considering the effect of financial leverage, investments of around 12 billion can be activated (MEF, 2016). Part of this funding will also be devoted to continuing training.

5.2. Public national investment

There is no aggregate data on public national investment in adult learning policies. Some sources provide partial data on some specific measures (MLPS & INAPP, 2017). The assessment of public spending in adult learning as a whole is made even more complex by the various cost-sharing schemes that cover all of the following measures: training funds, tax incentives for companies and individuals, grants for companies, grant for vouchers/individual learning accounts, loans, training leave, payback clauses (this is just in the private sector).

An analysis covering the entire landscape of public spending on adult learning could produce a new insight into real public policy in this field.

5.3. EU support via structural funds (primarily ESF)

As planned for the 2014-2020 planning period, investments in adult learning are included in two thematic objectives:

- Objective 10.3 – *Greater equality of access to lifelong learning for all age ranges* is present only in some Regional Operational Programmes. Concerning the specific objective to raising the level of education of the adult population, the actions planned are as follows:
 - Orientation and skills assessment;
 - Literacy and digital inclusion to stimulate the use of the web and digital public services.
- Objective 10.4 – *Increase the skills of the workforce and facilitate mobility, job entry/re-entry* is present in all Operational Programmes. The actions to be supported are as follows:
 - Training interventions (even those on a voluntary basis) closely related to the needs of new entrants and re-entrants to work, primarily addressed to people over age 55, long-term unemployed, people with low education, entrepreneurship and to specialised training initiatives aimed at the green economy, blue economy, personal services, health and social services, development of heritage and cultural activities;
 - Training courses related to issuing qualifications included in national or regional directories (including courses taken on a voluntary basis) accompanied where appropriate by guidance work;
 - Updating skills aimed at the entire workforce (including e-skills), short-term employees, self-employed, micro-enterprise owners, members of cooperatives;
 - Traineeships and mobility initiatives, also transnational, as privileged opportunities for learning and professionalization.

In both cases, participation is planned through the national repertory of study and professional qualification titles linked to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and implementation of the national public skills certification system. This includes the development and/or improvement of guidance and validation services and certification of learning outcomes achieved also in non-formal and informal contexts. In both cases, the main beneficiaries are training bodies, educational institutions, companies, universities and research institutes. Main target groups are adults with low levels of education and/or qualification, the working age population (inactive, never worked, unemployed and employed).

- **Structural fund support planned as part of 2014-2020 financial framework**

The role played by European funds is essential for financing policies in relation to introducing innovative processes. Below is a graph of financial allocations (MEF, 2016). by thematic objective at the conclusion of the adoption of operational ERDF-European Regional Development Fund and ESF-European Social Fund programmes (in MEUR, including national co-financing) (Figure 8).

Adult learning investments are mainly focused on Objective 10. However, it is not possible to exclude that specific projects may also be funded under other objectives. According to the data on financial support to the Member States between 2014 and 2020 – available in July 2016 for the European Commission from Operational Programmes for the ESF – the planned financial support from the EU for the investment priority most directly targeting adult learning (i.e. Investment priority 10.3) is EUR 278.9 million. However for the period 2014 to 2020, as planned by the Partnership Agreement (EC, 2014b) Objective10.3 objective – raising the education level of the adult population – EUR 197 million are expected to be allocated by the EU, EUR 489 million are expected for Objective10.4 – to increase the skills of the workforce and facilitate mobility and the insertion/re-employment. EUR 1397,9 million are expected for technical assistance, of which EUR 361,6 million on the ESF and the remainder on the ERDF). The situation would change little even with the inclusion of the funds for Objective 9.2 Increasing employability and participation in the labour market of the most vulnerable people, amounting to more EUR 500 million. This funding would only be partly dedicated to interventions and services for active inclusion such as: municipal employment assistance services, home educational assistance, apprenticeships, work grants.

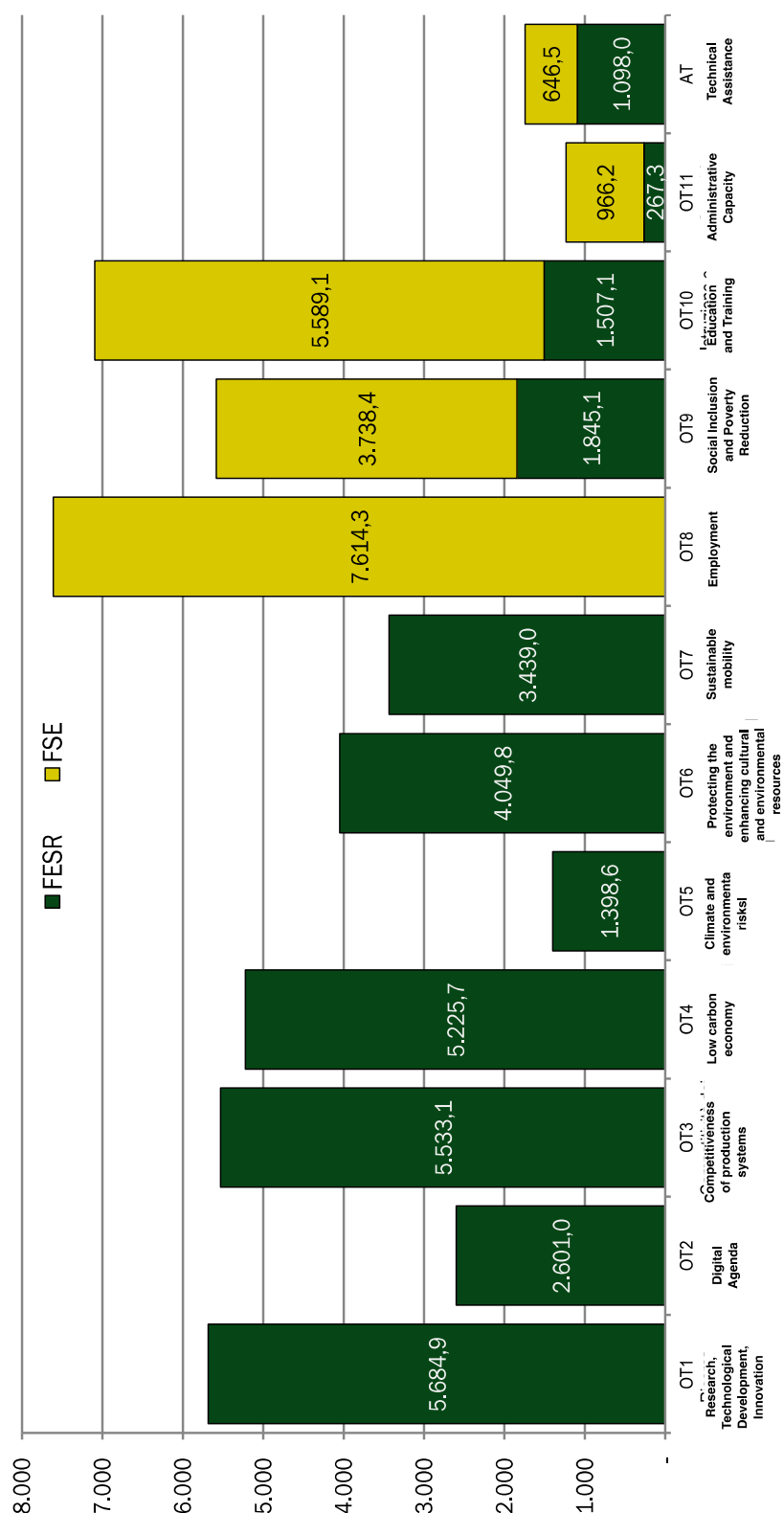


Figure 8. Financial allocations by thematic objective at the conclusion of adoption of operational ERDF and ESF programmes (in MEUR, including national co-financing). Source: Department for Cohesion Policies. MEF, 2016, p. 130.

- **EU support via structural funds (primarily ESF) provided as part of 2007-2013 financial framework**

For the period 2007 – 2013, the Intervention Priorities for the ESF was the following:

- adaptability of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs;
- improving of the access to employment and sustainable inclusion in the labour market;
- social inclusion of disadvantaged people and fighting discrimination in the workplace;
- development of the human capital;
- partnerships and agreements to promote the reforms in the fields of employment and inclusion in the workplace.

Furthermore, only regarding the Convergence – Objective:

- to expand and improve investment in Human Capital;
- to strengthen of the Institutional Capacity and the Efficiency of Public Administration and of the Public Services at national, regional and local levels and, where appropriate, of the Social Partners and of the non-governmental Organizations.

Potentially, the ESF's set of priorities covers adult learning actions.

5.4. Effectiveness of investment

The assessment reports of the policies and investments sector are focused on the administrative results. Impact assessments on adult learning policies do not exist. It can be said that the impact of investments in favour of vulnerable groups remains the most problematic. The new laws passed in 2015 and in 2016 will improve the situation. Public investment to increase access of vulnerable groups remains difficult and limited.

The possibility to activate public resources for adult learning in vulnerable groups is guaranteed, but it varies depending on the type of policies. The people who fall within the framework of the flexicurity policies or social acts access resources activating measures in their favour in an individual dimension (individual vouchers and individual plans). In other cases the possibilities to activate public resources are linked to the cyclical nature of issuing notices and approval of special ESF projects aimed at the vulnerable groups. However, the European Commission evaluation (European Commission. Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2015b) highlights two elements of weakness in the use of the ESF (2007-2013), referring to the lack of attention to the topic of:

- gender equality;
- vulnerable groups and in general the social inclusion policies.

Overall, however, the resources are insufficient to activate participation levels that produce a significant impact on increasing the participation of vulnerable groups in adult education/lifelong learning. The first problem that reduces the effectiveness of public policies is the low volume of investments. The ESF is the financial instrument that contributes most to implementation of expansion of public policy interventions.

However, the remaining problem is that of disparity between public and private investment for training that reduces the chances of the former to play a redistributive role

in favour of vulnerable groups. This phenomenon is accentuated by other concerns related to the inability to use the available resources. As a result, we must consider the problem of efficiency public spending. A recent survey that concerned the years after 2006 identified significant state resources destined for training and not used for significant periods of time by the Regions. In addition, it was found that the Regions have directed resources for continuing training towards financing passive policies in order to sustain the income of workers unemployed or at risk of exclusion from the job market (MLPS, 2015b).

Public investments in order to improve teaching methods have focused primarily on the field of remote learning. Today there are numerous publicly funded platforms. However, there is no national system for remote training.

6. Assessment of existing policy

6.1. Develop learners' interest in learning

- **Policy attention to heightening awareness of the benefits of learning**

The actions focused on heightening awareness of the benefits of learning are driven by the organisations implementing adult education programmes. In the territorial training projects programmes are promoted by associations or networks of stakeholders. In the corporate projects such actions can also take very rich forms that involve the future participants in the planning process.

The public policies explicitly aimed at encouraging the emergence of new demand for training – (i.e. adults at risk of social exclusion) are based primarily on measures of *compulsory training*. This approach characterises all measures related to the new flexicurity policies and of *active inclusion* (poverty), as well as the policies which aim to introduce new standards of quality in productive activities, in business, in the professions (doctors, engineers, lawyers, etc.). In these cases, obtaining a certification and the formal fulfilment of the provisions of the law is the main motivation for participation. However, compulsory training has a cost for those who participate. It is free when it is connected to flexicurity policies and active inclusion. Individuals concerned are supported by the employment services in defining their training plan and the choice of suppliers. In these cases it comes up against the problem of insufficient investment and thus of a limited offer for quantity and type.

- **Providing targeted guidance for learners about learning options**

The guidance services are managed independently by education and training providers, who are often in competition with each other. This carries the risk of guidance being distorted by marketing. The case of services that accompany the flexicurity measures (see Section 4.2) is different. These services should have an independent character with respect to the training offer. The adoption by law of instruments such as Individual Plans (employment and training) should partly protect people from conflicts of interest by the providers. The adoption of individual vouchers could strengthen the freedom of choice in respect to the interests of the training providers. However, the use of *closed lists* leads to a restriction of freedom of choice and competition (e.g. the English courses are offered by organisations that sit at the round-table and not from language schools).

- **Engaging social partners**

All organisations participating in the different kinds of Committee or Tripartite Commission for planning training and job policies own or otherwise control organisations which then contribute to achieving the resources destined to training. Committee are created by law or decree. Each specific policy area can have its own Committee set up and chaired by the Public institution that promoted and which determines the participants. This model actively involves social partners – sometimes even in associated forms – in the promotion and recruitment of adult learners to training programmes. There is a risk of being exposed to conflicts of interest. It is a model that led to the creation of an oligopoly in favour of the providers belonging to social partners. These providers also are active primarily in the public financed training market and are not recognised in the private market of adult education and training. This may depend on the weak competitiveness of their supply. This contrasts with the management of processes that affect the development and implementation of company training plans produced independently by companies and financed by Inter-professional Funds. In this case the whole process is managed by the companies concerned.

- **Providing appropriate introductory learning experiences for learners**

The supply of introductory learning is slowly spreading. It is part of *formative orientation* services. With the spread of e-learning platforms, the introductory activity is done online. Formative orientation is short term training designed to attract learners onto further programmes.

6.2. Increase employers' investment in learning

The spread of internships has increased the commitment of businesses to participate in on-the-job training for numerous young people and adults, Italians and immigrants. The internships have the primary purpose of leading to full time employment. They also contribute to the spread of the learning culture. Their success depends on the duration and the quality of the company mentors. Added to this type of intervention is the commitment of companies to second level apprenticeships for a professional qualification (for ages 18 to 29).

The main measure in this area concerns the introduction of an obligation for employers to pay 0.30% of earnings subject to the ordinary contributory obligation towards the financing of training established by the Law n. 845/1978, art. 25 and the subsequent establishment of Inter-professional Funds. Over the years the State has diverted large shares of this fund for the passive job market policies (like unemployment insurance, income support, and other kinds of policy measure not designed to improve the employability of people), flexicurity and to cover expenditure for the construction of the vocational training information system (MLPS, 2015b). However, part of this levy on salaries should return to co-finance the companies' continuous training programs for workers.

The *operating tax* of 0.30% had positive effects. In 2014 the Funds approved over 31,000 company training plans, involving 59,000 enterprises (MLPS, 2015b). There are three problematic aspects to highlight:

- only 36% of the companies involved have fewer than 50 employees. In Italy about 99% of companies has fewer than 50 employees. They employ 61% of the workforce;
- over 40% of the activity was subject to compulsory training for workplace safety and environmental protection;
- the Fund management costs are high.

However, it is positive that workers with lower levels of education are widely involved (50.4%).

The strengthening of tax deduction expense forms for training may be a more effective measure. It might have more incentive effects and have a potential impact on all businesses. This would also reduce the operating costs, which are currently very high.

6.3. Improve equity of access for all

Training interventions focused on specific aspects of receiving asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, as well as humanitarian protection, serve as examples of policy models for equality. In this field an integrated model has been adopted, based on interrelatedness of the following measures:

- food and lodging;
- linguistic and cultural mediation;
- orientation and access to local service;
- training and professional requalification;
- orientation and support for job insertion;
- orientation and support for housing insertion;
- orientation and support for social insertion;
- legal protection;
- psycho-social health protection.

The integrated model was effective in cases when fully implemented. The problem stems from the numerous administrative barriers hindering access for immigrants to make use of any kind of right. The system of procedures associated with the management of migratory flows has resulted arbitrary and uncertain, favouring the proliferation of situations of administrative irregularities, which have contributed to the social weakening of immigrants, but also to the spread of feelings of fear and processes of defensive self-segregation (CIES, 2010).

Unemployed Italian citizens may avail themselves of the measures provided by the Jobs Act, previously described. Italian citizens and immigrants will also have courses available, promoted by the provincial centres for adult education. Recognition of prior learning is not yet implemented despite investments and general rules approved with Law n. 92/2012 and then with Decree n. 13/2013 and subsequent Government Acts. Interventions in favour of disadvantaged sections are entrusted mainly to the third sector bodies and trade unions. This follows the Italian historical tradition; it is from the nineteenth century that associations and trade unions have been playing a central role in the development of adult education for all. Additionally during the last economic crisis, the third sector has played a counter-cyclical trend.

6.4. Deliver learning that is relevant

The actions focused on understanding and identifying needs and motivations of learners are mainly carried out within the framework of measures providing individual training/improvement plans (Jobs Act and Social Act). These actions are also present – within prescribed limits – in continuing training promoted by companies, usually preceded by an individual analysis of training needs (13908 individual projects out of a total of 187,381 business projects funded by the Inter-professional Funds, MLPS, 2015b).

Identification of current and future skills needs of employers is carried out by various bodies. The one most often used is managed by the Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and with the European Union, produced in 1997 the *Excelsior Information System for Employment and Training* (<http://excelsior.unioncamere.net>), which annually and quarterly reconstructs the forecast picture of job demand and professional and training needs expressed by companies, providing guidance to support the programming choices for training, orientation and work policies. This type of service allows short-term programming. However, foresight studies are lacking for the medium and long term which would improve the development of programmes to meet the needs of the labour market.

Innovation and flexibility in the delivery of learning is reflected principally in regional policies that over the past 15 years have developed regional, remote training systems and structure models of training paths. These modules are connected to the regional analysis databases of the skills of the various professionals. A national database is not currently in place.

In the private sector, even stock exchanged companies with ambitious and robust development plans accompany their projects with multi-year human resource development (both technical and managerial). These projects are covered by secrecy clauses and are self-financed.

Consistency of training plans with the basic needs of growth companies is strengthened thanks to the widespread use of new management software (SAP).

6.5. Deliver learning that is of high quality

The systems for monitoring and evaluating adult learning programmes are weak and rely mainly on ex-ante accreditation measures. In the school system new assessment models are being introduced that marginally impact adult education. Until 2015 the course has given incentives to the three switching channels of the National Evaluation System (SNV): self-evaluation of educational institutions, external assessment and evaluation of school leadership.

The training of specific adult educators does not exist and any teacher is able to teach adults. Two year university master degrees exist for those who want to specialise in the initial training of adult education teachers, but are not compulsory. These have a high placement rate (80% within 12 months from conclusion: <http://www.alma laurea.it>), but they form training specialists and managers. These master degrees are annually monitored and evaluated for quality, which is managed by the National Evaluation Agency of the University System (ANVUR).

Decree n. 616/2017 regulates how to obtain the necessary training, after graduation, to become a teacher. This Decree transposes the provisions of Legislative Decree n.

59/2017, implementing Law n. 107/2015. It creates a new recruitment system, called FIT (Formazione Iniziale, Tirocinio e Inserimento - Initial Training, Internship and Entry), which does not, however, provide anything specific for the training of adult education teachers.

6.6. Ensure coherent policy

Public policies tend to address the need for policy coordination through the creation of special coordinating bodies. Their functions are often limited to their specific field. This does not help to overcome the core issue of a fragmented framework.

The problem is further compounded by the complexity of a national context characterised by 20 different regional systems. It may be improved by a streamlined process initiated through further reforms of job market and vocational training policies. The role of the Municipalities – important for social policies – has weakened as a result of the reduction in public spending.

Building a knowledge base concerning best practices in adult learning is mainly entrusted to sectorial and episodic studies on the measures and policies of adult education (<http://www.isfol.it/temi>). Studies on the impact of the measures are rare. The choice of which policy to implement is derived from expectations (and the ability and willingness to invest) and not by the evaluation of the results achieved.

7. Strength and weaknesses of the adult education system

7.1. Strengths

For identification of Key strengths we start from some preliminary considerations:

- Italy is part of ten European countries with the highest number of social economic organisations (EC, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2013) with many of them operating in the field of adult learning. “These bottom-up initiatives are concrete expressions of an increasing sense of responsibility on the part of citizens and as an ‘endogenous response’ of society to rectify the failures of the market and the shortcomings of public policies. All of these organisations are based on motivations, behaviours, and principles (such as solidarity, reciprocity and direct participation in management, quest for justice and equality, accountability for achieving social impact) which appear particularly well suited to face the challenges related to the responsible management of collective assets, where the right of ownership must be balanced with the duty of custody for the benefit of current and future generations” (EC, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2013, p. 17);
- between 2007 and 2014, there were approximately 5.8 million participants involved in projects launched by the ESF (MLPS, 2015b). This means that of the total of 6.5 million adult learning participants (Istat, 2013) about 800,000 are supported by the ESF. In addition, approximately 400,000 adults annually access education for adults offered by the State (Indire, 2013). Therefore 80% of participants access opportunities for adult education through private and/or third sector funding;

- Italy shows lower values than the OECD-PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) average regarding skills in reading, writing and calculating. Regarding other skills, as defined by the OECD, such as information, processing skills, or problem solving skills, Italy exceeds the OECD-PIAAC average, in the frequency of use of these skills in the workplace. Italy has one of the highest averages for problem solving at work among all countries participating in the survey (Isfol, 2014).

From these observations we identify three key strengths of the Italian model:

1. a major share of participation in adult education activities is due to the support of families and businesses. In addition, the role of social economy, associations and voluntary work have played a key role in adult education for centuries in Italy and must also be considered;
2. strong performance in the field of problem solving in the PIAAC study are to be connected to the particular production structure of the country, which is mainly made up of small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises. In such contexts, the organisational structure is generally flat and forces workers to deal everyday with the challenges of problem solving and the production of new product and process knowledge;
3. the reform of labour market policies is to be enhanced and the beginning of a flexicurity model should produce a significant increase in participation and in training for vulnerable groups (statistical information on this strength has been indicated previously in the report). The positive impact is due to the introduction of active labour market policies that require the unemployed to engage in training activities.

7.2. Weaknesses

The key weaknesses have already been documented in the preceding paragraphs. In summary, it should be born in mind that the Italian welfare state model is not based on the principle of universalism granting access to benefits and services based on citizenship, but is inspired on the principle of subsidiarity and the dominance of social insurance schemes, offering a medium level of decommodification and a high degree of social stratification. This model offers sub-protective welfare and creates inequalities especially among youths depending on the resources of their families (European Commission. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation Directorate B — European Research Area Unit B.5 — Social Sciences and Humanities, 2012).

The main concerns regarding adult education in Italy according to the author are:

- low levels of education of the adult population and the tendency to stagnate (-2.1% low skilled in ten years). This is even more evident when considering the educational attainment levels, jointly with the PISA data and the growing number of NEETs. There are no plans suggesting that a significant number of young people and adults who have already left the school system can improve their level of skills;
- participation in adult education activities is low and even among the privileged strata of the population participation does not exceed the European benchmark of 15%. This reduces the propensity for training the vulnerable groups as well. Achievement of the European benchmark by 2020 is impossible because it would require a significant increase of public and private investments. Macroeconomic

strategies in place are characterised by the postponement of new investments to overcome the crisis and towards the consolidation of public finances. This approach involves optimisation processes of public spending (e.g. financing flexicurity measures), but does not allow the activation of investments needed to produce changes in resource allocation, specifically in orientation to finance the growth of individual and collective demands for skills. However, public funding is still directed towards supporting existing policy paradigms, though it could be argued the related devices and systems have helped create the current imbalances: a lack of a strategic framework, lack of knowledge on the expected impact of policies, especially on vulnerable groups, financing a public market of adult education dominated by an oligopolistic system;

- the lack of financial resources weakens the action of adult learning government. Many laws simply state principles that can not be met. The implementation of administrative decentralisation was started in 1970, over a century after the birth of the Italian State. In the first decades of decentralisation, the regional governments have approved regional laws on adult learning. In recent years their action in the field of adult learning was limited to the management of the European Social Fund and educational interventions in the field of health and social policies (normally entrusted to social economy enterprises). The ability of the state to intervene in the area of adult learning is also hampered by weaknesses in the system of public administration, although a profound reform in this area is in progress. The weakness of the administrative and financial framework has accentuated the fragmentation of political action processes. The definition of strong policy priorities at national level (such as the Job Act) has allowed for better coordination and, possibly, a more effective intervention.

8. Further policy reforms and orientations needed

8.1. Orientation issues

In 2013 after the publication of the PIAAC results, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education set up a commission of experts with a mandate to propose specific measures to improve education and training paths in order to increase and enrich the skills of adults (MLPS & MIUR, 2014). The strategic actions proposed are essentially preventive and aimed primarily on increasing education and formal training, as well as on contrasting early school leavers. In terms of labour market policies, strategic importance is attributed to a skills certification system that ensures the mutual permeability between the world of work, education and training.

Regarding the specific measures to be taken in the short term the following are indicated:

- actions aimed at the NEET;
- actions aimed at adults in general, especially women who do not work, inactive people and seniors;
- actions aimed at adults who are unemployed and at risk of unemployment;
- actions to stimulate enterprises to develop and use the skills of both men and women workers.

A balanced public strategy has the task of pushing talents and leaders towards challenging goals, such as Industry4.0 and Industry5.0 targets. At the same time, an adult

learning strategy must also reduce the risk that public policies increase the perception of growing relative educational poverty. The educational distance between population layers is increasing. Tackling inability of youth and adult to reach a minimum accepted standard of skills is the primary task of adult learning public policies.

8.2. The challenges

Until recently, a policy of emergency containment prevailed concerning vulnerable groups (e.g. migrants, NEET, elderly, etc.) through specific responses and momentary interventions. Today the challenge for Italy is to define the supply of skills that the country needs to ensure participation of the country in the new industrial revolution (Industry 4.0) characterised by new production models based on the embedding of intelligence in all objects of industrial production, as well as in living and working environments. Today, the creation of innovation and its use aim at human capital development, equipped with more refined qualities than those required by previous industrial eras.

It is not just reforms are needed to face this challenge. Italy does not have a public system of adult learning and as a result adult learning does not achieve the standards of quality and extent of other countries. Public investment should respond to a support strategy of expanding the demand for training by all the population and qualification and enlargement of the offer. Some of the reforms in place (the public administration and flexicurity policies) are moving in this direction. Other policies should be adopted urgently to support individual demand (from vouchers to the effective obligation of adult learning), the creation of support systems (from operator training, to research, to the introduction of access policies to new technologies, as well as cultural infrastructures), the adoption of fiscal measures that favour social mobility (tax simplification and breaks for new businesses) and the qualification of training organisations (cutting down oligopolies in public sector, opening up to competition, encouraging their internationalisation as well as the creation of new training start-ups).

The main challenges of education and training of adults in Italy is the ability to contribute to the revival of growth and employment in a context of shrinking resources, of fiscal policy aimed at ensuring debt reduction.

The policies of flexicurity and the social act have increased the potential demand for training through the concentration of public resources on vulnerable groups. At the same time, approval of the reform in the third sector has created conditions for an increase in private investment in social enterprises and cooperatives.

Training system interventions are in place to reinforce the quality of the supply of skills by adapting the training of young people to the demand for skills by the company and the job market of the future.

Italy must accompany new interventions in order to reinforce the quality of growth processes in the workplace through tax policies that encourage companies to invest in the participation of workers of all ages in production, development and innovation processes.

The adoption of measures supporting individual demand for training can help spread the possibility of increasing people's freedom of choice and customising routes. This could enrich the training offered and improve quality assurance.

Additionally, this trend of measures to support individual demand would lead to the release of public resources and direct them to the construction of a public system of adult

learning that ensures all necessary support for proper functioning of the education market. This includes: improved skills recognition systems (which are already starting), training of trainers, dissemination of information and guidance services, introduction of devices for quality control of learning and to the adoption of favourable tax policies.

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