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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018

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EN BOOK	ISBN 978-92-79-89824-2	ISSN 2466-9989	doi: 10.2766/992790	NC-AN-18-016-EN-C
EN PDF	ISBN 978-92-79-89823-5	ISSN 2466-9997	doi: 10.2766/214015	NC-AN-18-016-EN-N

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Education and Training Monitor 2018

Italy

Volume 2 of the Education and Training Monitor 2018 includes twenty-eight individual country reports. It builds on the most up-to-date quantitative and qualitative evidence to present and assess the main recent and ongoing policy measures in each EU Member State, with a focus on developments since mid-2017. It therefore complements other sources of information which offer descriptions of national education and training systems.

Section 1 presents a statistical overview of the main education and training indicators. Section 2 briefly identifies the main strengths and challenges of the country's education and training system. Section 3 looks at investment in education and training. Section 4 focuses on citizenship education. Section 5 deals with policies to modernise school education. Section 6 discusses measures to modernise higher education. Finally, section 7 covers vocational education and training, while section 8 covers adult learning.

The manuscript was completed on 1 September 2018.

Additional contextual data can be found online (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor)

1. Key indicators

		Italy		EU average		
		2014	2017	2014	2017	
Education and training 2020 benchmarks						
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)		15.0%	14.0%	11.2%	10.6%	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)		23.9%	26.9%	37.9%	39.9%	
Early childhood education and care (from age 4 to starting age of compulsory primary education)		96.5% ¹³	96.1% ¹⁶	94.2% ¹³	95.3% ¹⁶	
Proportion of 15 year-olds underachieving in:	Reading	19.5% ¹²	21.0% ¹⁵	17.8% ¹²	19.7% ¹⁵	
	Maths	24.7% ¹²	23.3% ¹⁵	22.1% ¹²	22.2% ¹⁵	
	Science	18.7% ¹²	23.2% ¹⁵	16.6% ¹²	20.6% ¹⁵	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-8 (total)	45.0%	55.2%	76.0%	80.2%	
Adult participation in learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	8.1%	7.9%	10.8%	10.9%	
Learning mobility	Degree mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)	:	3.3% ¹⁶	:	3.1% ¹⁶	
	Credit mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)	:	7.8% ¹⁶	:	7.6% ¹⁶	
Other contextual indicators						
Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP		4.0%	3.9% ¹⁶	4.9%	4.7% ¹⁶	
Education investment	Expenditure on public and private institutions per student in € PPS*	ISCED 1-2	€6 226	€6 667 ¹⁵	€6 494 ^d	: ¹⁵
		ISCED 3-4**	€6 797 ^d	: ¹⁵	€7 741 ^d	: ¹⁵
		ISCED 5-8	€8 451	€8 583 ¹⁵	€11 187 ^d	: ¹⁵
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Native-born	13.0%	12.0%	10.4%	9.6%	
	Foreign-born	32.6%	30.1%	20.2%	19.4%	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)	Native-born	26.7%	30.6%	38.6%	40.6%	
	Foreign-born	12.8%	12.8%	34.3%	36.3%	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4	38.3%	48.4%	70.7%	74.1%	
	ISCED 5-8	52.9%	62.7%	80.5%	84.9%	

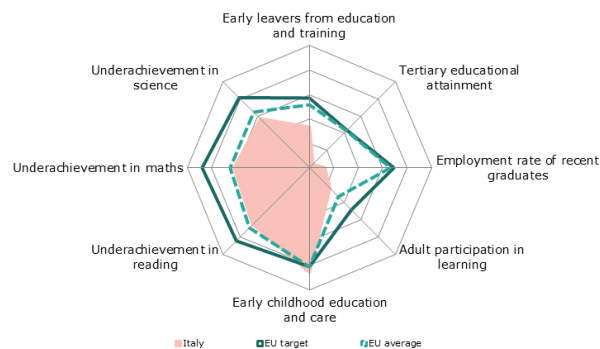
Sources: Eurostat (see section 10 for more details); OECD (PISA).

Notes: data refer to weighted EU averages, covering different numbers of Member States depending on the source; d = definition differs, 12 = 2012, 13 = 2013, 15 = 2015, 16 = 2016.

On credit graduate mobility, the EU average is calculated by DG EAC on the available countries; on degree graduate mobility, the EU average is calculated by JRC over Eurostat and OECD data.

Further information can be found in the relevant section of Volume 1 (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

Figure 1. Position in relation to strongest (outer ring) and weakest performers (centre)



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2015, UOE 2016) and OECD (PISA 2015). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the strongest performers visualised by the outer ring) and a minimum (the weakest performers visualised by the centre of the figure).

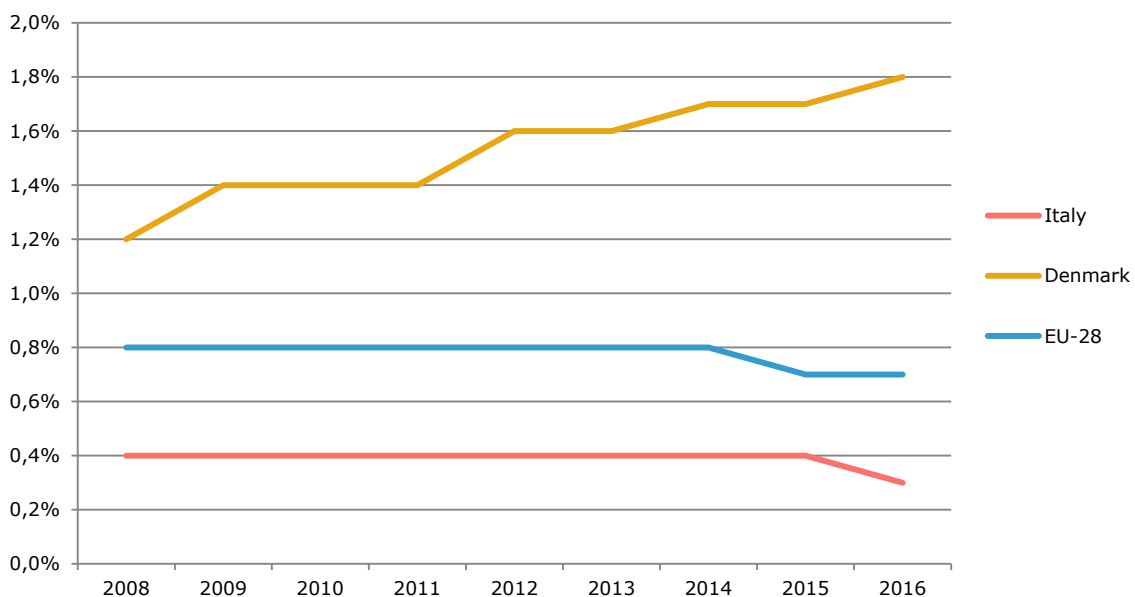
2. Highlights

- Italy's investment in education is well below the EU average, particularly in higher education.
- The 2015 school reform was partially implemented, and some key measures are currently being reconsidered by the new government; wide regional disparities in educational attainment persist, as evidenced by national and international surveys.
- Civic and citizenship education is defined by law as a key objective, to be implemented at school level.
- The quality of higher education is receiving more attention and the framework for allocating public funding to universities has improved in recent years.
- The transition from education to work remains difficult, also for high-qualified people.

3. Investing in education and training

Education receives a comparatively small share of the public budget. General government expenditure on education continues to be among the lowest in the EU, both as a proportion of GDP (3.9 % in 2016, compared to the EU average of 4.7 %) and as a proportion of total general government expenditure (7.9 %; EU average, 10.2 %). While the share of funding allocated for primary and secondary school (ISCED levels 0-3) is broadly in line with EU averages, expenditure on tertiary education is the lowest in the EU after the UK, at just 0.3 % of GDP in 2016, well below the EU average of 0.7 % (Figure 2). The Council has adopted a country specific recommendation for Italy under the 2018 European Semester to "*foster research, innovation, digital skills and infrastructure through better-targeted investment and increase participation in vocational-oriented tertiary education*" (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Figure 2. General government expenditure on tertiary education as share of GDP (2016)



Source: Eurostat. Online data code: [gov_10a_exp](#).

The student population is projected to shrink by 1 million (8.8 %) over the next ten years. According to projections based on Eurostat data, the number of school-age children (3- to 18-year-olds) would decrease from the current 9 million to 8 million in 2028¹ (Fondazione Agnelli, 2018). Under existing regulations, this could result in the loss of over 50 000 teaching posts, lower teacher mobility and teacher turnover. In the long term, new approaches will need to be developed to ensure the renewal of the teaching body, and the capacity for innovation of the education system.

The high number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) continues to represent a challenge. In 2017, around a fifth of Italians (20.1 %) aged between 15 and 24 were neither in employment, nor in education or training – by far the highest share in the EU². The figure for 2017 remained virtually unchanged compared to 2016 (19.9 %), almost twice as high as the EU average (10.9 %).

4. Citizenship education

Civic and citizenship education is defined by law as a key objective of education, but there is no systematic approach to its implementation, which happens at school level.

Civic and citizenship education in Italian schools is taught at all levels of school, starting in pre-primary. It is integrated into other compulsory subjects: history and geography in primary and lower secondary school, and socio-historical disciplines, law and economics in upper secondary (both general and IVET). In 2015, the “*La buona scuola*” school reform³ advocated a more whole-school approach. The law provides principles, objectives and guidelines, assigns objectives to schools and underlines their role to promote the acquisition of social, civic and intercultural competences at all education levels from primary to school-based IVET. Schools identify the strengths and weaknesses of their institution in relation to key competences and citizenship in the self-assessment report (RAV). Schools and individual teachers have the autonomy to choose how to implement these to reach the expected goals (e.g. citizenship and social/civic competences, knowledge of the Italian Constitution and other laws and understanding of the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights). Assessment of social and civic competences is included in the certificate of competences at the end of lower secondary education (ISCED 2, grade 8). Teachers do not currently receive pre-service training in civic and citizenship education, although in-service training is available under the National Plan for Teacher Training, and is open to all teachers, regardless of their subjects.

Most schools actively participate in national and European initiatives to promote civic and citizenship education. The Ministry of Education offers a range of annual activities targeted at primary and secondary schools, such as “A Day in the Senate”, “I would like a law that...”, “Witness Rights”, “Training Day at Montecitorio” and “Parlawiki – building the vocabulary of democracy”. At European level, more than 60 000 teachers and 11 000 schools participate in the EU e-twinning platform⁴, within over 20 000 school co-operation projects. Citizenship education is one of the priorities of the 2014-2020 National Operational Programme for the Structural Funds 2014-2020 for the education sector co-funded by the Structural Funds (See Box 1). The result is that there are many good initiatives, but they do not systematically cover all schools or all students

Box 1: European Social Fund (ESF) support for teaching global citizenship in schools

As part of the objective “Strengthening students’ key competences” under the National Operational Programme for the school sector 2014-20 (PON *Per la Scuola – competenze e ambienti per l’apprendimento*), in 2017 the Ministry of Education made available EUR 120 million to primary and secondary schools for projects on citizenship education. The aim is to strengthen students’ transversal, social and civic competences, helping them to become competent, responsible citizens in a modern, connected and interdependent society. Each of the participating

¹ This is due to decreasing fertility rates across the country combined with a sharp reduction in international migratory influxes (from 7.5 per thousand in 2007 to 3 per thousand in 2017).

² Followed by Cyprus with 16.1 %.

³ Law no. 107/15 of 13 July 2015.

⁴ The eTwinning action is an initiative of the European Commission that aims to encourage European schools to collaborate using Information and Communication Technologies by providing the necessary infrastructure (online tools, services, support).

schools will receive up to EUR 30 000 to finance 30- or 60-hour modules on global citizenship. The thematic areas and objectives eligible for ESF support include the following:

- **Environmental education:** The aim is to form citizens able to tackle environmental challenges, knowledgeable about the contents of international climate change agreements, mindful of environmentally responsible behaviours and aware of the characteristics of the territory they live in. Students will be able to develop “reduce-reuse-recycle” schemes, to devise and implement projects for sustainable mobility and for adopting, managing and caring for green spaces, parks and urban spaces.
- **Economic citizenship:** The main objectives are: strengthening financial and economic literacy with a focus on a more inclusive and ethical economy; consumer education, awareness of the relationship between economic growth, wealth and economic development; knowledge of financial instruments, risk prevention, knowledge of financial institutions and market regulations.
- **Civic education, respect of diversity and active citizenship:** Projects will focus on the Italian Constitution, the concept of subsidiarity, public goods and common goods, democracy, active citizenship and participation. Examples of activities include the development of a budget, the participative design of school spaces, as well initiatives of shared management and active citizenship in local contexts.

5. Modernising school education

The expansion of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services could help to bring about improved learning outcomes by helping to compensate for socioeconomic disadvantages. The enactment of the school reform foresees the coordination of early childcare and pre-primary education in larger centres called *Poli per l’infanzia* (European Commission 2017). The objective is to reach a coverage rate of 33 % of children under three (currently around 10 %) and to have ECEC facilities in at least 75 % of municipalities. For the school year 2017/18, the previous government distributed EUR 209 million among the Italian regions (expected to rise to EUR 239 million in the next school year) according to three criteria: population in the relevant age bracket (0-6), current attendance rates for early childcare, and share of children not enrolled in pre-primary education.

The implementation of the 2015 school reform is now being reconsidered by the new government. The new government in place after the March 2018 election has announced a major review of the school reform “*La Buona Scuola*”, which had already been weakened in its implementation under the previous government, leaving many issues unsolved. Successive derogations to the stricter mobility rules introduced by the reform (a mandatory period of three years for newly appointed teachers before they could apply for a transfer) have exacerbated teacher turnover⁵, leading to teacher shortages in the North as most applications are for North-to-South transfers⁶. The implementation of work-based learning (a mainstay of *La Buona Scuola*) is currently under review, while the possibility for school principals to hire teachers directly based on school needs (*chiamata diretta*), which never really took off, was abolished in June 2018.

The education system is characterised by wide and persisting regional gaps in learning outcomes. The regional disparities in learning achievements already highlighted by international tests (European Commission 2017) were largely confirmed by the latest round of national student testing conducted by INVALSI (*Istituto nazionale per la valutazione del sistema educativo di istruzione e di formazione*)⁷. The number of low achievers in Italian, mathematics and English in grade 8 is significantly and consistently higher in the South of the country than the North (45 % vs 28 % in Italian, 54-56 % vs 28-32 % in mathematics, 67 % vs 27-30 % in English). The education system in the South also appears to be less equitable than in the North and Centre: at primary

⁵ Almost 240,000 teachers (out of 819,000) changed school or geographical area the last three years: a turnover rate of 29%.

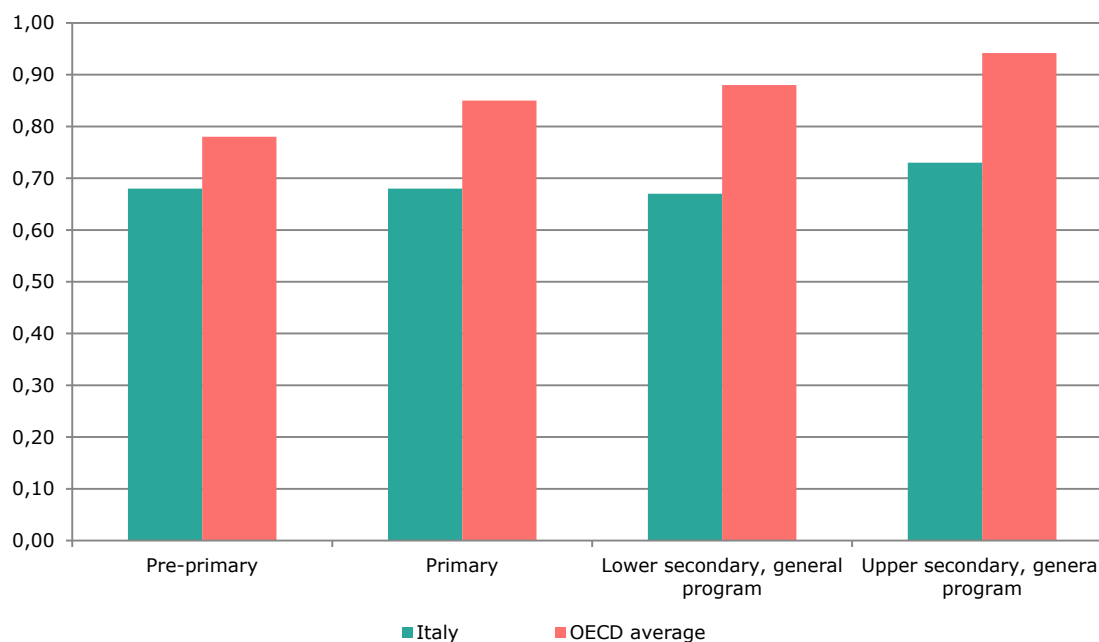
⁶ Geographical mismatches mean that most teachers are from the South while most teaching posts are available in the North.

⁷ The INVALSI tests are taken every year by all students in grades 2, 5, 8 and 10 to measure their achievement in Italian, mathematics and, as of 2018, English (grades 5 and 8 only).

level, there are marked differences between schools and, in some cases, between classes in the same school, which could indicate a tendency to group less able students in separate classes from very early on. Schools in the South also have a larger proportion of low-achieving students from low socio-economic backgrounds (INVALSI 2018).

Recruiting and motivating good teachers is a challenge. Teachers' salaries remain low compared to international standards (Figure 3) and career prospects are limited (OECD 2017). A new national contract for the school sector signed in February 2018 for the period 2016-2018 provides wage increases for school teachers and non-teaching staff for all educational levels (from primary to tertiary). The average increase covering the past three years (2016 to 2018) was EUR 89 per month (gross), representing an average rise of 0.5 %. This is in line with contract renewals in the rest of the public sector, but significantly below the 2018 inflation rate. The possibility for school principals to reward teachers based on merit introduced by the 2015 reform has been weakened by merging the dedicated fund (*Fondo per la valorizzazione del merito*) into a single fund (*Fondo per il miglioramento dell'offerta formativa*) to be disbursed through negotiations with trade union representatives at school level. The new recruitment system for school teachers should improve average quality, since initial teacher education now includes a two-year period of paid apprenticeship in place of the system of being enrolled in waiting lists and being hired on need. The system was formally introduced in 2017 (European Commission 2017) and is expected to be operational as of the 2018/19 school with the first intake of applicants to be determined by the Ministry of Education on the basis of estimated vacancies.

Figure 3. Teachers' actual salaries relative to earnings of tertiary-educated workers (2015)



Source: OECD, Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators, Table D3.2a.

Non-Italian students' educational attainment lags significantly behind that of Italians.

There were 826 000 non-Italian students in the school year 2016/17 (9.4 % of the school population and 11 000 more than the previous year). Boys slightly outnumbered girls (52 % and 48 % respectively) and the majority (61 %) was born in Italy. Compared to Italian students, foreign students are at higher risk of grade repetition (31.3 % vs 10 %) and early school leaving (30.1 % vs 12 %). They show a stronger orientation towards VET education and lower enrolment rates of boys compared to girls, especially after grade 10 (MIUR 2018). There are no recent measures to even out differences of attainment with Italian students.

Box 2: The fight against early school leaving and educational poverty

In January 2018 the Ministry of Education published a strategy to fight early school leaving (ESL) and educational poverty. The aim is to reduce the ESL rate (currently 14 %) to below 10 %, in accordance with the Europe 2020 target, and to increase investment in developing basic skills and competences. The strategy sets out a number of actions to be implemented over the next 5 years in the framework of a national action plan co-ordinated by the government in agreement with the regions and municipalities and overseen by Parliament. Part of the plan consists in mapping existing initiatives and proposing new measures to fight ESL. The strategy identifies critical areas to be targeted, including through financial support, in particular:

- making the passage from primary to secondary school more effective,
- allocating resources to schools based on learning outcomes and ESL rates,
- extending early childhood education and care,
- improving data collection,
- strengthening networks for sharing good practices,
- enhancing links between cities and neighbourhoods and the school community.

At school level, the strategy recommends strengthening and promoting digital innovation, lab-based learning and after-school activities, and encouraging stronger involvement of families.

6. Modernising higher education

High dropout rates and a comparatively long duration of studies contribute to low tertiary educational attainment rates, but enrolment in higher education is increasing.

Over 280,000 high-school graduates enrolled in a university in the academic year 2016-2017, an increase of 4.3 % over the previous year and the largest since 2002. Almost a fifth of new entrants (19.3 %) chose STEM subjects, with the vast majority (14.5 %) opting for engineering (MIUR 2017). Italy has one of the lowest tertiary educational attainment rates for 30- to 34-year-olds in the EU (26.9 % as compared to the EU average of 39.9 % in 2017), but the share of university graduates has been steadily increasing, a trend projected to continue⁸.

The educational attainment of an average Italian is heavily determined by parental background. This is exacerbated by several factors - tracked secondary school system, a lack of a non-academic track in tertiary education, and high drop-out rates. Only 8 % of students from families with at most lower secondary education (*diploma di licenza media*- ISCED 2) reach tertiary education, and more than half only complete lower secondary school. At the opposite end of the spectrum, 65 % of students from graduate parents achieve a tertiary degree, and only 6% never progress past lower secondary. In 2016, 75 % of new university entrants came from general upper secondary schools (*licei*).

The low number of graduates is also a reflection of the increasingly high costs of studying coupled with low returns on education. Tuition fees in Italy are among the highest in the EU, estimated at around 1,650 USD per year and the majority of students (80 %) does not receive financial support (OECD 2017). In a bid to improve access to tertiary education, in 2017 the government introduced a tuition fee exemption for students coming from households with an income below €13,000, and partial exemptions for incomes between €13,000 and €30,000. There has been no evaluation so far of the impact on enrolments.

The employment rate of recent graduates is increasing but remains below pre-crisis levels. In 2017, the employment rate of recent graduates in the age group 25-29 was 54.5 %, compared to the EU average of 81.5 %. Older cohort of 30- to 34-years olds fared better, but their employment rate (77.3 %), was still well below the EU average of 87.1 %. Low demand from the productive sector characterised by small and medium size firms is a factor in graduates' poor employment prospects. In addition, firms privilege candidates with previous work experience, indicating that the skill-signaling power of university degrees is relatively weak. Tertiary professional education institutes (*Istituti Tecnici Superiori* – ITS) offer much better prospects, with graduate employment rates above 80 %, but they are still too limited in scope for a real impact to

⁸ The proportion of students entering tertiary education in each birth cohort is currently equal to 44% (and 41% if considering people younger than 25)

be felt⁹. As of 2018, new university-track tertiary professional education pathways (*Lauree Professionalizzanti*) should be available to students alongside the ITS.

Some steps were taken to improve funding. The 2018 budget law provides for the funding of 1,300 additional tenure tracks for associate professors (*ricercatore a tempo determinato di tipo B*). In addition, the "excellent departments" initiative ("*Dipartimenti di Eccellenza*") should result in additional recruitments in the order of 900 new tenure track positions, for a total of up to 2,000 new associate professors entering the Italian universities – a 2 % increase in academic staff which is nevertheless insufficient to compensate for retirements. Through an amendment to the 2018 budget law, the government reallocated to student financial aid the funds which were originally earmarked for a special initiative to attract professors from foreign universities ("*cattedre Natta*"). This initiative was never implemented, due to strong opposition by universities (European Commission 2017). A second discontinued initiative was a research fund targeted to the best assistant and associate professors (called "Fondo di finanziamento attività base di ricerca") which was introduced in 2017¹⁰.

7. Modernising vocational education and training

Italy has continued to increase the quality of VET notably through strengthening of work-based learning pathways and expansion of tertiary VET. Participation of students in VET at ISCED3 level (including *Istituti Tecnici*) remains stable at 56%. Recent VET graduates employability is slowly increasing, at 50.8%, in 2017, but still far below the EU average of 76.6%, a long-lasting issue. Nevertheless, tertiary VET, in particular the Higher Technical Institutes (ITS) which closely involve businesses, show (as already noted above) very promising employment success. Steps are being taken to gradually increase the number of ITS students. Implementation of a revised apprenticeships system and compulsory work-based learning experience for both VET and general education is ongoing. A new funding plan was prepared to cover the 2018-2020 period. The plan aims at strengthening the dual system as well as school-based VET, to make work-based learning more sustainable. To further strengthen the relationships between VET and the labour market, agreements between public authorities and businesses have been concluded to strengthen companies' involvement in work-based learning. Financial incentives are offered to companies to employ with open contracts the learners who undertook a period of work-based learning in their companies. In addition, Cedefop completed in 2017 a comprehensive analysis of the apprenticeship scheme. The project included in depth interviews with all partners involved (e.g. apprentices, VET providers and companies offering apprenticeship placements) and workshops to present and discuss findings (Cedefop 2017). There is a graduate tracking system in I-VET although the periodicity of the inquiry has been somewhat irregular. However, a comprehensive tracking strategy is not in place and career guidance based on solid information is limited and provided in a scattered way.

8. Promoting adult learning

Steps were taken to implement the Upskilling Pathways Council Recommendation to address the "low-skilled equilibrium" trap. Adult participation in learning stood at 7.9 % in 2017, a decrease compared to 2016. The decrease in participation of low skilled adults in training (from 2.3% in 2016 to 2% in 2017), those who need it most, is also worrying. Digital skills remain low: in 2016, only 44 % of the population possessed at least basic digital skills (compared with the EU average of 56 %). Some measures are being implemented to increase digital skills levels but a comprehensive digital skills strategy is missing, with a negative impact on parts of the population such as the elderly and inactive people, who are not directly targeted by other measures. According to the OECD national Skills strategy published in 2017, Italy is trapped in a low skilled equilibrium, where the low supply of skills is accompanied by low demand for skills. In 2015, 60.2 % of Italian companies (compared to EU-28 average of 72.6 %) provided vocational training to their employees. The rate of employees who participated in this training was 45.9 % (above the EU-28 average of 40.8 %). In December 2017, a tax credit system was introduced for companies that invest in training. This amounts to 40% of the cost of employees for the period in which they are involved in training activities. Eligible training activities are those targeted at the acquisition/consolidation of knowledge in the technologies highlighted in the National Industry 4.0

⁹ Currently there are 98 ITS, mostly concentrated in Northern regions, with about 10,500 students.
¹⁰ Law n. 232/16 of 11 December 2016.

Plan. A major development was the adoption of a comprehensive National Qualifications Framework in January 2018. Italy uses ESF funding to provide the PIAAC online tool to Public Employment Services to assess the basic skills of job-seekers. The centres for adult education offer targeted personalized pathways, leading to a certificate at European Qualifications Framework level 3 or 4.

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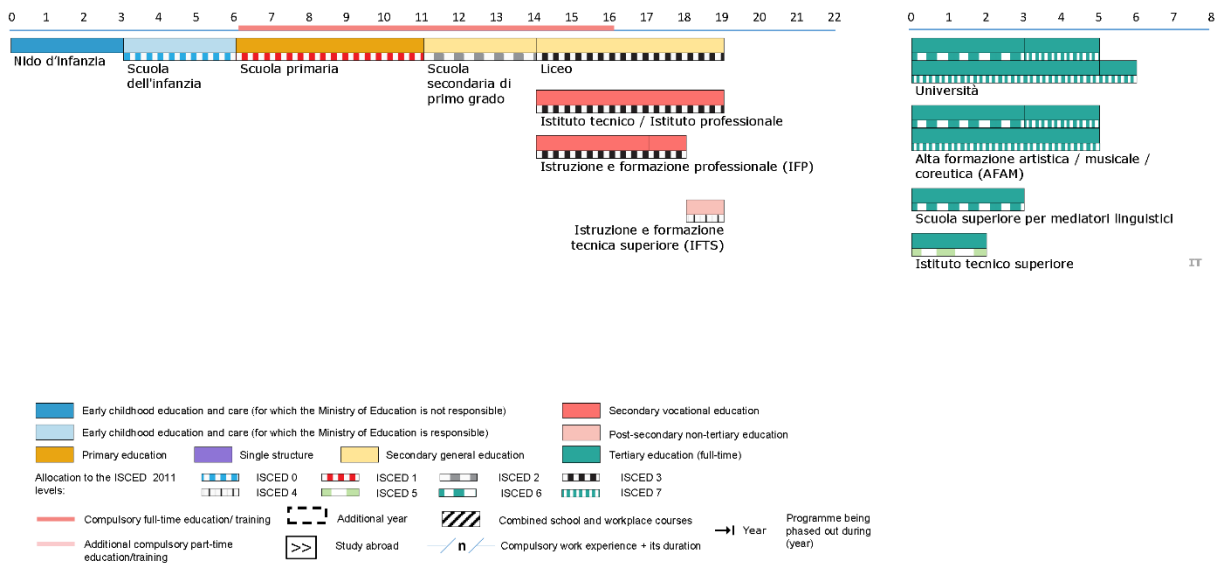
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10. Annex I: Key indicator sources

Indicator	Eurostat online data code
Early leavers from education and training	edat_lfse_14 + edat_lfse_02
Tertiary educational attainment	edat_lfse_03 + edat_lfs_9912
Early childhood education and care	educ_uoe_enra10
Underachievement in reading, maths, science	OECD (PISA)
Employment rate of recent graduates	edat_lfse_24
Adult participation in learning	trng_lfse_03
Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	gov_10a_exp
Expenditure on public and private institutions per student	educ_uoe_fini04
Learning mobility: Degree mobile graduates	JRC computation based on Eurostat / UIS / OECD data
Credit mobile graduates	educ_uoe_mobc02

11. Annex II: Structure of the education system



Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017. *The Structure of the European Education Systems 2017/18: Schematic Diagrams*. Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg; Publications Office of the European Union.

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