



Mutual Learning Programme

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Peer Country Comments Paper – Italy

A long journey to harmonisation

**Peer Review on “Competence Assessment System:
MyCompetence”**

Sofia (Bulgaria), 28-29 November 2019



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1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared for the Peer Review on "Competence Assessment System: MyCompetence" within the framework of the Mutual Learning Programme. It provides a comparative assessment of the policy example of the host country and the situation in Italy. For information on the host country policy example, please refer to the Host Country Discussion Paper¹.

2 Situation in the peer country

2.1 Labour market key trends

The Italian labour market was severely impacted by the recession. Despite a moderate recovery, the current level of growth is still insufficient for a total recovery of previous employment levels. Although recent improvements in labour market performance, employment rates (59.2%) remain among the lowest in the OECD area (OECD, 2017). Inactivity and unemployment rates (respectively 34.5% and 9.5%) are among the highest in the EU, and still too many people end up becoming long-term unemployed (ISTAT, 2019). Large heterogeneity exists in the country among different socio-demographic groups – with women, young people, and those living in Southern regions facing the greatest challenges in entering and remaining engaged in the labour market (OECD, 2017).

2.2 Sectoral and occupational employment trends

Although Italian growth rate will remain below the EU-28 average employment, according to the last Cedefop Skills Forecast a rise is expected in 2021-26. The highest increase during the period 2016-21 is expected in non-marketed services sector, while during the period 2021-30 the highest increase is expected in business and other services sector (Cedefop, 2018).

The sectoral shift towards non-marketed services and business and other services is expected to create demand for high-skills occupations such as health professionals, health associate professionals and legal, social and cultural professionals, and also for low and medium-skills occupations, such as personal care workers or cleaner and helpers. The decrease in employment within primary sector and utilities, construction and manufacturing sectors is expected to affect mainly occupations such as agricultural, forestry and fishery labourers and assemblers. On the other hand, advancement in ICT and automation technology will lower the demand for routine-based occupations such as metal, machinery and related trade workers and general and keyboard clerks (Excelsior survey system, 2018).

2.3 Skills mismatch

Bringing skills supply and demand into better balance is crucial. The matching between labour demand and supply is still highly problematic. Out of the more than 4.5 million work contracts that the production system intended to stipulate the 26% have been identified as mismatch, 5 percentage points more than 2017 (Excelsior survey system, 2018).

The professional structure of companies' needs, with a demand of more qualified profiles has started to change: the quota of managers, specialists and technicians reaches 19% of the total programmed revenue (it was 17.5% in 2017). At the same time the request for the unskilled professions decreases by 3 percentage points, which stands at 15%. For high-skill occupations, however, recruitment difficulties are generally much more frequent as the demand for highly-qualified workers is expected to exceed the supply:

¹ Loukanova, P. (2019) Workforce Competence Assessment -in retrospect and in perspective, Host Country Discussion Paper – Bulgaria. Peer Review on "Competence Assessment System; MyCompetence", Sofia (Bulgaria), 28-29 November 2019. European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

the first seven positions in the scale of recruitment difficulties are held by these jobs, with electro-technology engineers and software and applications developers and analysis standing well above the other ones (Excelsior survey system, 2017).

Skill mismatch is pervasive in Italy with very high shares of adults aged 25-64 with low educational attainment levels and low cognitive skills (literacy and numeracy). Despite the low average levels of skills proficiency, skills surpluses are also present, reflecting the low demand for skills in Italy (OECD, 2017).

Over-skilled (11.7%) and over-qualified (18%) workers represent a substantial part of the Italian workforce (OECD, 2017) . In addition, around 35% of workers are working in fields that are unrelated to their studies (Cedefop, 2018).

2.4 National system: a multi-actor and multi-level governance

In Italy, skills policies depend on a complex governance system that cuts across different policy portfolios and involves different levels of governments, including national, regional and local authorities, as well as the civil society and the business community (Ministries, Regions, labour market agencies, employers, trade unions, research institutes, etc.).

Among the main providers of skills audits are the Public Employment Services (Centri per l'Impiego) which are under the coordination of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces and the supervision of the National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies (ANPAL), a national agency acting on behalf of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. The PES are in charge of favouring the matching between labour demand and offer, and implement active employment policies. In addition to PES, private services accredited by the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces exist. Among the services they provide, skills audits to unemployed people are included. In addition to PES, also other organisations (chambers of commerce, social partners, universities, schools, VET providers, etc.) accredited by the Regional authorities are authorised to provide competences' identification and validation services, including skills audits.

Since 2012, the debate for establishing a national legal framework in the field of validation of skills and competences has involved a number of national and regional authorities in Italy, and a national legal framework has been progressively developed since then.

3 National policies and measures

3.1 The process for the development of a National Qualification Framework

Because of a high level of differentiation among Regions, Italy has been involved in a profound process of reform regarding both the education and training systems and the competences certification system, all connected to the development of the National Qualifications Framework.

The process connected to the valorisation of qualifications, which had started in 2012 with the First Italian Referencing Report to the EQF, had further developed in the years 2013-2016. In 2013, a step forward concerned the Legislative Decree (no. 13/2013),² which defined the *general rules and essential performance levels for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning and the minimum standards of the national system of competence certification*. This act represents the basis for the implementation of the national system of competences certification and it aims at

² Legislative Decree no. 13/2013, regarding the "Definition of the general rules and essential performance levels for the identification and validation of nonformal and informal learning and the mini-mum standards of the national system of competence certification, following art. 4, subparagraphs 58 e 68, of the law no. 92/2012."

enhancing recognition and transparency of qualifications across IT regions. This included not only titles and qualifications of the formal system of education and training, but also procedures, reference paths and standards for the identification, validation and recognition of learning acquired by the individual in all contexts and, in particular, those achieved in non-formal and informal contexts. It has reached important results and has become an effective legal framework for: (i) the implementation of the national repertory of qualifications as a unique reference for the certification of competences; (ii) the definition of a framework of minimum standards which guarantees the quality of competences certification services.

In 2015 competent Ministries, Regions and Autonomous Provinces (Inter-ministerial Decree of 30 June 2015 defining the National Framework of Regional Qualifications according to Decree 13/2013)³ agreed on an *Operative Framework for the national recognition of the regional qualifications and competences, within the national repertory of qualifications*. This included not only titles and qualifications of the formal system of education and training in Italy, but also procedures, reference paths and standards for the identification, validation and recognition of learning acquired by the individual in all contexts - in particular those achieved in non-formal and informal contexts.

This national system of competences represented the main step toward the establishment of a common methodological framework for gathering all regional qualifications repertories in a homogeneous national system. The aim was to integrate the various regional repertories, creating a national repertory and assigning specific roles to competent institutions. The decree also provides the infrastructure and operational basis for the overall set up of the system for the certification of competences. An online tool (the *Atlas of Labour and the Repertory of Qualifications*) is available since 2016 (see later in paragraph 3.2).

At the end of 2016, national guidelines for validation and certification of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (NFIL) were also defined. Further, a proposal for referencing those qualifications not included in the First Italian Referencing Report, together with the definition of the Italian NQF (correlated to EQF and to Regional repertories) was forwarded in 2016 by the Technical Group to the responsible Ministries and was then formalized. All regions are implementing the above-mentioned provisions and all these actions are in line with the requirements of the worldwide innovations and challenges to encourage the development of visible and demonstrable qualifications, skills and competences.

3.2 Skills audit

Skills audits are part of the above wide and complex process of harmonisation that lead to the establishment of a National Qualification Framework based on the learning outcomes approach, and to work on a credit and validation system.

According to Legislative Decree 150/2015, skills audits are to be offered by PES and accredited labour agencies⁴ to unemployed people accessing the services, having been profiled and being still in an unemployment condition after four months. Skills audits are part of the subsequent specialised and individualised guidance activity aimed at verifying the adequacy of the individual profile to the local, national and European labour market needs.

The prevalent approach when conducting a skills audit as regulated in the Inter-Ministerial Decree of the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education of June 2015 is the following: (i) service access and reception phase; (ii) provision of information and guidance on the service offered to the citizen through the provision of information on

³ Interministerial Decree 30th June 2015 regarding the "Definition of an operative framework for the national recognition of the regional qualifications and competences, within the national Repertory of Da: qualifications following Art. 8 of the Legislative Decree no. 13/2013."

⁴ They are private services accredited by the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces and offer, among others, specialised services to unemployed people including skills audits.

an individual or group basis. Individuals receive support from an adviser in combination with a skills profile and in-depth interview. Much practice and experience have been developed at local, regional and sectoral levels. Skills and competences coming from previous experiences in terms of education, training and previous jobs are traced back and entered into a 'Transparency Document' (Documento di trasparenza) which also keep tracks of any documentary evidence supporting and proving the acquisition of competences. This phase is based on individual interviews carried out by specialised professionals (counsellors). All gathered information is made available through existing information systems having a high degree of interoperability of already existing and regulated instrument such as, for example the 'Citizen's Training Booklet' (Libretto Formativo del Cittadino)⁵.

Between 2017 and 2018, Italy carried out an online experimentation of the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competences (PIACC) that was aimed to pilot the use of the PIAAC online tool⁶ to allow a better profiling in terms of skills and competences of long-term unemployed people accessing PES (see Annex 2 for more details).

3.3 The Atlas of Work and Qualifications: an online tool

Good efforts have been recently undertaken to harmonise different existing definitions of skills also with a view to profiling services and skills assessment. One example is the recent establishment of the Atlas of Work and Qualifications (Atlante del Lavoro e delle Qualificazioni), developed by ISFOL (now INAPP), which describes job contents (e.g. tasks) related to occupations. The aim is to harmonise the language used by the world of work with the terminology used by the Education and Training sector (Regional VET pathways, ITS and Apprenticeship) across the territory (OECD, 2017) .

The Atlas of Work and Qualifications is a detailed map of work and qualifications, described according to a common language shared between the institutions according to the National Directory of Qualifications. The Atlas of Work and Qualifications is now in the process of being harmonised with the ESCO (European classification of skills, competences and occupations) program.

The Atlas of Work and Qualifications is useful for:

- the transparency and reorganization of the system of qualifications issued in Italy;
- the national recognition of regional qualifications and the identification of potential equivalences;
- the recognition of educational credits / debts towards formal learning paths;
- the support for the validation and certification of skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts;
- the orientation to work;
- the support for planning, evaluation and certification of learning paths;
- the programming of the public training offer;

⁵ The Citizen's Training Booklet is a tool developed following a Ministerial Decree of the 10th of October 2005: its format and aims can be compared to the European skill portfolio, but in the case of Italy it is managed through a public skills audit support service (at regional level). This means that it is not a self-compiling tool but depends by a reconstructive process supported by expert operators. The Booklet is not even a skill certification tool. In the Booklet information on the skills already certified in training are presented; at the same time the Booklet summaries non-formal and informal learning to enhance them preparing the conditions for their subsequent validation / certification.

⁶ <http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/onlineassessment/>

- the support for the definition of policies in the field of active labour policies both nationally and internationally.

The Atlas of Work and Qualifications encompasses various information tools, each with a specific purpose and use. It is organized in three sections (Atlas of work; Atlas of professions; Atlas of qualifications)⁷ which can be consulted online (<https://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/index.php>) by all citizens.

4 Assessment of success factors and transferability

4.1 Overall assessment and success factors

The overall assessment of the My Competence (MC) platform is very positive as the tool seems to be very rich and complete.

In particular, the whole structure composed by five (main) elements/modules which provide different services and types of outcomes is very appreciable as is the fact that all the modules are organised as an online platform.

MC is also very well-focused on direct services such as the assessment tools and the e-learning trainings that can be used not only to help users assess their own level of mastering specific competences, but also their professional suitability with respect to a specific job profile.

The fact that MC includes a digital module for analysis and assessment of the training needs of the personnel in a given company can be also a valid tool for measuring training effectiveness and developing further or more specific training within companies. In this view the strong role of the Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA) and of the two nationally representative trade unions in Bulgaria are a guarantee toward an effective adherence to labour market needs.

4.2 Elements of possible transferability

Given the above positive overall assessment, the MC can be a valid instrument for possible transferability in other countries including Italy. Especially if considering that the main need from which MC was developed is the mismatch between labour supply and demand, that is also persistent in Italy. Moreover, MC is said to be particularly suitable for economies with a high share of small and medium-sized enterprises like Italy and, thus could be considered as a possible instrument in agreement with social partners.

In particular, the first two main elements/modules of which MC is constituted can be, in some way, be assimilated to the Italian Atlas of Work and Qualifications (which in any case covers all the Italian economic sectors), while the other three have still not been developed. Indeed, at the moment, in Italy, an online skills and competencies self-assessment tool does not exist. The PIAAC online experimentation at PES has been a valuable exercise and could bring interesting insight for PES operators in their support to people accessing PES in their skills audit. However, the PIAAC online self-assessment tool is quite complex and requires time for being carried out. A more immediate and

⁷ Atlas of work (Atlante Lavoro) which describes the contents of the work in 24 professional economic sectors following a scheme that identifies for each sector the work processes, the process sequences, the areas of activity (ADA) and the specific activities. Atlas of professions (Atlante professioni) which includes the regulated professions (Directive 2005/36 / EC and subsequent additions), the Repertoire of apprenticeship professions (consisting of all the profiles present in the National Collective Labour Agreements related to the professionalizing apprenticeship), the professional Associations (L. n.4 / 2013) which covers the professions not organized into orders or colleges. Atlas of qualifications (Atlante qualificazioni) that collect in the same framework the qualifications awarded in the various areas of the lifelong learning system: School, Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education and Regional Vocational Training.

more comprehensive system as the MC is proposing could be a viable opportunity on which reflecting upon.

5 Questions

- In the paper, it is written that MC follows the leading principles of ESCO and European qualification framework. How exactly job profiles are connected to ESCO within each economic sector?
- At the moment MC is focused on developing competence models for 25 of the most important sectors of the national economy selected to test the MC tools. Will MC be extended to other sectors in order to cover all economic sectors present in Bulgaria?

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Annex 1 Summary table

The main points covered by the paper are summarised below.

Situation in the peer country

- The Italian labour market was severely impacted by the recession.
- The Italian labour market is characterised by deep gender differences and regional variability.
- The sectoral shift towards non-marketed services and business and other services is expected to create demand for high-skills occupations.
- Matching between labour demand and supply is still highly problematic.
- Skills policies depend on a complex governance system that cuts across different policy portfolios and involves different levels of governments.

National policies and measures

- Italy has been involved in a profound process of reform regarding both the education and training systems and the competences certification system, all connected to the development of the National Qualifications Framework.
- A common methodological framework for gathering all regional qualifications repertories in a homogeneous national system has been developed.
- Skills audits are part of this wider and complex process of harmonisation to establish a National Qualification Framework based on the learning outcomes approach, and to work on a credit and validation system.
- The construction of the National Directory of Qualifications and the Atlas of Work and Qualifications as an ordering tool for the Directory is being harmonised with the ESCO (European classification of skills, competences and occupations) program.
- Between 2017 and 2018, Italy carried out an online experimentation of the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competences (PIACC).

Assessment of success factors and transferability

- The overall assessment of the MC platform is very positive as the tool seems to be very rich and complete.
- MC is very well-focused on direct services such as the assessment tools and the e-learning trainings.
- Positive role of the Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA) and of the two nationally representative trade unions.
- MC is said to be particular suitable for economies where the share of small and medium-sized enterprise predominates and where the mismatch between labour supply and demand is high like Italy.
- The MC self-assessment tools can be of particular interest for transferability as at the moment in Italy an online skills and competencies self-assessment tool does not exist.

Questions

- In the paper, it is written that MC follows the leading principles of ESCO and European qualification framework. How exactly job profiles are connected to ESCO within each economic sector?
- At the moment MC is focused on developing competence models for 25 of the most important sectors of the national economy selected to test the MC tools. Will MC be extended to other sectors in order to cover all economic sectors present in Bulgaria?

Annex 2 Example of relevant practice

Name of the practice:	Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competences (PIACC) online experimentation in Italy ⁸
Year of implementation:	The experimentation of the PIAAC Online was launched in Italy at the beginning of April 2017 and was concluded in the first semester 2018.
Coordinating authority:	ANPAL - Agenzia Nazionale Politiche attive del Lavoro (National Agency Active Labour Policies)
Objectives:	<p>Based on the PIAAC Survey, and with the support of the European Commission (DG Employment), the OECD developed and promoted a self-assessment tool called Educational & Skills Online Assessment.</p> <p>The general objective of the PIAAC - Formazione & Competenze Online (PIAAC Online) experimentation in Italy is that of providing local and national institutions (Ministries, Regions), the social partners, the university and research centres, schools, VET providers, guidance providers, public employment services and employment agencies with a tool allowing the final beneficiaries of their services of knowing and assessing their command of some key competences. Furthermore, decision makers and service providers will dispose of relevant information for increasing the quality of the services provided, such as guidance, profiling, validation of competences, counselling.</p> <p>The objectives of the experimentation were agreed with the participating 19 Regions, who actively cooperated in the identification of the PES and beneficiaries to be involved.</p>
Main activities:	<p>The PIAAC online experimentation was tested on a specific target, that of the long-term unemployed enrolled at the Employment Centres, with the aim of verifying how much this instrument can be useful and effective for operators to better "profile" users in terms of possessed skills. Participants start the test by answering a questionnaire with basic fundamental questions (BQ), background questions (socio-demographic characteristics) that are fundamental because they are later used to orientate the "path" of the tests and apply the appropriate filters on entire modules or part of them.</p> <p>After completing the background questions, users are given a pre-test, a pack of three literacy tests and three numerical tests (numeracy). Once the cognitive tests are completed, all the participants continue with the non-cognitive tests: competences acted; interests and career goals; subjective well-being and health. At the end of all the tests each participant received, during an interview with an operator of the ICC, a summary document with the results of the tests (the score report).</p>

⁸ <http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/onlineassessment/>

Results so far:	<p>The survey carried out between June 2017 and June 2018 by the 181 Job Centres distributed in 19 regions and one autonomous province involved a total of 3,704 participants of which 55.3% females.</p> <p>Overall, the tool is perceived as "quite useful" by most individuals involved in the trial, with percentages ranging from 48.0% to 57.1% of users depending on the section and of the test considered. However, the tool was considered quite complex (especially by adult people) and the time required was considered to be quite long.</p>
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