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## 24.1 History and Social Parameters of the Education System

### 24.1.1 Cornerstones of Historical Development

From the fall of the Roman Empire to its unification in 1861, Italy was fragmented into numerous smaller states; there was no compulsory schooling, and education was regulated by the Catholic Church. The first state-run schools provided free of charge were introduced in the Kingdom of Sicily in 1778. With the unification of Italy, the notion of a general, state-run education system – initially formulated in the Casati law of 1859 and originally intended for the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia – was extended to all other regions and laid the foundations for the school system of present-day Italy (Allemann-Ghionda 1999; Brinkmann 1995). As Italy's first minister of education, Gabrio Casati first introduced compulsory schooling covering two years which gained significance in the light of the prevailing illiteracy rate of 75 %. *Scuola elementare* preceded secondary school, which was divided into two elements: traditional secondary schools comprised a first stage of five years' duration (*ginnasio*) and a second of three years' duration (*liceo classico*); and technical-scientific secondary schools consisting of two- to three-year stages, the technical school (*scuola tecnica*) and the technical institute (*istituto tecnico*). In addition, there was the two-year *scuola normale* at which primary school teachers were trained.

In 1877, primary school was extended to cover five years, the first three of which were compulsory. Public debate on the responsibility of schools following the spread of child labor during the initial phase of industrialization led to the extension of compulsory education. According to the *lex Orlando*, children had to attend school until they reached the age of twelve. The Daneo-Credaro law of 1911 led to the state taking over the burden of funding and administering the entire compulsory school system.

The Fascist takeover in 1922 heralded a new phase in the development of the Italian school system. A renowned professor of philosophy at the University of Rome, Giovanni Gentile, became Minister of Education in 1923. He instigated a comprehensive school reform which aimed at tightening the selection of pupils and the education of the elite in accordance with Fascist ideology. The reform focused on secondary school, with its traditional, philologically oriented *ginnasio/liceo* remaining the most important form of schooling. Gentile introduced an entrance examination following the five-year primary school and a number of other restrictive selection procedures which led to a significant decline in pupil numbers and enrolments at university. In addition to the *ginnasio/liceo*, which was the only school type enabling pupils to pursue their education in the tertiary sector without restriction, there were technical institutes (*istituti tecnici*) that entitled students to

## Italy

				Grade	Age
				17	23
				16	22
				15	21
				14	20
				13	19
				12	18
				11	17
				10	16
				9	15
				8	14
				7	13
				6	12
				5	11
				4	10
				3	9
				2	8
				1	7
					6
					5
					4
					3

  

University (Bachelor, Master, PhD)	Professional Education Center (3-5 years)	Higher Technical Education and Training (part-time, full-time)			
Grammar School  (liceo)	Technical College	Vocational College			
			Vocational Training Center		
Middle School (lower secondary education)					
Primary School					
Crèche, Kindergarten					

enter specific technical faculties and seven-year schools for training primary school teachers (*istituti magistrali*). The reform also introduced scientific grammar schools (*liceo scientifico*) to enable pupils to take up a course of study at the scientific and medical faculties of universities. In contrast, the new grammar school for girls

(*liceo femminile*) was explicitly not aimed at preparing girls for tertiary education; its goal was rather to provide an extended general education. In a bid to extend compulsory education until the age of 14 provided for in Gentile's reforms, complementary schools (*scuola complementare*) were established for those pupils who did not want, or were not allowed, to attend secondary school after they had finished primary school. In 1931, the three-year post-primary vocational schools (*scuole di avviamento professionale*) emerged from the complementary schools. In reality, however, these schools were only introduced in larger cities, and eight years of compulsory education were unattainable for many young people. In 1940, Gentile's successor instigated a partial unification of the lower level of secondary education (*scuola media inferiore*). But this was merely the common base of higher schools and hardly a comprehensive school as we know it today. This only came about around 20 years later. The mandatory nature of Latin in schools continued to contribute to the strict selection of pupils. Quite separate from the other secondary schools were the practically self-contained vocational schools, the *scuole di avviamento professionale*.

With the fall of Fascism and the movement away from a monarchy toward a republic, 1946 witnessed an increasing wave of democratization. A commission revised the curricula to remove aspects of ideology but the overall structure; the dual system remained as it was until the beginning of the 1960s. A large proportion of the pupils attended the five-year general primary school; secondary education remained the reserve of a small elite. In 1963/1964, the center-left coalition introduced the *scuola media unica*, a three-year comprehensive middle school. But the main point of contention here was the role of Latin, which was now introduced as an option from Year 8. Latin was an instrument of selection for acceptance in the *liceo classico*; pupils could attend all other types of upper level secondary school once they had successfully passed through *scuola media*. Whereas in 1953, only 35.5 % of a cohort attended school until they were 13, by 1974 this had risen to 86.6 % (Fadiga Zanatta 1976).

The growing need for highly qualified pupils and university graduates to feed the flourishing economy, together with the student demonstrations of 1968 eventually led to a further liberalization of the education system. In 1969, all pupils with a certified five-year secondary education were entitled to enroll at a university. At secondary schools that did not already offer five years' education, an extra preparatory course was created thus avoiding having to exclude these schools from university study.

### **24.1.2 Important Reforms and Phases of Innovation in Education and School Policies in the Last 30 Years**

Whereas the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by liberalization and efforts to achieve greater equality in education, primarily by merging educational facilities into a type of common schooling, the years that followed only brought about isolated change. In 1994, formal grades were replaced by an oral assessment of achievement up to *scuola media*; in 1997, a law was passed that recognized greater autonomy for schools; in 1998, the training of primary school teachers that to date

had taken place in vocational schools became the prerogative of universities; 1999 saw the introduction of a form of post-secondary vocational education (*istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore, IFTS*); and in 2000, a law on the equality of private and public education came into force that considerably improved the financial status of private education facilities. In the same year, under the minister of education Luigi Berlinguer, a large-scale reform of the school system was developed that envisaged increasing compulsory education to 15, compulsory vocational education up to the age of 18, and access to university to the age of 18. With the fall of the government in spring 2001, these reforms were put on ice, and the new center-right coalition, with its education minister Letizia Moratti, developed its own reform plans which were passed in 2003, plans that integrated the increase in compulsory school and vocational education (*obbligo formativo*). Furthermore, this Reform No. 53 enabled pupils to change easily between all disciplines and forms of vocational education at the upper level of secondary education and facilitated the mutual recognition of achievement. Moreover, a key element of the reform was the strict separation of practical-vocational and academic schooling. Those schools complementing their curricula with vocational elements, the *istituto tecnico* and the *istituto d'arte* were formally assigned to the branch of grammar schools (*licei*). The role of the remaining *istituti* became unclear, both in terms of their vocational training function and in terms of their administrative assignment between the national ministry of education and the regional government responsible for vocational education. Because of another change of government in 2006, these reforms were never fully implemented. Subsequent to yet another change of power in favor of the center-right government in spring 2008, at the end of October of the same year and following waves of public protest, a law was passed that envisaged the reintroduction of numerical grades in primary schools from 2008 to 2009. Further, children could not be forced to repeat a year for underachieving, and single-teacher classes were reintroduced in primary schools.

### **24.1.3 Political, Economic, and Cultural Framework for the Development of the Education System**

Italy is a democratic republic comprising 20 regions, five of which enjoy a special status with extended rights of autonomy, including education (the Aosta Valley, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, Sardinia, Sicily). The country covers 301,336 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 58.7 million, of which 2.7 million are foreigners. At an average density of 195 people per square kilometer, 67.6 % of the population lives in urban areas. The birthrate stands at 1.3 children per woman (Destatis 2006). With an old-age dependency rate of 28.9 %, over 60 % of the state's social benefits are paid for retirement and survivor's pensions, the highest values in the EU (2005/2006). Italy also has the highest rate of debt measured against GDP in the EU of 106 % (EU average, 61.4 %) (EU 2007). The Roman Catholic Church still has a major influence on cultural life and around 88 % of church and social taxes are paid to the Catholic Church (Eurispes 2009).

In 2005, 65 % of the economically active were employed in the service sector, 30.8 % in the manufacturing industry, and 4.2 % in agricultural, forestry, and fishing (Destatis 2006). There is still a marked contrast in the country between the highly developed north and the traditionally structurally weak south. This divide is also reflected in employment statistics. The general labor force participation rate for 2006 stood at 58.4 % (in the south, 46.6 %), the participation rate for women stood at 46.3 % (in the south, 31.2 %). The unemployment rate in recent years has steadily sunken, largely due to changes in labor market legislation and the increase in temporary work agreements, and in 2006, unemployment rate stood at 6.8 % (in the south, 12.3 %) (SVIMEZ 2007). Youth unemployment is particularly high (i.e., unemployment among 15–24-year-olds) at 23.5 % (in the south, 37.6 %) (EU 2004). GDP per capita in 2006 amounted to € 25,032 (in the south: € 16,699; compare with 37.6%) (Istat 2008).

Total public spending on the education system in 2006 amounted to 4.59 % of GDP (EU 2008); Italy is the only OECD country that spends less than 1 % of its GDP on the tertiary sector (OECD 2007a). Italy has not kept pace with other economically successful countries in terms of general qualifications. In 2005, just 17 % of the population between 25 and 64 had a primary school education, 32 % had completed the lower level of secondary education, 38 % possessed an advance school leaving certificate, and nearly 13 % had a higher education qualification (OECD 2007b). Italy's public sector, including education, is an extremely popular employer, primarily because of the combination of relatively low demands on work with simultaneous job security. At European level, employee salaries are very low while the cost of living is high (Eurispes 2009).

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## **24.2 Fundamentals, Organization, and Governance of the Education System**

### **24.2.1 Current Educational Policy and Goals of the Education System**

The Italian education system has suffered from political instability in the country brought on by numerous changes in government in such a relatively short period of time. Initiatives instigated by one government will mainly be stopped when the government changes. Then, after a long process of dialog, initiatives are reformulated, always accompanied by the risk of having responsibility dissolved again. To date, nobody has succeeded in systematically and efficiently remedying the central problems of the education system. Concrete steps are urgently required to counter inefficiencies in the school system (OECD 2007a), namely, the high number of pupils finishing school early, low levels of achievement, low participation rates in regional vocational education framed by high youth unemployment, an underdeveloped system of adult education and defective advisory facilities, and the absence of a national system of quality assurance and development for the schools and teachers of the country.

## 24.2.2 Legal Foundations of the Education System

The central legal basis for the Italian education system is the Italian constitution of Jan. 1, 1948. This provides for academic freedom; the state's obligation to ensure the establishment of schools of all types and for all levels that are accessible for all without restriction; the right of all higher education facilities to determine their own legal form themselves; the right of everyone to establish schools and other pedagogical institutions; the rights and duties of parents to educate and bring up their children; the right of those capable and worthy to attain the highest possible level of educational achievement, even if they do not have sufficient economic means; the right of the disadvantaged and disabled to educational and vocational integration (EU 2007/2008). Also anchored in the constitution is the exclusive right of the central government in Rome to pass laws on general school education. As a result, the general school system in all 20 Italian regions is by and large the same. Matters are however different in terms of professional training and development, which is regulated at regional level and thus very heterogeneous.

## 24.2.3 Management of the Education System

Italy's administration is traditionally centralist in nature. A significant change was brought about in 1997. Since then, regions, provinces, and local districts accept all administrative tasks that are not the express reserve of the central government in Rome. The primary fields of competence for the national Ministry of Education (*Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, MIUR*) include: universities and science, organizational and legal questions relating to the general school system, the legal status and assignment of school staff, the compilation of general curricula, criteria and parameters for organizing the school network, evaluating the school system and examinations, and funding. At regional level, the ministry is represented in the form of regional school authorities (*Uffici Scolastici Regionali*), which primarily take care of personnel issues. Moreover, the ministry is represented by school authorities (*Uffici Scolastici Provinciali*, formerly *provveditorato*) in provincial capitals (with the exception of the autonomous regions). Also at national level are two facilities associated with the ministry: the National Institute for the Evaluation of the School and Vocational System (*istituto nazionale per la valutazione del sistema educativo di istruzione e di formazione, INVALSI*) and the National Institute for the Documentation, Innovation, and Research in Education (*Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa, INDIRE*) that was reinstated in September 2012 after the National Agency for Development and Promotion of School Autonomy (*Agenzia nazionale per lo Sviluppo dell'Autonomia Scolastica, ANSAS*) was restructured in January 2007.

The regions are responsible for planning vocational courses in cases where vocational-oriented schools and the national school system overlap, and for courses

in regional vocation programs, the planning of the school infrastructure, the school calendar, and for providing funds for private schools and regional vocational education facilities. When it comes to establishing, merging or closing schools, and to monitoring these processes, the respective provinces are responsible for schools in the upper level of secondary education, the local districts for facilities from crèches to middle schools. The competence of the individual schools was extended in 2001/2002 in administrative matters but primarily also in relation to the planning of courses and their specific design (curricula, range of courses offered, organization of lesson times, group work, and general didactics).

#### **24.2.4 Financing the Education System and Its Institutions**

The Italian education system is primarily financed by the national government. Education facilities are relatively free in the specific appropriation of funds assigned to it, only bound by the obligation to use resources mainly for education and advisory activities. In addition, regions can provide funds to public and private facilities for concrete projects. While the state is financially responsible for the administration and educational content of education facilities, the regions provide funds for ancillary services (catering, transport, specific teaching materials, socio-pedagogical support services, financial aid). Furthermore, the regions commission provinces and local districts to maintain and service school buildings. Attendance at school, from kindergarten to final examinations, is fundamentally free of charge. Families only have to cover the costs of transport, catering, and school books – incrementally based on their financial situation. Various fees are incurred for university study and private education facilities.

Italy's overall spending per capita in secondary education is in line with the OECD average, while it is above average in the primary sector, significantly in preschool education. Italy is the only OECD country to spend less than 1 % of its GDP on the tertiary sector (OECD 2007a); and public spending for the tertiary sector did not grow at all between 2000 and 2005. On the other hand, the proportion of private funds grew significantly by 51 % and is now above the OECD average. It also heads all other EU countries (OECD 2008).

#### **24.2.5 Relationship Between the Public and Private Sectors in the Education System**

In 2000, new provisions governing the relationship between the public and private sectors of education in Italy were introduced in law, granting increased recognition to non-state-run facilities. Depending on who maintains the school, non-state-run schools are divided into public (*pubbliche*) and private (*private*) facilities. Public, non-state-run schools are those maintained by regional, provincial, or district authorities. Schools maintained privately (religious or confessional schools) are described as non-state-run private schools. Schools that meet certain criteria for



recognition (staffing, equipment, parent participation, equal access rights for pupils, curricula, and teaching methods in harmony with the constitution and school legislation) can be recognized by regional authorities as *scuola paritaria* (equivalent schools) and may grant the same awards as state-run schools and can fall back on funds from the public hand. On average, 72.3 % of all schools in Italy are state-run schools (54.7 % of kindergartens and up to 89.2 % of middle schools). Most of the non-equivalent schools (*non paritarie*) can be found in the preschool sector, whereas the number of non-equivalent schools in the secondary sector is negligible (MPI 2008).

### 24.2.6 System of Quality Development and Support in Education Facilities

For decades, quality assurance in Italy's education sector primarily took place via a set of input controls which mainly affected administrative aspects. A holistic approach to quality assurance that broadly monitors education achievements still does not exist today. However, 1999 did see the introduction of the first measures relating to a new understanding of quality.

At this time, a legislative decree was issued awarding more rights of autonomy in a number of fields to all schools from 2001 to 2002. This obliged every school to present their activities in a school plan (*piano dell'offerta formativa*) and to publish their offerings for all to see. This was compiled by the teaching staff and is still seen as a key component of internal quality development in schools. Since 2004, the National Institute for the Evaluation of the School and Vocation System (*Istituto nazionale per la valutazione del sistema educativo di istruzione e di formazione, INVALSI*) has taken over the external evaluation of the education system.

The task of the National Institute of Documentation, Innovation, and Research in Education (*Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa, INDIRE*) is to operate educational research and consulting, to train school staff, to develop documentation systems, to take part in international initiatives in the field of skill development, to implement a national system of adult education, and to collaborate with regional and local institutions in the field of higher vocational training (*istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore, IFTS*).

Since 2002, all training and development centers (*centri di formazione professionale (CFP)*), which involve the majority of regional vocational education facilities, are subject to an accreditation process if they wish to receive government grants. This aims to ensure the quality of education in an area that is largely in private hands. The criteria and minimum requirements on such centers are defined at national level, however, accreditation is the responsibility of the 20 regions, each of which apply different procedures.

In the tertiary sector, the National Agency for the Evaluation of Higher Education and Research (*L'Agenzia nazionale di valutazione del sistema universitario e della ricerca, ANVUR*) was founded in 2008.

## 24.3 Overview of the Structure of the Education System

### 24.3.1 Pre-primary Education

The first educational facility assigned to the Ministry of Education is the kindergarten or nursery school (*scuola materna/dell'infanzia*), envisaged for children aged two-and-a-half to six. The entry age was officially lowered in September 2009 after tests were conducted in many facilities on permitting children younger than three, the previous age for admission. Attendance at nursery school is not compulsory and is usually free of charge, with the exception of costs incurred for transport and catering. A nursery school year usually runs from 1 September to 30 June of the following year. In 2007/2008, each teacher at state nursery schools was responsible for the care of 11.3 children.

The care of children up to the age of three years takes place in crèches (*asili nido*) and is regulated at regional and district levels. This is subject to costs. In 2006, there were 3,131 crèches, of which 46 % were in private, often catholic, hands. Overall, there are not enough places at crèches to meet demand; an average of 27 % of all applications are not successful (Milan, roughly 25 %; Naples, 46 %). Italy provides just 8 % of children up to the age of 3 years a place in a crèche (EU Lisbon guidelines by 2010, 33 %) (IFEL/ANCI 2008).

However, when it comes to the care of 4-year-olds, Italy heads the EU table with nearly all children in preschool care (EU 2008).

### 24.3.2 Primary Education

The first obligatory school cycle begins in September with the five-year primary school (*scuola primaria/elementare*) for all children who turned six years old by 31 August. If requested by their parents or custodians, children who will turn six years old by 30 April of the following year may also be admitted. Schools have a degree of leeway in the manner they organize everyday school life. However, lessons have to take place five days per week covering a total of 871 h (27 h per week). Lessons can take place either only mornings or in a combination of mornings and afternoons, either with lunch at home with the family or with lunch at school. In addition to regular lessons, optional extracurricular activities can also be organized. Including the provision of lunch, the week cannot extend beyond 40 h. Learning materials are free of charge and are provided by the local district authority.

Children may have to repeat Years 1, 3, and 5 depending on levels of achievement. Since 2008/2009 schools again give numerical grades to record achievement, and single-teacher classes are also being reintroduced. In 2007/2008 average class sizes at public schools were 18.7 pupils, with 10.3 pupils per teacher (MPI 2007/2008).

### 24.3.3 Lower Secondary Education

After completing primary school, pupils attend the three-year middle school (*scuola media/secondaria di primo grado*). The obligatory curriculum was extended by 66 h in 2004 to include additional lessons in English and Information Technology (IT) and now comprises 957 h per school year. In addition, in an effort to meet the wishes and needs of families, schools are called on to organize other activities related to the curriculum of up to 132 h per school year (four hours per week). The additional activities selected by the families at the beginning of the school year then become part of the mandatory school program for the pupil. On top of this, each school can choose whether to offer lunch to the pupils or not (EU 2007/2008). The third year at middle school ends with a national examination (*esame di stato*) which needs to be passed to secure entry to the upper level of secondary school (*secondo ciclo*).

### 24.3.4 Special Needs Schools

The integration of the disabled (*alunni diversamente abili*) was gradually introduced from 1977 onwards, and, with just a few exceptions, special schools are abolished. Initially, this applied to nursery schools, primary, and middle schools; however in 1992, the right to integration in all educational facilities – from crèches through to universities – was anchored in law (Act No. 104). In 2006/2007, children with disabilities amounted to 2.3 % of the overall school population at public schools (MPI 2008).

Classes with disabled pupils should not exceed 20 in number (25 in exceptional cases). Such classes are entitled to support teachers who are specially trained to take care of specific disabilities as well as a socio-psycho-pedagogic service (EU 2007/2008).

### 24.3.5 Upper Secondary Education

After completing the lower level of secondary education (*scuola primaria/elementare* and *scuola media/secondaria di primo grado*) and passing the relevant examination (*esame di stato*), pupils can enroll at a variety of higher schools:

- Five-year grammar school (*liceo*) specializing in *artistico* (arts), *classico* (classic languages), *linguistico* (modern languages), *scientifico* (science), *musicale e coreutico* (music) and *delle scienze umane* (formerly *istituto magistrale*)
- Five-year technical college (*istituto tecnico*), following a specialism in economics and two other subjects or following the technology specialism (*tecnologico*) and nine other subjects
- Five-year vocational college (*istituto professionale*) with a focus on services (*servizi*) and four other subjects or a focus on industry and handicrafts (*industria e artigianato*) and two other subjects

Students can enroll at university once they have completed the fifth year of upper secondary school education and have passed the advance school leaving certificate (*esame di stato*, or the *maturità*).

Originally envisaged to counter the number of early school leavers, part of the traditional regional vocational system was transferred to the state school system in 2003. Pupils who do not achieve at school can transfer to vocational training centers (*Centri di Formazione Professionale, CFP*) maintained by the regions to complete their compulsory education in three to four year courses (*percorsi sperimentali*) and receive practical training with general education (*istruzione e formazione professionale*). Since 2010/2011, this model project has been institutionalized, and 22 three-year and 21 four-year vocations containing national minimum standards have been approved. Pupils also fulfill their compulsory education when they take up an apprenticeship contract of employment, which they may do from the age of 15. Mutual recognition of achievement between the various forms of education helps facilitate change as required. Some schools offer the same course in the morning time and in the evening, with a slight reduction in the number of hours to be taken.

### 24.3.6 Post-secondary (Non-tertiary) Education

The traditional, if somewhat insignificant, post-secondary education system has undergone a major expansion in recent years. For decades, this type of education (was virtually exclusively for sporadic professional courses run by largely private (often catholic) training and development centers (*Centri di Formazione Professionale, CFP*) for various target groups that today still do not differentiate between initial vocational training, development, and re-training. Only 2.7 % of all 19–24-year-olds took part in post-secondary vocational education in 2004/2005 (ISFOL 2006).

In 1999, an even less frequented and little-known form of higher vocational education was established, the Higher Technical Education and Training course (*Istruzione e Formazione Tecnica Superiore – IFTS*). This targets job starters, the employed, and the unemployed. *IFTS* courses are planned and delivered in regional associations of a variety of education facilities (training centers, universities, schools, companies). Nationally, uniform minimum standards and planning guidelines were drafted for 46 vocations. All courses last from two to four semesters each containing 1,200–2,400 h of instruction, of which 30 % can be in the form of a work placement (MPI et al. 1999). Since this form of education was introduced, 110 associations had been set up by 2007, with 3,425 courses carried out for just fewer than 60,000 participants (MPI 2008).

About ten years later, another post-secondary form of education was established, the higher technical institutes (*istituti tecnici superiori, ITS*). They are also an association of facilities: in addition to the *istituto tecnico* or an *istituto professionale*, the association also has to contain four other facilities, at least one of which has to be private company. Courses are set up solely on the basis of regional development plans. In 2011/2012, 58 higher technical institutes were launched in 16 regions. Courses last four semesters and cover 1,800 or 2,000 h.

To enroll, students need to have passed the advanced school leaving certificate (*diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore* or the *maturità*) and an entrance test.

For a long time, the so-called *apprendistato* filled the gray area between apprenticeship and employment contract. In reality, this never lived up to its claim and has been in a state of restructuring since the labor market reform of 2003. The *apprendistato* was never a formalized form of vocational education (with the exception of South Tyrol – Südtirol); there were never any standardized vocations, neither curricula nor final examinations, and employers alone were responsible for the training. Although legally prescribed, a survey conducted in 2005 ascertained that only 15.8 % of under-18 students actually attended organized lessons or were even offered these at all. The national legal basis for the “new traineeship” (*nuovo apprendistato*) was created in September 2011. In the course of 2012, complementary provisions were provided by the regions enabling the *nuovo apprendistato* to be implemented in most regions from 2013. The *nuovo apprendistato* comprises three roughly different forms of agreement: an earlier example of the *apprendistato* is the *apprendistato professionalizzante*, or professional apprenticeship, a mainly three- to five-year employment contract for career entrants over the age of 18. As before, the employer is responsible for the training in accordance with the industry-specific national collective agreement (*Contratti Collettivi Nazionali di Lavoro, CCNL*), but now they have to appoint a tutor to be responsible for the trainees and present a training plan (*piano formativo individuale*). The regions are responsible for the organization of the 120 h of instruction (for the three-year programme) in which interdisciplinary skills are to be taught. There is usually no final examination at the end of the training. Instead, the skills acquired are entered in the trainee’s training log (*Libretto Formativo del Cittadino*).

Fifteen to twenty-five-year-olds now have the possibility of acquiring a vocational qualification via the *apprendistato per la qualifica e per il diploma professionale* which to date could only be achieved through full-time vocational college education for the 22 (three-year) or 21 (four-year) vocations for which the regions are accountable (*istruzione e formazione professionale*). The regions themselves decided which vocations are available for these trainees. They also decide on the relationship between practical and theoretical components. The courses usually last as long as purely academic training programmes.

Ultimately, all vocations and the respective qualifications are to be opened up to a model based on learning at work. The *apprendistato di alta formazione e di ricerca* (higher vocational training and research) allows 18- to 29-year-olds to gain university entrance qualification and university degree and higher vocational qualifications (*IFTS* and *ITS*) through this dual vocational training system. The specific design of these programs is also in the hands of the regions.

### 24.3.7 Tertiary Sector

Italy’s university education system comprises a total of 94 facilities: 56 state universities, three technical universities, 16 private non-state-run universities,

three institutions for foreigners, 6 solely offering postgraduate masters' programs, and eleven distant learning universities.

The remodeling of Italian higher education to meet the requirements of the Bologna process of 1999 took place relatively quickly. With the exception of human and veterinary medicine and dentistry, all courses have been converted to a three plus two model, although this might not be so apparent at first glance. The first level of university education comprises the three-year bachelor degree (*laurea triennale*). Upon completion of the bachelor degree, students can enroll for a two-year master's course (*laurea specialistica/magistrale*). Besides PhD programs (*dottorato di ricerca*), universities also offer special diploma courses providing knowledge and skills for practical professional work (e.g., in the field of medicine). Such courses target both bachelor and master graduates. Universities also offer a special master program (one-year minimum study or 60 ECTS) with a particular focus on professional training. These are usually very costly programmes.

For decades, a university degree in the respective subject was sufficient qualification to apply for a position as a teacher at secondary school through national job allocation system. From 1999 to 2009, aspirants to the teaching profession at secondary schools had to undergo a two-year postgraduate specialization program (*scuola di specializzazione per l'insegnamento nella scuola secondaria, SISS*). Since 2011, bachelor graduates now also take a two-year master's program for prospective teachers to which access is limited. Afterwards, there is a one-year teaching practice (*tirocinio formativo attivo, TFA*) covering 475 h where students are accompanied by an experienced teacher in the role of the student's tutor. The training of primary school teachers has only been university-based since 1998. Before then, training took place at vocational colleges at upper secondary school level. In 2011, university courses for primary school and preschool teachers were increased to five years. Subsequent professional admission courses (*abilitazione per la scuola primaria e dell'infanzia*) to which access is restricted round off the training.

University study is subject to students' fees which vary between universities and disciplines. University fees are charged at the university's discretion. Fees have more than doubled in the past ten years and the trend it set to continue. In 2005/2006, average annual fees amounted to 880 Euros. In order to guarantee the constitutional right to university study, students from low-income family and those with above-average achievement may have university fees, meals, accommodation, and transport refunded, either wholly or in part. This group of students can also secure an interest-free loan from banks under certain conditions (EU 2007/2008). There is no direct financial assistance from the state. The criteria for the granting of indirect financial assistance are redefined every three years by a council of ministers. In August 2008, a law was passed that enables state universities to become private trusts in the future.

### 24.3.8 Adult Education

Adult education in Italy is very much underdeveloped and is poorly utilized. At 4 %, participation in non-formal vocational education programmes for 25–64-year-olds is

the lowest rate of all OECD countries for which data is available. Participation by adults with lower level of secondary education schooling is particularly low at 1 %; whereas 12 % of graduates in the age group participate in adult education (OECD 2007a). In the last few years, some political initiatives have emphasized the central importance of lifelong learning, and a number of isolated, mainly regional, projects have started. At national level, community education centers (*Centri Territoriali Permanenti, CTP*) for adults were set up at public schools in 1997 (mainly focusing on catching up on professional qualifications and on language and integration courses for immigrants), and in 2004, a national training fund was established (*Fondi Paritetici Interprofessionali per la Formazione Continua, FPI*). Some regions have introduced education vouchers that grant employees subsidies for educational programs. According to the Italian chambers of commerce, 19.8 % of Italian companies provided development and training programs for their employees in 2006 (Unioncamere 2007).

Overall, the Italian market for adult education is experiencing a strong trend toward commercialization. Courses offered by a variety of providers (universities with master's and distance learning programmes, regional and private training centers, chambers of commerce and industry, trade unions, etc.) are usually very expensive. Independent consultation and information from educational providers is rare and the absence of a national network makes such details difficult to come by.

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## 24.4 Developments in the Current School System

### 24.4.1 Transfer Between School Years

The education reform No. 53 from 2003 extended the possibility of pupils repeating a year to include Year 7 and introduced a centrally organized examination (*esame di stato*) of the end of the middle school, which pupils have to pass in order to transfer to the upper level of secondary education. In 2006/2007, 94.7 % of pupils enrolled in schools in the national system at the end of the lower level of secondary education; only 5.3 % took part in courses offered by regional vocational schools or followed the *apprendistato*. Within the national system, 41.4 % of pupils attended the various grammar schools, 34.4 % attended a technical institute, 20.4 % a vocational college, and 3.8 % a schools of arts (MPI 2008). Up until 2009/2010, technical institutes and vocational colleges distinguished themselves from grammar schools – especially during the first three of the five years – by having the vocational elements taught in addition to the normal core curriculum covering all schools in the upper level of secondary education. As a consequence, pupils at these schools had to cope with 40 h of lessons per week, whereas grammar school pupils had lessons for 30–34 h per week. Despite their supposed vocational orientation, both of these school types have a strong focus on theoretical learning, and 50 % of the curricula in the last two years are still made up on general subjects. This fact might well be the reason that “real” vocational education (*formazione professionale*) is traditionally seen as the more practical training offered by the

regions in contrast to the vocational courses offered by schools (*istruzione professionale*). However, these mainly three-year vocational courses operated in the regions are not really an option for graduates of the lower level of secondary education. Much more, they are seen as an alternative to school education for young people who can no longer cope with the more intensive theoretical lessons of schools. Most of the time, pupils land in these regional schools in a second step after failing to achieve well at the upper level secondary school they have attended (ISFOL 2006). These regional courses did not receive any recognition in the formal education system up to 2003, but since then they have become part of the formal system of the upper level of secondary education; and qualifications acquired and achievement attained are now recognized across the whole level of state-run schooling. However, the provision of such courses is very uneven: 57.4 % of participants come from three northern regions (Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont), whereas provision in most other regions is still very low (MPI 2008).

After passing the *esame di stato* – the advanced school leaving certificate – students can enroll a university or try their hand on the labor market, a market characterized by an unemployment rate of 23.5 % among young 15–24-year olds (in the south, 37.6 % (EU 2004). There was no other possibility of gaining other post-secondary education qualifications outside the university system in Italy until 1999, until the higher technical education and training course – the *istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore (IFTS)* – was launched. However, this did not have any direct connection to secondary education, and although associations of institutions have grown, they are still too unevenly distributed and largely unknown. The situation of grammar school graduates choosing not to study at university was particularly grave in Italy since at this time they had no chance of securing vocational qualifications in the formal system. In recent years however, Italy has recognized the significance of qualified vocational education and is trying to expand this much neglected sector. Since 2011/2012, students with their advanced school leaving certificate in their pockets can now attend higher technical institutes (*istituti tecnici superiori, ITS*).

Because more traditional forms of formal education are deeply rooted in Italian society, grammar schools have enjoyed enormous popularity, and vocational education has tended to be seen as a somewhat inferior. Besides the creation of the ITS, other new developments – in particular, those relating to the new traineeship, the *nuovo apprendistato* – can be seen as a sign of the increasing value being attributed to vocational training, especially in the transfer from school to work (if not so much in the eyes of the general public, then at least for those directly involved).

In this connection, the Italian socio-economic research institute CENSIS has drawn attention to what it sees as the key problem here: the poor dissemination of information concerning the new provision of vocational education (CENSIS 2007). In a survey, 57.7 % of young people questioned said that careers advice given at middle schools was too general, if not nonexistent (15.4 %). In addition, 51.4 % of parents are of the opinion that information on vocational education courses (*istruzione-formazione professionale*) is insufficient.



### 24.4.2 Quality Development and Quality Assurance Measures in Schools

Italy has made noteworthy progress in educational participation in recent decades and has always attained above-average levels of achievement in primary education (EUIRSPES 2009). However, international comparative studies such as PISA have highlighted serious shortcomings in the quality of the Italian secondary school system. Italy's 15-year-olds found themselves near the bottom of all the categories of performance investigated. Results revealed striking disparities between the regions (much worse in the south than the north) and between the various types of school – the grammar school (*licei*) were the best, vocational colleges (*istituti professionali*) the worst. But there were also significant differences in achievements between schools of the same type, an indication of the discordant nature of the learning environment at school and the strong influence of social factors (MEF/MPI 2007).

A significant proportion of expenditure on the Italian school system is invested in a large number of teaching hours (the highest across all OECD countries) and a very low pupil-teacher ratio. The fact that this expenditure is at least average, if not above average, seen internationally, gives rise to doubts about the efficiency of the system and the adequate distribution of resources. As far as the teaching staffs are concerned, they are relatively poorly paid, and their teaching commitment is relatively low. Salaries are not performance-related, but rise in line with the number of years' service.

Although discussions on quality that have taken place in varying degrees of intensity since the 1990s have brought about some innovation, there is still no effective system of quality assurance operating at national level. Greater rights of autonomy introduced in 2001/2002 and the extended leeway afforded to school have not yet been embedded in a national system of standards, of continuous external evaluation, of comparative data, or of support. The National Institute for the Evaluation of Schooling and Vocational Education (*Istituto nazionale per la valutazione del sistema educativo di istruzione e di formazione, INVALSI*) was assigned the task of establishing such a national system. To date, it has been primarily focused on looking at the national final examinations (*esame di stato*) and is only slowly beginning to embrace its role. In terms of internal quality development, schools are obliged to compile a school program (*piano dell'offerta formativa, POF*). However, as this only has to satisfy minor demands, it is often really only effective as a development instrument. Some schools, mainly in the north, have used their own initiative to carry out their own internal evaluation measures. Sometimes this has also received support from regional school authorities.

The Italian public has only been marginally interested in the results of international studies, if at all. The competent ministry did not even hold a press conference when the results of the first PISA study were published (Nardi 2004). A so-called *White Paper* of schools was first published in September 2007 at the behest of, and with the collaboration of, the Ministry of Education and Science. For the first time,

a committee of experts conducted a comprehensive analysis of the shortcomings in quality in the Italian education system, highlighted by international studies and made substantiated proposals for improvement. In addition to pressing for national standards and a national evaluation system to be established, the paper issued a reminder to focus more on the organization of work, on recruitment and rewarding practices, and on in-service teacher training (MEF/MPI 2007). Despite a renewed change of government, the first projects and measures have been initiated, signaling a clear awareness of, and a fundamental willingness to tackle, the necessary steps described in the White Paper.

### 24.4.3 Dealing with Special Problems

Since 2008/2009, Italy's secondary school pupils have been subject to a new charter of rights and duties (*statuto delle studentesse e degli studenti*) in daily school life. Changes to the charter were motivated by a perceived increase in bullying, the lack of discipline exhibited by many pupils, and the feeling that not enough was being done to counter this trend. While on the one hand, documented unacceptable behavior is to be countered using tougher yet reasonable sanctions, on the other, endeavors encapsulated in an education and upbringing pact aim at making families more sensitive to, and responsible for, the upbringing of their children. Disciplinary measures are to be seen as educational, ranging from a chance to put wrongs right by doing something for the good of the school community through to the option of suspending pupils from school for days or weeks or even until the end of the school year. Each misbehavior sanctioned is recorded in a type of personal rap sheet. This is part of the pupil's file that accompanies him or her even when he or she changes schools. Another measure to counter bullying and misbehavior includes the option of actually grading pupil behavior as unsatisfactory which may lead to the pupil having to repeat the school year (DM 2009).

A serious problem the Italian education system has had to deal with over a number of years concerns the high rate of pupils leaving school early. Although the rate of *dispersione scolastica* fell from 25.3 % in 2000 to 20.8 % in 2006, this still clearly exceeds the EU average (15.3 %) and is still far away from the EU's Lisbon guideline for early leavers of no more than 10 %. In 2006, regional differences ranged from 12.8 % in Basilicata to 31.4 % in Sicily thus reinforcing the differences between the north and the south of the country (MPI 2006/2007). One measure to support pupils at risk relates to the regional vocational education courses discussed above. These have been part of the national school system since 2003 and award state-recognized qualifications. However, more than half of pupils enrolled in such courses can be found in just three northern regions; in other regions the provision of such courses is only marginal at best (ISFOL 2006).

A possible indicator to identify pupils at risk of leaving school early relates to statistics on repeaters: In 2006/2007 6.3 % of pupils in upper secondary school education had repeated a year, and 27.3 % of pupils pass their advance school leaving certificate later than expected (MPI 2006/2007). Pupils underachieving in

one or more subjects have to be provided with additional support lessons, if necessary at the end of the school year, during the holidays. Prior to the start of the new school year, pupils are again tested. If they do not pass they will have to repeat the school year (DM 2007).

#### 24.4.4 Measure to Integrate Pupils from Immigrant Families

The number of pupils from a non-Italian background has risen severely in the last ten years. In 2007/2008, 6.4 % of pupils were not Italian. This growth affects all types of school, with the proportion in the upper level of secondary education (4.3 %) being significantly lower than in primary school (7.7 %). Most children from immigrant families live in the north of Italy (Emilia-Romagna 11.8 %), while the proportion living in south is relatively small (Campania 1.2 %). The largest proportion of pupils from non-Italian backgrounds – 29.8 % – comes from non-European countries (15.6 % of which come from Albania), 24 % come from Africa, 19.4 % from EU countries (13.7 % of which comes from Romania), 14.3 % from Asia, and 11.4 % from the Americas.

All children on Italian soil – whether legally or illegally – are included in the compulsory education system, just as children with Italian citizenship. All immigrants holding a residence permit are entitled to draw on all the services within the Italian education system, including universities. Despite the integration assistance envisaged in theory, pupils from a non-Italian background are severely disadvantaged in the education system. This is not only a question of language but also of social integration. In primary schools, 21.3 % of pupils from a non-Italian background are in classes below their age group (2 % of Italian pupils). In the upper level of secondary education, the figure rises to 71.8 % (24.4 % of Italian pupils) (MIUR 2008). At upper secondary school level, 1.9 % of the grammar school population is made up of pupils of immigrant families; the largest proportion is found in vocational colleges (8.7 %) (MPI 2008).

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### 24.5 New Developments

For decades, experts have been discussing the *licei*-isation of the Italian education system, referring to the tendency across all forms of upper level of secondary education to draw heavily on the most popular school form, grammar schools (*licei*), when contemplating content and methodology. Since 1969, all schools at the upper level of secondary education provide university entrance qualifications. This means that the curricula of all schools, including vocational-oriented schools, focus on the teaching of general subjects and study skills. On the one hand, this is an obvious attempt to address the wishes of Italian families; on the other hand, this trend might explain some of the ongoing problems inherent in the education system. The system does not seem to have managed to motivate young people, as the high numbers of early school leavers would indicate. Regional vocational centers are an

attempt to provide such young people with a qualification. However, this liceisation of the education system does not seem to reflect social or business needs, and representatives from industry are increasingly complaining about the shortage of well-trained specialists and the limited practical experience of pupils (Gentile 2006). It is also striking how little companies in Italy are involved in vocational education, keeping a low profile when it comes to assuming responsibility (both in terms of content and providing financial support). A good example of this is the Italian model of apprenticeships (*apprendistato*): although it is highly subsidized, up until 2013 it did not need to satisfy any quality demands (ISFOL 2006).

For a long time, one of the reasons for the weak and low appeal of vocational education in Italy was surely the unclear division of competence. Although the regions are responsible for vocational education (*formazione professionale*), in terms of pure numbers, most pupils attend two types of school that actually fall within in the state system, the *istruzione professionale*, or school-based training. Only since 2007 has this problem – the unclear division of competence between national and regional authorities – been seriously addressed jointly in numerous task forces and coordination processes. In 2010, these consultations ended in defining minimum standards for a number of new vocational fields, in strengthening regional vocational education by creating new courses, and in providing greater influence on the curricula of state-run schools. Vocational courses at state schools with vocational subjects (*istituti tecnici* und *istituti professionali*) were rigorously purged and reduced from several hundred vocations to a manageable 17! Furthermore, the extremely high number of taught hours per week was cut while increasing flexible quotients for individual schools. One of the side effects of the reforms, and one certainly in the mind of the government when reforms were proposed, was the considerable financial savings. It remains to be seen just how these 20 regions fill these new programs with life. In the past, it was always the more northerly regions – perhaps also because of their financial clout – that have known how to make the most of the options made available to them to shape educational offerings.

Given the political instability of Italy, there was always little reason to be optimistic about expecting profound improvement in the quality of the education system. None of the reforms of the past few years has gone beyond generating isolated innovation efforts to systematically investigate the actual cause of disastrous school achievement, the many early school leavers and the huge differences in quality between regions and schools, and to bring about significant change. To date, practically no reform has impacted the core of the current system with its heavy theoretical teacher-up-front style of teaching delivered by poorly trained teachers across all types of upper level of secondary education.

Plans were launched to establish a system of education standards and external evaluation more than 15 years ago, yet to date this is still not fully functional. Particularly alarming is the fact that although PISA made public that conditions at some schools and regions must be abysmal, there is still no nationwide system of inspection and development. Measures undertaken so far are a step on the right direction but are mere island solutions, not part of an overall concept that tackles the root cause of prevailing problems.

In this connection, the neglected field of empirical educational research on test developments mentioned in the White Paper of 2007 is still a major issue. The White Paper also drew attention to the significance of establishing an academic skill center in addition to the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Schooling and Vocational Education set up to carry out external evaluation (MEF/MPI 2007).

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