



## **VIPER - Volunteers in Play**

### **WP 2 – Needs Analysis Report**

#### **Country report of the research and needs analysis for Italy**

#### **DESK RESEARCH - December 2013**



# Index

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Statistical overview of the target populations .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Demographic indicators of Italy's population .....	4
1.2 Children .....	5
1.3 Employment indicators for men and women .....	6
<b>2. Playwork in Italy.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 The right to play in Italy.....	7
2.2 Settings where children play .....	8
2.3 Playwork industry needs .....	10
<b>3. Training for volunteers in Italy .....</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1 What kind of training is available for playworkers?.....	11
3.2 Why do we need volunteers in the playwork sector?.....	11
3.3 Where can we find volunteers in playwork? What activities do they undertake? .....	12
3.4 What are the training needs?.....	12
<b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>12</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this brief report is to map volunteer training needs in Italy in the field of playwork.

### *Methodology*

The information compiled here is the result of desk research carried out by browsing websites and reports, as well as by interviewing stakeholders and selected experts.

### *Geographic scale*

We've tried to provide an overview of the current volunteer training needs in Italy as a whole. However, more in depth information was only available for Sicily.

### *Playwork*

The term "playwork" as such does not exist in Italy. Our research has thus focused on public or private, profit or non-profit centres providing childcare, afterschool and play activities for children. The main finding of the research and some of the interviews in the field of play is the need for more state/regional-funded structures or play projects as well as the need for funding for private initiatives. In this framework, the lack of adequately trained personnel and volunteers constitutes also an issue but only a secondary one compared to the main problem identified.

### *North/South divide*

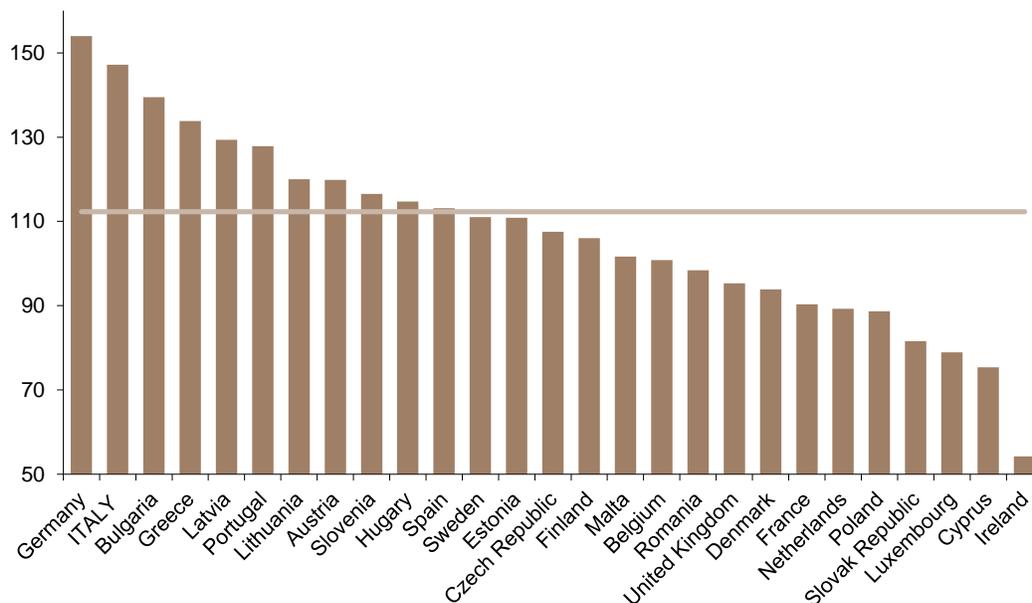
As it is very well known, there is a very big gap in terms of economic development between the South and the North of Italy. This is also reflected in the area of childcare and playwork. This means that there is a very strong lack not only of public funding in playwork activities and centres but also of public kindergardens and child centres.

# 1. Statistical overview of the target populations

## 1.1 Demographic indicators of Italy's population

Italy is one of the oldest countries in the EU, second only to Germany. In 2012 there were 147 elderly every 100 youths. The percentage of young people (aged 0-14) is 14.1%, while the percentage of people aged 15-65 is 65.4% and of people aged 65 years or older is 20.5%.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1.1 The ageing index in the EU (%) (2011)



Source: ISTAT, 2011

However, Sicily is one of the “youngest” regions in Italy. In fact, in the island there are 125 elderly every 100 youths.

In Italy, the average number of children per women is 1.42 while the average age of women at birth is 31. The natural growth rate of the population is negative (-0.8‰) and is one of the lowest in the EU. The overall growth rate of the population is however positive (2.7‰) and this is mainly due to incoming migration flows.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), 2013, consulted on 20/12/2013

<sup>2</sup> ISTAT, 2013, consulted on 10/12/2013

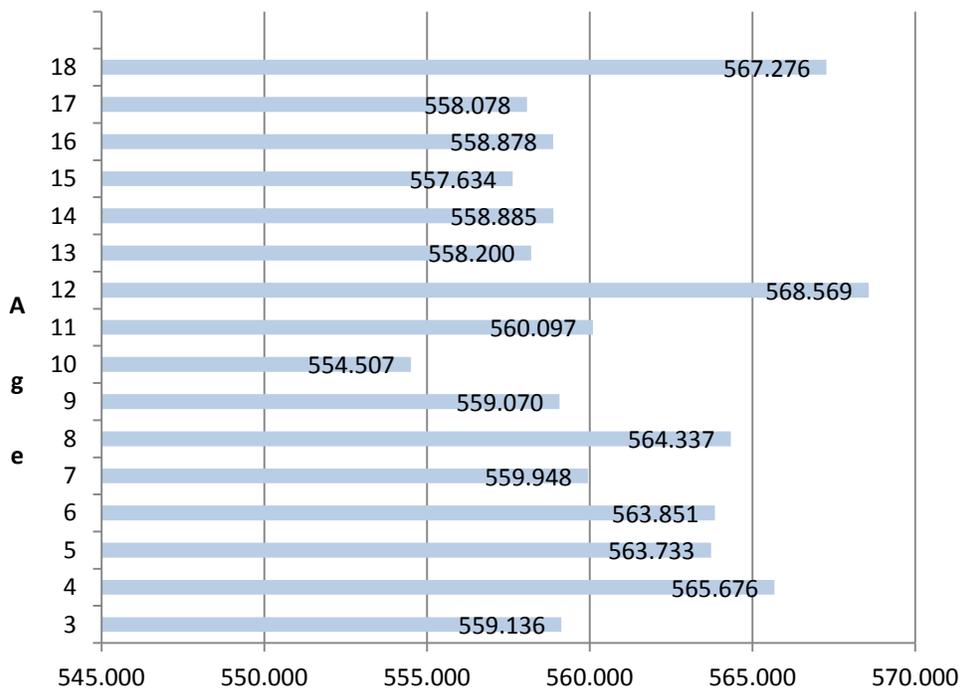
## 1.2 Children

Even though the general trend in Italy is that of an ageing population, children still constitute a very large group and there is a strong need throughout the country for accessible childcare and play infrastructures and activities.

According to the Italian Institute for Statistics (ISTAT), there are 7,293,385 young people aged 4-16 in Italy. 3,748,858 are males and 3,544,527 females.<sup>3</sup> In Sicily, there are 660,117 young people aged 4-16 (338,597 boys and 321,520 girls).<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1.2 gives us an overview of the distribution of young people aged 3-18 in Italy. As we can see, 4-, 8-, 12- and 18-year olds constitute the largest age groups.

*Figure 1.2 The distribution of children aged 3-18 in Italy (2013)*



Source: Istat, Italy 2013

<sup>3</sup> ISTAT, values refer to resident population on January 1st 2013, [www.demo.istat.it/pop2013/index.html](http://www.demo.istat.it/pop2013/index.html), consulted on 10/12/2013

<sup>4</sup> ISTAT, consulted on 12/12/2013

### 1.3 Employment indicators for men and women

In the third quarter of 2013, employment rates were 65.1% for men and 46.2% for women.<sup>5</sup> In the same timeframe, activity rates were 73.1% for men and 52.6% for women.<sup>6</sup>

There is an evident correlation in Italy between employment rates for women and the existence or not of childcare facilities. According to a study conducted in 2013, women with small children have 30% less chances of working compared with women with no children at all.<sup>7</sup> This is mainly due to the fact that there are very few public childcare and play facilities across the country. Mothers tend to rely very much on informal ties and on intergenerational solidarity (i.e. on grandparents) for help with keeping their children. In fact, only two every ten children managed to be enrolled in a public or private nursery.

In Sicily employment rates stood at 51.8% for men and 26.1% for women,<sup>8</sup> while activity rates stood at 63.6% for men and 33.6% for women.<sup>9</sup> The big difference between the national rate and the regional level for female employment and activity rates is also due to the fact that public nurseries and childcare facilities are much scarcer in Southern Italy than in the rest of the country.<sup>10</sup> 6% of children in Southern Italy are enrolled in a nursery school, while this percentage rises at 13% for the Centre of Italy and at 15% for Northern Italy.<sup>11</sup>

Across Italy mothers that would have liked to rely on childcare services but that were not able to do so, most frequently argued that (i) there was no availability for their children in nurseries (22% of interviewed cases), (ii) there was a lack of nurseries in their municipality (21% circa), or that (iii) nurseries' fees were too high (19%).<sup>12</sup> However, it is in Southern Italy that we find the highest percentage of mothers who report the absence of nursery schools in their municipality (34% of cases – against 15% of cases in Northern Italy).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> ISTAT, 2013, consulted on 10/12/13

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> CNEL - ISTAT, "Rapporto Bes 2013: il benessere equo e sostenibile in Italia", Chapter 3 *Lavoro e conciliazione dei tempi di vita*, March 2013, Rome, available at [http://www.istat.it/it/files/2013/03/3\\_lavoro-conciliazione.pdf](http://www.istat.it/it/files/2013/03/3_lavoro-conciliazione.pdf) retrieved on 13/12/2013.

<sup>8</sup> ISTAT, consulted on 12/12/2013

<sup>9</sup> ISTAT, consulted on 12/12/2013

<sup>10</sup> ISTAT, *Le strategie di conciliazione e le reti formali e informali di sostegno alle famiglie con figli piccoli*, Prati – Lo Conte – Talucci, in Seminario CNEL – ISTAT, 2nd December 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> ISTAT, *Le strategie di conciliazione e le reti formali e informali di sostegno alle famiglie con figli piccoli*, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit.

## 2. Playwork in Italy

“Playwork” as such does not exist in Italy. However, there are many kinds of settings in which children do and experience play. The most typical setting is the “*ludoteca*” (singular), “*ludoteche*” (plural), which in English literally means “toy library”. However, the translation is not very precise, as “*ludoteche*” have progressively acquired the meaning of “play” or “recreational” centres. Even though play can be experienced in many settings and situations by children in Italy, there is very little funding in this field and therefore most children play at home.

### 2.1 The right to play in Italy

According to the 6th Report of the “Convention on the Rights of the Child Group” (a network made up of different third sector bodies working to protect the rights of children and teenagers and promoting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Italy)<sup>14</sup>, the right to play is not very well assured for in Italy. Playwork activities have been carried out quite randomly throughout the country, but there’s a general lack of coordination of such initiatives. Play is often regarded as a luxury good and is not regulated in any way by national law. Also under a cultural point of view, play is not very much developed as it is often seen as functional to training, and it is often confused with free time and recreational activities. Moreover, no distinction is made between “play” and the “availability of games and toys”.

Also a study conducted by the Italian Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) on “Childhood and everyday life” depicts how play is not very much accounted for in the country. In fact, in the course of the week, 98% of children aged 3-10 play at home and 46% at other people’s homes. 25.5% of them play in courtyards while 38.4% in public parks. 16% play in parish spaces while 14% in fields. 6.4% of children play in non-trafficked roads.<sup>15</sup>

Also due to the lack of childcare and play facilities, 66.4% of children up to 13 years old are taken care of by their grandparents, 11.4% by other relatives, 6.8% by older brothers or sisters, 5.9% by non-remunerated persons and 4.3% by remunerated persons (see figure 2.1 below).<sup>16</sup>

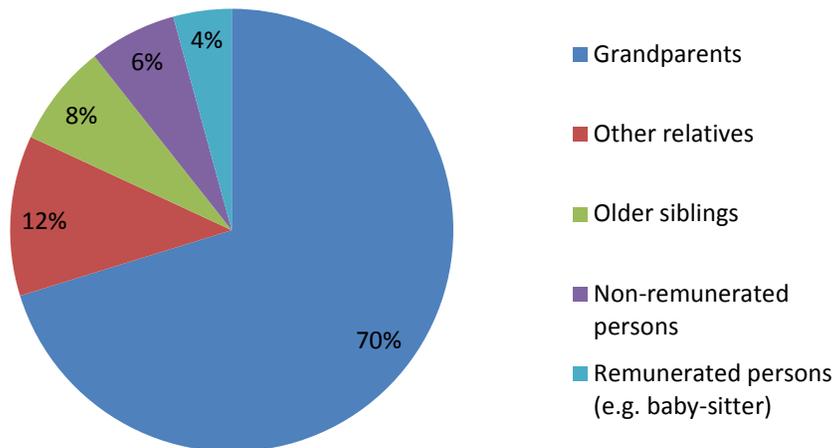
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<sup>14</sup> CRC Group, 6° Rapporto CRC di aggiornamento sul monitoraggio della Convenzione sui diritti dell’infanzia e dell’adolescenza in Italia. 2012 – 2013, available on <http://gruppocrc.net/>

<sup>15</sup> ISTAT, Infanzia e vita quotidiana, 2011 ([www.istat.it/it/archivio/45646](http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/45646)).

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit.

Figure 2.1 Persons taking care of children up to 13 years (%) (2001)



Source: Istat, 2011

In the field of sports, only 47% of children aged 3-5 practices sports, while 80% of those aged 6-17 practices some sport.<sup>17</sup>

This data shows how the main issue in the area of playwork in Italy is linked first of all to the concrete lack of services, facilities and play activities for children, rather than to the lack of trained volunteers or staff.

## 2.2 Settings where children play

There are several settings where children (could) play and where playwork volunteers (could) spend their time and energies in Italy. However, as mentioned before, these settings or activities receive very little public funding and are not numerically enough to satisfy the needs of the population.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> ISTAT, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Conversation with a stakeholder and toy library expert, held on 19/12/2013.

### 2.2.1 Ludoteche (Toy libraries)

“Ludoteche” are the most popular setting where play activities are to be found in Italy. The definition for these institutions, as provided by the Italian Association for Playbuses and Toy libraries is:

*“A space where boys and girls find time, space and games to play and socialize.”*<sup>19</sup>

This definition indicates how the English term “toy library” does not fully correspond to the term *ludoteca*, but it can be encompassed by it. According to “Ali per giocare”, the Italian Association of Toy libraries and Playbuses, 131 toy library staff reached 52,599 children in 2012.<sup>20</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that *ludoteche* are the main setting where children's right to play is guaranteed and the fact that a few local municipalities in the country have made them become a public service, they receive very little consideration at national level. The main obstacles to a fuller recognition are linked with the lack of economic resources, the lack of regulations at national level and the difficulties faced by the not-for-profit sector in running such centres in the long run.<sup>21</sup> According to an expert of the toy library sector in Italy, critical aspects of playwork and of *ludoteche* are the fact that these centres open and close at a very high rate and that their play offer is often inhomogeneous and quite improvised.<sup>22</sup> In order to address some of these issues, a National Charter of Italian toy libraries<sup>23</sup> has been subscribed by many actors involved in playwork. However, a national law regulating toy libraries remains yet to be put in place.

### 2.2.2 Playbuses

Starting at the end of the '90s, playbuses played a very important role in affirming the right to play especially in remote areas of Italy. It is worth mentioning that since 2007, a National Fair on Wandering Play (LudobusSi) has been established in the country. In 2012, at least 36

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<sup>19</sup> Ali per giocare, Associazione Italiana dei Ludobus e delle Ludoteche, [http://www.alipergiocare.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=11&Itemid=33](http://www.alipergiocare.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=11&Itemid=33), consulted on 16/12/2013.

<sup>20</sup> Ali per giocare, Associazione Italiana dei Ludobus e delle Ludoteche, [http://www.alipergiocare.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=53&Itemid=43](http://www.alipergiocare.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=53&Itemid=43), consulted on 16/12/2013

<sup>21</sup> CRC Group, 6° Rapporto CRC di aggiornamento sul monitoraggio della Convenzione sui diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza in Italia. 2012 – 2013, available at <http://gruppoCRC.net/>

<sup>22</sup> Conversation with a stakeholder and toy library expert, held on 19/12/2013.

<sup>23</sup> National Charter of Italian Toy libraries, available at <http://nuke.ludoteche.info/>

playbuses carried out playwork activities in 332 Italian municipalities, reaching out to 134,146 children and young people.<sup>24</sup>

### *2.2.3 Local play activities and fairs*

Play activities for children are also sponsored by local municipalities on special occasions, such as the 28th May (World Play Day) or the 20th of November (Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). To name a few, between 2012 and 2013 the city of Modena launched the campaign "The playing city"<sup>25</sup>, while Bologna had its "Children's city"<sup>26</sup> event and Naples organized a fair called "Play is culture"<sup>27</sup>.

Other settings where play activities for children are carried out include kindergardens, children centres, play rooms in hospitals, adventure playgrounds, playgrounds in malls, holiday play schemes, etc. However, it is not very easy to quantify them or estimate their outreach in the country.

## **2.3 Playwork industry needs**

The professional group of playworkers in Italy probably pertains to the labour market classification of "Operators for child monitoring and similar profiles".<sup>28</sup> This professional group includes: animateurs for summer camps for children, afterschool assistants, pre-school assistants, baby sitters, toy library staff and child centres staff.

According to forecasts on labour market trends, between 2010 and 2015 there will be a -4.7% decrease in the number of persons working in the area of "qualified professions in personal services and similar profiles", which also encompasses operators for child monitoring and similar profiles. In 2015 it is expected that there will be 413,224 people working in this particular field (20,491 less people than in 2010). But the trend for persons working with children should remain stable.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Italian Association of Playbuses and Toy Libraries "Ali per giocare", Playbuses and Toy Libraries activity data 2012, available at <http://www.alipergiocare.org>, retrieved on 17/12/2013.

<sup>25</sup> <http://istruzione.comune.modena.it/memo/Sezione.jsp?idSezione=2534>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.comune.bo.it/news/bologna-citt-delle-bambine-e-dei-bambini>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.cittadellascienza.it/notizie/giornata-mondiale-del-gioco-27-maggio-2012/>

<sup>28</sup> ISTAT, Classification of professions, Profession number 5.4.4.2.0 ("Sorveglianza di bambini e professioni assimilate"), corresponding to the ISCO-08 professional group of "child care workers and teachers' aides" (531), <http://cp2011.istat.it/>

<sup>29</sup> ISTAT, Indagine ISFOL – ISTAT sulle professioni, [http://professionioccupazione.isfol.it/scheda.php?id\\_menu=16&id=5.5.3.3.0&codice\\_3=5.5.3&allegato=medio\\_ter](http://professionioccupazione.isfol.it/scheda.php?id_menu=16&id=5.5.3.3.0&codice_3=5.5.3&allegato=medio_ter)

### 3. Training for volunteers in Italy

Apart from the general lack of play activities and organizations, as the report on the application of art. 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Italy states, "teachers, educators and playworkers lack technical and ludic training, and, apart from some specific pilot projects, most of these persons are not obliged to "learn how to play"<sup>30</sup>.

#### 3.1 What kind of training is available for playworkers?

Training for playworkers is very scarce. The Italian Toy Library and Playbus Association has been organizing training courses for toy library amateurs and playbus staff in the past few years. In November 2013 the association organized the third training course for toy library amateurs.<sup>31</sup> The 4-day training embraced the following areas:

- 1) Brief history of toy libraries ("ludoteche") in Italy;
- 2) Play in Italy;
- 3) The profession of playworkers ("ludotecari");
- 4) Toy libraries: planning and organising space and time;
- 5) How toys and games are to be organized;
- 6) Practical workshops;
- 7) Toy libraries and the outside world.

Moreover, the same organization runs a course for playbus staff on a yearly basis.<sup>32</sup> Other courses on children and play are organized by the "Istituto degli Innocenti" in Florence (Italy).<sup>33</sup>

#### 3.2 Why do we need volunteers in the playwork sector?

The playwork sector in Italy is mainly made up of private toy libraries. As such, these organisations would probably welcome volunteers or trainees within their staff. With regards to the not-for-profit playwork sector, as we mentioned above, there are very few public-funded

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[mine 5.5.3 Isfol-Irs Italia 2015.pdf&directory=mediotermines\\_occupazione\\_2015\\_Italia](#) , consulted on 19/12/2013

<sup>30</sup> CRC Group, 6° Rapporto CRC di aggiornamento sul monitoraggio della Convenzione sui diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza in Italia. 2012 – 2013, available on <http://gruppocrc.net/>

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.alipergiocare.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=250](http://www.alipergiocare.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=250)

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.alipergiocare.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=232&Itemid=100](http://www.alipergiocare.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=232&Itemid=100)

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[http://www.formarsi.istitutodegliinnocenti.it/pr\\_dettaglio.jsf;jsessionid=9D9B1694A5F051C235F18FBC66DA3F39?i\\_dProg=124](http://www.formarsi.istitutodegliinnocenti.it/pr_dettaglio.jsf;jsessionid=9D9B1694A5F051C235F18FBC66DA3F39?i_dProg=124)

play centres or toy libraries. For this reason, many of these centres rely almost entirely on the work of volunteers, who are therefore indispensable.

### **3.3 Where can we find volunteers in playwork? What activities do they undertake?**

Volunteers in playwork can be found in toy libraries, kindergardens, afterschool clubs, voluntary organisations for migrants and migrant children, adventure playgrounds, local associations and parks. The work they undertake varies greatly. However, most volunteers carry out indoor and outdoor play activities, as well as drawing and dancing. More information on this subject will be gathered after the interviews with volunteers and employers will take place.

### **3.4 What are volunteers' training needs?**

Answers to this question will be provided (or have been provided) by volunteers and employers during interviews. However, according to a national survey on professions<sup>34</sup>, the most relevant areas of knowledge for people working in the childcare sector are: psychology, care for clients and persons principles, Italian language, training and education principles, sociology and anthropology. The study also identified the necessary skills for working with children. Some of these are: social perceptions, speaking skills, service orientation, teamwork, active listening, critical sense, time management, teaching skills and active learning.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The main difficulty faced by the Italian "playwork" sector is that there is a general lack of resources supporting childcare centres and play activities. The right to play in Italy is not very well secured for and projects supporting children's play are very rare.

Children play very often in their homes and lack play opportunities outdoors with specifically trained staff. Most of the time, children play with their grandparents, parents and siblings. A training course such as "Volunteers in Play" could be very useful in Italy and could help sustain families in expanding play opportunities for their children.

However, it would be advisable to think carefully about which groups to include as beneficiaries for the training course. There is indeed a very vast population of volunteers that

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<sup>34</sup> ISTAT, Indagine ISFOL – ISTAT sulle professioni,  
[http://professionioccupazione.isfol.it/scheda.php?id\\_menu=16&id=5.5.3.3.0&codice\\_3=5.5.3&allegato=medio\\_termine\\_5.5.3\\_Isfol-Irs\\_Italia\\_2015.pdf&directory=mediotermin\\_occupazione\\_2015\\_Italia](http://professionioccupazione.isfol.it/scheda.php?id_menu=16&id=5.5.3.3.0&codice_3=5.5.3&allegato=medio_termine_5.5.3_Isfol-Irs_Italia_2015.pdf&directory=mediotermin_occupazione_2015_Italia)

supports not-for-profit organisations working with children. These volunteers would indeed benefit from a training course round and about play with children, and so would women returners, young graduates interested in working with children or social workers. However, as it is very difficult that a volunteering experience in this sector might turn into a paid job, many potential participants would see the term "volunteer" in a negative way.

On the other hand, since most play settings for children are private, and might be willing to hire trained entries, it's possible that the "Volunteers in Play" course may indeed be useful for trainees or volunteers involved in such settings, and really constitute a stepping stone into working with children.

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