

Version 1.0

REVIEW OF LOCAL, REGIONAL AND/OR NATIONAL POLICIES TO TACKLES EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING – [ITALY]

# Reduce early school leaving and underachievement



# Summary

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this Report was to reconstruct a national picture of the policies implemented in Italy to tackle underachievement in studies and early leaving of education and training, shedding light on the archipelago of specific publicly financed interventions and their management.

The analysis of public policies was conducted taking into account the international and national literature on educational policies in Italy and on the basis of the identification of some dimensions considered relevant, including the European classification into prevention, contrast and compensation measures, the type of funding (European, national and regional), the connection between centralized and local policy levels, and the relevance of educational institutions experience and expertise in combating early leaving of education and training. All the information collected, for each policy action examined in the desk phase and for general policy analysis, was included in a structure prepared ad hoc for the SCIREARLY project, subsequently used for the delivery of the findings.

In terms of methodology, research paths were developed along two lines: an on-desk analysis of strategic documentation on combating early leaving of education and training (legislative/regulatory acts, guidelines, calls and projects aimed at combating early leaving of education and training in Italy) and an on field analysis, based on the conduct of qualitative interviews with contact persons of CESIE and privileged witnesses (mainly education stakeholders and implementers of interventions), aimed at clarifying discordant information and data acquired and at integrating and enriching the wealth of information collected.

### 1.1 Country context - Education and training system

The Italian educational and training system is organized based on the principles of subsidiarity and autonomy of educational institutions. The State has exclusive legislative competence for general regulation about education (in it.: *norme generali sull'istruzione*) and for determining the minimum levels of performance that must be guaranteed throughout the national territory. Furthermore, the State defines the fundamental principles that the Regions must respect in the exercise of their specific competences.

The Regions have concurrent legislative authority in the field of education and exclusive authority in the field of vocational education and training.

Schools are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Merit, with different arrangements based on their legal status (state public schools, accredited private schools, private schools). Schools have didactic, organizational, research, experimentation, and development autonomy.

In this policy report it was therefore necessary to examine the legislation on education and training issued not only at a national level but also at a regional level (here limited to the Sicily Region alone).

The Italian education and training system is fundamentally structured into three Education cycles: Primary education, Secondary education, and Higher Education. There is also a non-compulsory integrated Early Childhood Education system that lasts a total of 6 years.

### 1.1.1 Integrated 0-6 System<sup>1</sup> (ISCED 0<sup>2</sup>)

The Integrated Education and Instruction System is aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for all children, from birth to 6 years old, to develop their potential in relationships, autonomy, creativity, and learning, in order to overcome inequalities, territorial, economic, ethnic, and cultural barriers.

It is structured into a series of pathways, including:

- **Early Childhood Education services**, managed by Local Authorities, either directly or through agreements with other public entities or private entities, further structured as follows:
  - **Nurseries and Micro-nurseries (in it.: *Nidi e micronidi*)**, which accommodate children between 3 and 36 months and have different opening hours, capacity, functioning methods, and fee structures from one municipality to another (typically providing meals and rest);
  - **”Spring” Sections (in it.: *Sezioni primavera*)**, which accommodate children between 24 and 36 months and are associated with state or accredited preschools or nurseries;
  - **Integrative Services**, with highly flexible organization and diverse functioning methods. They can be categorized as follows:
    - Play Spaces for children aged 12 to 36 months, without meal service, with flexible attendance up to a maximum of 5 hours per day;
    - Centers for Children and Families, accommodating infants along with an accompanying adult from the early months of life, without meal service, with flexible attendance;
    - Educational Services in a Home-based Context for a limited number of children aged 3 to 36 months.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sistema integrato 0-6*. (n.d.). Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito - Miur. <https://www.istruzione.it/sistema-integrato-06>

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO. (2012). *International Standard Classification of Education - ISCED 2011*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:International\\_standard\\_classification\\_of\\_education\\_\(ISCED\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:International_standard_classification_of_education_(ISCED))

- **Preschool (in it.: *Scuola dell'Infanzia*)** (from 3 to 6 years), which can be state-run or accredited and managed by public or private entities. Attendance at state preschool is free; families are responsible for meal costs and any services requested individually (such as school bus, before-school care, extended hours).

The 0-6 system is not compulsory in Italy. The offer of Early Childhood Education facilities is regulated by the Region, which set standards for structures, services, human resources, access and quality. Facilities can be public or private and usually they stay open for 5 days a week and 6 or 8 hours per day from September to June.

Access to public structures – which in Italy cover only the 49,1% of childcare provision – is by entering a ranked list. Seats are reserved for children who enrolled in the previous years. Extra places are given considering family situation – measured by the Equivalent Financial Position Indicator (ISEE)<sup>3</sup> which takes into account income, wealth and family composition, presence of social disadvantage, handicap, children being in alternative care or living with a lone parent (the parent who: has recognized the child, is widow/widower, is related to a detainee, holds parental responsibility).

The Italian Early Childhood Education system meets the needs of only a very small proportion of children: in 2019/2020 the coverage (defined as the number of places in Early Childhood Education services per 100 resident children under the age of 3) was only 27,2%.<sup>4</sup>

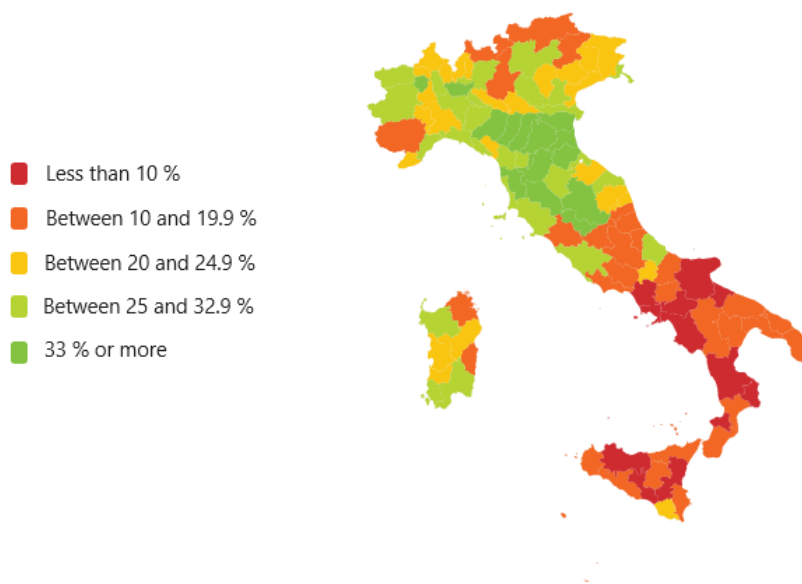


Figure 1 - ECEC places per 100 residents 0-2 years, [Source: openpolis - Con i Bambini - elaboration on Istat data, 2023]

<sup>3</sup> How to fill in the DSU and request the ISEE. (n.d.). Sito ufficiale di INPS (Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale). <https://www.inps.it/en/en.information-english.income-and-assets.isee-equivalent-economic-situation-indicator-how-to-fill-in-the-dsu-and-request-the-isee.html>

<sup>4</sup> Istat. (2022). *Offerta di nidi e servizi integrativi per la prima infanzia | Anno educativo 2020/2021* (Statistiche Report). <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2022/10/report-asili-nido-2020-2021.pdf>

In terms of the availability of services on the territory, there are still very large gaps to the detriment of households residing in the South and in smaller municipalities. In Sicily there is little more than one place for every 10 children.

So, Italy still does not even reach the original European target set in 2002<sup>5</sup> of providing childcare to at least 33% of children under 3 years of age by 2010 and set by Legislative Decree 65/2017<sup>6</sup>. After the Covid-19 emergency, the target was updated to 45%.

When turning towards private facilities (covering 50,9% of childcare provision), the average out-of-pocket monthly fee may reach range from 250 € to 400 € per month that, considering 10 months of use of the service, bring the annual cost per family to more than € 3000 (in Sicily they are 30% more expensive than rest of Italy). Because of the high costs, families are likely to become in default of payment, and in fact in 2016 19% of families left private childcare facilities, withdrawing their children before the end of the educational year or after only 3 months of attendance.

The scarcity of childcare for young children is mainly a reflection of the structure of the Italian care regime, which relies on a minimal supply of services, cultural factors as family solidarity and gender division of labour, and financial transfers meant only for to those most in need. This situation contributes to disparities between the rich and poor, not only because poorer families cannot afford the cost of childcare but also because the cost serves as a disincentive for mothers to job-hunting, keep their job or re-enter education or training.

It must be specified here that facilities continue to be in short supply despite funding allocations (the latest linked to the Next Generation Europe EU initiative – in Italy implemented through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan – PNRR 'Italia Domani'). This happens because the allocations finance the facilities but not the activities: for many regions in financial distress, it is not worthwhile to participate in tenders for facilities because they would lack resources for ordinary and extraordinary maintenance as well as for the selection, training and remuneration of staff.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission. (2013). *Barcelona objectives - The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2838/43161>

<sup>6</sup> Istituzione del sistema integrato di educazione e di istruzione dalla nascita sino a sei anni, a norma dell'articolo 1, commi 180 e 181, lettera e), della legge 13 luglio 2015, n. 107., Decreto Legislativo No. 65 (2017, May 16) (Italia). Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana, 195. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/05/16/17G00073/sg>

<sup>7</sup> *Un aggiornamento sulla situazione degli asili nido in Italia* | Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. (n.d.). Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. <https://osservatoriocpi.unicatt.it/ocpi-pubblicazioni-un-aggiornamento-sulla-situazione-degli-asili-nido-in-italia>

### 1.1.2 First Cycle of Education (ISCED 1 and 2<sup>8</sup>)

It covers the first 8 years of compulsory education.

- **ISCED 1 - Primary School (previously called Elementary School) (in it.: *Scuola Primaria*):** Children start formal education at the age of 6 (or 5 and a half) at Primary School – lasting 5 years – whose aim is to provide pupils with basic learning and the basic tools of active citizenship. Law 169 of 2008 established that the educational offering of primary schools could be structured as a single teacher system of 24 hours or divided into different hourly proposals, such as 27 hours, 30 hours, and 40 hours, including lunch and after-lunch activities. As for the educational aspect, the main subjects introduced to students are: Italian language, foreign language, mathematics, science, history, and geography.
- **ISCED 2 – First Grade or Lower Secondary School (in it.: *Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado*)** (previously called Middle School, in it: *Scuola Media*): Children attend Lower Secondary School for 3 years till they are 14, where they acquire the fundamental knowledge and skills to develop basic cultural competence. Possible hourly proposals within the educational offering include a standard 36-hour schedule or an extended 40-hour schedule. Differences in hours correspond to various subjects, including Italian, history, geography, literary subjects, mathematics, sciences, technology, English, second language, art, physical education, music, and (catholic) religion. At the end of the Lower Secondary School they have to be admitted and pass a State examination in order to receive the first-cycle State leaving certificate (in it.: *Diploma di licenza conclusiva del primo ciclo di istruzione*) (EQF level 1<sup>9</sup>), enabling access to the second cycle of education.

### 1.1.3 Second Cycle of Education (ISCED 3)

Once out of the first cycle of education, students attend Upper Secondary School (in it.: *Scuola Secondaria di Secondo Grado*). Teachers formulate a formal track recommendation at the end of Lower Secondary School, which is not binding. Students have the opportunity to choose between:

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<sup>8</sup> UNESCO. (2012). *International Standard Classification of Education - ISCED 2011*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:International\\_standard\\_classification\\_of\\_education\\_\(ISCED\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:International_standard_classification_of_education_(ISCED))

<sup>9</sup> *The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) | Europass*. (n.d.). Europass | European Union. <https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-tools/european-qualifications-framework?langcode=en>



- **Licei**<sup>10 11</sup>: *Licei* provide 5-years General upper secondary education programmes directed at students aged 14 to 19. They are developed in two two-year periods (in it.: *biennii*) and in a fifth year that completes the subject pathway. Students may choose among the following fields of studies: Artistic, Classical, Linguistic, Music and dance, Scientific, Scientific – applied sciences option, Scientific – sports option, Humanities, Humanities – economic and social option. The routes realise the educational, cultural and professional profile of the student specialising in the field of studies. General education is mostly academic in nature, with less attention devoted to technical-practical education. Work experiences have been recently included in curricula but they are a residual part of the educational programme. Students who pass the final State examination receive a Diploma (in it.: *Diploma Liceale*) (EQF level 4<sup>12</sup>), recognised as entrance qualification for university and upper post-secondary vocational education and a basic step for access to the labour market.
- **Technical Schools (in it.: *Istituti tecnici*)**: Technical and vocational institutes offer 5-years courses aimed to provide students with competences specific of a professional sector. Organisation and student assessment and final evaluation follow mostly the same procedures as General education. Students who pass the final State examination receive a technical education diploma (in it.: *Diploma di istruzione tecnica*) or a vocational education diploma (in it.: *Diploma di istruzione professionale*) (EQF level 4).
- **Vocational Schools (in it.: *Istituti professionali*)**: Regional Vocational Education and Training is addressed to 14/17-year olds who wish to enter the labour market after a short period of training, and it is organised and run by private or public vocational training agencies and upper secondary vocational institutes accredited by the Regions in agreement with the State (thus being different from a Region to another). These organisations issue a vocational qualification for a 3-year course

<sup>10</sup> lycèon (or lycius) adj. [from Gr. *Λύκειος* or *Λύκιος*, Latin *lycēus* or *lycius*]. - In Greek mythology, an epithet of Apollo, the origin of which is variously explained by ancients and moderns: either by linking it to the fact that Apollo was believed to have exterminated wolves (*λύκος*), or to the fact that Apollo, immediately after his birth, was supposedly transported by his mother to Lycia (*Λυκία*), or finally, assuming Apollo to be a solar deity, by linking it to the root *λευκ-*, *λυκ-* 'whiteness, light'. In ancient Greece near Athens there was a sanctuary of Apollo Lyceum and where Aristotle had a school in which he taught philosophy. Later the term generally designated public places where literary and philosophical exercises were held, and eventually became by extension the name of high schools.

<sup>11</sup> *Licei* are also commonly referred to as “High Schools”. However, for the purpose of this publication, the author prefers to depart from this definition. Students self-select into the different types of Upper Secondary education (and into early leaving of education) on the basis of their previous achievements and their close family members' (mainly parents or guardians) occupation and educational qualification. This mechanism leads to a segmentation of the student population (e.g. between *Licei* and Technical or Vocational schools) strongly correlated with the social classes of origin: upper class students are strongly overrepresented in the academic track of *Licei*, whose students display much higher rates of university enrolment to and completion of higher education than students attending the other two tracks. Conversely, working class, immigrant, low-performing students are significantly overrepresented in the vocational track and, to a lesser extent, in the technical track. This generates, in the common perception, two channels of education, one league A and the other league B. This misperception has meant that for a long time only the *Licei* were called “High Schools”, even though both Technical and Vocational Schools fall under Upper Secondary Education.

<sup>12</sup> *The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) | Europass*. (n.d.). Europass | European Union. <https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-tools/european-qualifications-framework?langcode=en>

(EQF level 3<sup>13</sup>) or a vocational diploma for a 4-year course (EQF level 4) with direct access to higher technical education.

Students have very limited choice regarding school subjects once they have chosen a track. By the fifth year, students are expected to have fully developed the knowledge, competences and skills acquired in the first cycle of education and reached the specific learning objectives for each branch of specialist study. The final evaluation consists in a State examination (in it.: *Esame di Stato* or *Esame di maturità*) which foresees written and oral tests (verifying proficiency in main language, testing of the main subjects of the programme and knowledge of the course programmes).

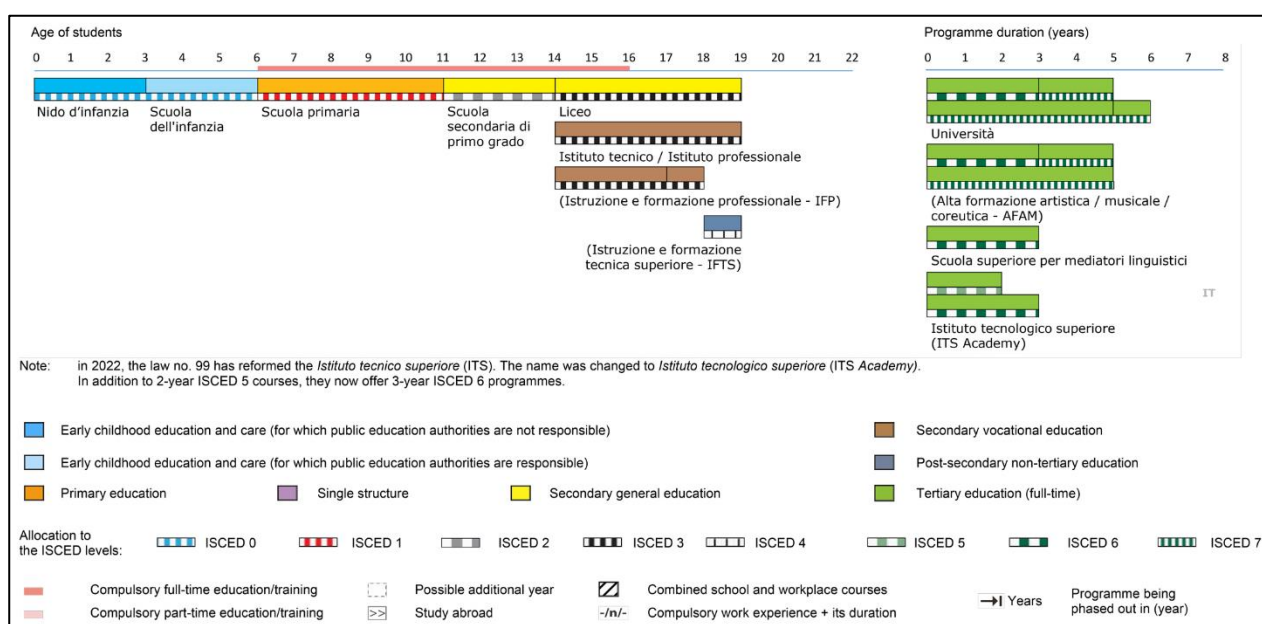


Figure 2 - Structure of the national education system (Source: Eurydice, 2023)

The education system in Italy involves not only state schools but also encompasses private schools. Following the enactment of Law 62 of 2000<sup>14</sup>, the private school sector has been reorganized into an **integrated public system**. As a result, every student has the choice to enroll in either a state school or a private school. This arrangement ensures that within the integrated system, students have the opportunity to attain the academic qualification associated with their chosen field of study.

<sup>13</sup> *The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) | Europass.* (n.d.). Europass | European Union. <https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-tools/european-qualifications-framework?langcode=en>

<sup>14</sup> Norme per la parità scolastica e disposizioni sul diritto allo studio e all'istruzione, Legge No. 62 (2000, March 21) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 67. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2000/03/21/000G0099/sg>

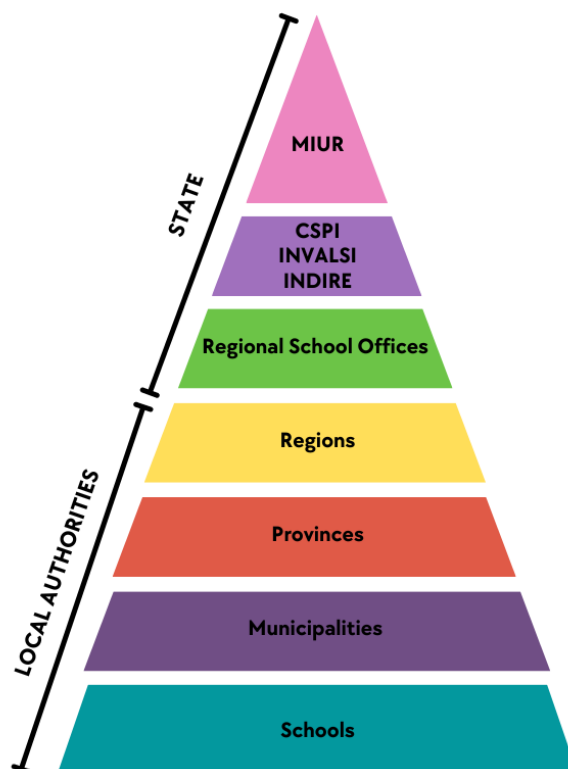


Figure 3 - Pyramid of Education Governance in Italy (developed by CESIE based on review, 2023)

## 1.2 Country context - Governance system

The Italian Governance system for Education and training can be seen as a pyramid that starts from the state and reaches down to the territory, thus extending to the citizens. Because of the decentralisation system, significant differences emerge in terms of operating rules of education and training systems: the ways in which education and training are provided varies from region to region.

### 1.2.1 Ministry of Education and Merit (MIUR)

The functions and responsibilities pertaining to the State in the field of education are attributed to the Ministry of Education and Merit. The activity of the Ministry is primarily directed towards:

- Defining regulations, curricula, national guidelines, and guidelines as a framework for the curricular design of educational institutions within the national education and training system.
- Managing the overall organization of school education, legal status of school personnel, training of school administrators, teaching and educational staff, as well as administrative, technical, and support staff.
- Establishing criteria and parameters for implementing social interventions in schools, supporting disadvantaged areas for territorial balance in the quality of educational services.

- Conducting research and experimentation for functional innovations in response to educational needs.
- Recognizing academic qualifications and certifications at the European and international levels, and implementing education policies common to European Union countries.
- Providing guidelines for the National Evaluation System.
- Identifying objectives, standards, and educational pathways for Higher Education and advanced technical training, and managing relationships with regional educational systems.
- Setting guidelines for private schools and non-state educational institutions and courses.
- Overseeing activities related to student and parent associations.
- Ensuring the right to education and family services, promoting student status, study and career guidance.
- Managing international relations, both bilaterally and multilaterally, and promoting the internationalization of the educational and training system.

The Ministry is organized into two Departments (per Prime Minister's Decree (DPCM) dated September 30, 2020, No. 166<sup>15</sup>), with their Heads responsible for coordination, management, and oversight of the general management offices within each department. They are also accountable for achieving results in alignment with the Minister's directives:

- Department for the Educational System of Education and Training, consisting of 4 General Management Offices:
  - a. General Directorate for interventions in school construction, management of structural funds for education, and digital innovation.
  - b. General Directorate for school regulations and evaluation of the national education system.
  - c. General Directorate for school personnel.
  - d. General Directorate for student affairs, integration, and participation.
- Department for Human, Financial, and Instrumental Resources, consisting of 3 General Management Offices:
  - a. General Directorate for human and financial resources.
  - b. General Directorate for information systems and statistics.
  - c. General Directorate for organizational design, administrative process innovation, communication, and contracts.

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<sup>15</sup> Regolamento concernente l'organizzazione del Ministero dell'istruzione, Decreto No. 166 (2020, December 14) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 309. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/12/14/20G00178/sg>

### 1.2.2 Higher Council for Public Education (CSPI)

The Higher Council for Public Education (in it.: *Consiglio Superiore della Pubblica Istruzione – CSPI*) is the guaranteeing body for the unity of the national education system and provides technical and scientific support for the exercise of Ministry's functions. It consists of 36 members, half of whom are elected from among teachers, school administrators, and administrative staff, while the other half is appointed by the Minister.

It assists the Minister in the planning and supervision of educational policies by formulating proposals and issuing obligatory but not binding proposals on:

- the guidelines for defining school personnel policies.
- directives from the Minister of Education and Merit regarding the evaluation of the education system.
- the objectives, directions, and standards of the education system established at the national level, as well as the national portion of curricula.
- the overall organization of education.

### 1.2.3 National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (INVALSI)

The National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (in it.: *Istituto Nazionale per la VALutazione del Sistema educativo di Istruzione e di formazione – INVALSI*)<sup>16</sup> is a research institute with legal public status. INVALSI is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Merit, which defines strategic priorities that the Institute considers when planning its activities.

The institute manages the overall evaluation of the Italian school system. Since its establishment in 1999, it covers the tasks carried out by the former Observatory on Early leaving of education and training.

### 1.2.4 National Institute for Documentation, Innovation, and Educational Research (Indire)

The National Institute for Documentation, Innovation, and Educational Research (in it.: *Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa – Indire*) is an institution overseen by the Ministry of Education and Merit, specializing particularly in educational research. It is MIUR's main institute for education research and innovation.

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<sup>16</sup> The INVALSI assessment has always had little support among teachers for various aspects, including the use of tests that are the same for the entire peninsula and for all schools, despite the fact that it represents an assessment system that is part of a European reference framework, which sees assessment in its various forms (from pupils to teachers, passing through the school institution) as one of the necessary tools for the development of the school system.

Besides being a part of the national evaluation system, INDIRE conducts research and documentation activities in education and the use of technology for in-service training of school personnel. A specific task of the Institute within the National Evaluation System is to support schools in their process of improvement and educational innovation. Furthermore, Indire develops online learning environments for newly appointed teachers in their roles.

### 1.2.5 Regional School Offices

The Regional School Offices are peripheral branches of the Ministry of Education and Merit. They are either at the level of general management or, depending on the student population of the respective region, at a non-general level. Typically, the Regional School Office is organized both functionally and territorially, with offices at the provincial level (Territorial Areas). They have the following responsibilities:

- Monitors compliance with general education regulations and essential performance levels, the implementation of school regulations, effectiveness levels of educational actions, and adherence to planned standards.
- Implements national policies for students within their territorial competence.
- Handles administrative and accounting management of general, contractual, and conventional activities common to regional administrative offices.
- Activates national educational policies on the territory, supporting organizational, educational, and research flexibility of educational institutions, and integrates its actions with municipalities, provinces, and the region.
- Promotes identification of educational needs and development of corresponding offerings in collaboration with the region and local authorities; manages relationships with regional administration and local entities for integrated educational offerings, adult education, as well as higher technical education and school-work relationships within its state competence.
- Exerts supervision over non-state private and non-private schools, as well as foreign schools in Italy.
- Conducts verification and surveillance activities to assess the efficiency of educational institution activities.
- Evaluates the degree of implementation of the educational offer plan.
- Allocates personnel resources to educational and instructional institutions and exercises all competences, including union relations, not assigned to educational institutions or reserved for the Central Administration.
- Ensures information dissemination; exercises authorities and assumes passive legitimacy in relevant judgments concerning disputes involving school personnel; provides support to state education and training institutions, in coordination with the General Directorate of Human and Financial Resources, regarding fund allocation to these institutions.
- Also handles activities related to procedures for criminal, administrative-accounting, and disciplinary responsibilities of administrative personnel in service at the Regional School Office, excluding first-tier managers.

### 1.2.6 Regions

Italy is organised into 20 regions, which work with the central state on most issues related to education through the State-Regions Conference (it.: *Conferenza Stato-Regioni*). Article 117 of the Italian Constitution<sup>17</sup> defines the division of legislative powers between the central State and the Regions allowing them to define and regulate key education issues within their territories. This has substantial implications for the organization, management, and regulation of the education system. Administrative tasks of the Regions include:

- Planning and programming of educational and vocational training offerings within their territory, tailoring educational policies to local and regional needs. Regions may have the authority to influence the definition of curricula and educational programs, adapting them to cultural, linguistic, and territorial specificities. This can result in variations in the educational content taught in schools at the regional level.
- Regional planning of the school network based on provincial plans, coordinating with the programming mentioned in the first point.
- Division of the regional territory into functional areas for enhancing the educational offering, considering proposals from relevant local entities.
- Establishing the school calendar.
- Providing financial contributions to non-state schools.
- Initiatives and promotional activities within the scope of conferred functions.

### 1.2.7 Provincial School Offices

In Sicily, the regional legislature, by Regional Law No. 8 of 24 March 2014<sup>18</sup> and the subsequent Regional Law No. 15 of 4 August 2015<sup>19</sup>, abolished the regional provinces. However, the reform has never been fully implemented and Provinces have kept some of their competencies. In Education, they are responsible in providing buildings but also for upper secondary schools. Administrative tasks of provinces in relation to upper secondary education institutions include:

- Establishment, aggregation, merger, and closure of schools in line with planning tools.
- Development of plans for organizing the network of educational institutions.

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<sup>17</sup> *Constitution of the Italian Republic*. (n.d.). Homepage | Senato della Repubblica. [https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione\\_inglese.pdf](https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Istituzione dei liberi Consorzi comunali e delle Città metropolitane, Legge regionale No. 8 (2014, April 26) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana, 3a Serie Speciale - Regioni* (17). <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/regioni/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2014-04-26&atto.codiceRedazionale=14R00164>

<sup>19</sup> Disposizioni in materia di liberi Consorzi comunali e Città metropolitane, Legge regionale No. 15 (2015, August 7) (Italia). *Gazzetta ufficiale della Regione Siciliana*, 32. <http://www.gurs.regione.sicilia.it/Gazzette/g15-32o/g15-32o.pdf>



- Organizational support services for education for students with disabilities or in disadvantaged situations.
- Plan for the utilization of buildings and equipment, in coordination with educational institutions.
- Suspension of classes in severe and urgent cases.
- Initiatives and promotional activities within the scope of conferred functions.
- Establishment, oversight, and supervision, including dissolution, of school collegial bodies at the territorial level.

### 1.2.8 Municipalities

Municipalities work in collaboration with regional and national education authorities to implement educational policies and ensure alignment with broader educational goals.

Administrative tasks of municipalities include:

- Similar responsibilities as provinces, but pertaining to the first cycle of education.
- Allocation of Resources, including personnel and funding, to support local educational institutions.
- Early Childhood Education: Municipalities often manage and fund preschools.
- Adult education.
- Integrated actions for school and career guidance: after-school programs, extracurricular activities, and recreational services to complement formal education and support working parents or guardians; cultural and educational events, workshops, and initiatives to promote learning and community engagement.
- Initiatives aimed at achieving equal educational opportunities. Municipalities provide support and services for students with disabilities or special needs, including organizing individualized education plans and providing necessary accommodations.
- Integrated actions for preventing early leaving of education and promoting health education.
- Maintenance and upkeep of school buildings, ensuring a safe and conducive learning environment for students.
- School Transportation: Municipalities may be responsible for arranging school transportation services to ensure that students can safely travel to and from school.

### 1.2.9 Schools



Schools from pre-primary to secondary level have an autonomy within the general objectives and standards set by the Ministry<sup>20</sup>. This autonomy is defined as ‘functional’ meaning that many activities and functions that were previously carried out by the peripheral levels have been attributed to the educational institutions. Each school has the ability to organize itself in terms of teaching, organization, administration, and decision-making, leading to differentiated approaches from one school to another. Plus, with functional autonomy, educational institutions can exercise ‘private law’ capacities, i.e. they have a real legal personality and also participate together with other public bodies in the pursuit of public interests. Schools have a school director (it.: *Dirigente Scolastico*), a director of general and administrative services (it.: *Direttore/Direttrice dei Servizi Generali e Amministrativi – DSGA*) and several committees and boards. Students and parents (or guardians) are also represented in the school system.

Different aspects of this autonomy include:

- **Teaching Autonomy:** Schools make didactic choices within class councils and teaching boards, pursuing the general education system's objectives while adapting them to their specific context, thus organising themselves independently of other schools. This autonomy respects the constitutional principle of teaching and educational freedom, allowing families to choose an educational offer and approach that suits their preferences, since schools create their own educational offerings. This teaching autonomy is aimed mainly at ensuring that each student achieves their own personal educational success.
- **Organizational Autonomy:** Schools can organize themselves to achieve objectives and goals, structuring their educational offerings in terms of flexibility, diversification, efficiency, and effectiveness. Depending on their specific needs, context, available resources, and educational choices made within their respective collegial bodies, schools can autonomously organize themselves.
- **Research, Experimentation, and Development Autonomy:** Each school has the opportunity to innovate and experiment, contributing to the educational and didactic debate within the country. However, this autonomy has often been sacrificed or underutilized, as the trend in recent decades has leaned toward top-down reforms rather than bottom-up experimentation.
- **Administrative and Accounting Autonomy:** Schools manage functions that were historically handled by central and peripheral administrations, including administrative and accounting tasks. This aspect has faced difficulties, particularly due to a lack of training and appropriate staffing. Investment in training and staffing is crucial for effective and efficient administration.

School autonomy does not concern either the expansion of school buildings, premises and related equipment, or related maintenance operations, including safety protection measures: nursery and first-cycle school buildings are Municipalities’ property, while secondary schools

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<sup>20</sup> Regolamento recante norme in materia di autonomia delle istituzioni scolastiche, ai sensi dell'art. 21 della legge 15 marzo 1997, n. 59, Decreto No.275 (1999, August 10) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 186. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1999/08/10/099G0339/sg>

belong to the Provinces. School autonomy does not concern the recruitment of the school director, which is done by competitive examination, nor the recruitment of teachers, which is done through different rankings.

The autonomy of Italian schools, on the other hand, concerns operating expenses, including the acquisition of computer equipment, following specific procedures on public procurement.

## 2.0 POLICY/POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

### 2.1 Policies - Compulsory Education

The principle of compulsory education was outlined in **Article 34 of the Italian Constitution**<sup>21</sup> and represents a fundamental element in the country's legal framework. The founding fathers demonstrated extraordinary vision by foreseeing a compulsory education of at least 8 years. This measure aimed to ensure that every citizen had access to a level of education that provided a solid foundation for active participation in society and the job market. This provision reflected their deep recognition of the crucial role of education in reducing inequalities, promoting equal opportunities, and fostering cultural and economic evolution.

In the following decades, compulsory education has been expanded beyond the initially established 8 years. This reflects a proactive response to the changing dynamics of modern society and the complexities of the global economy. Policymakers and educators recognize that a more extended period of compulsory education better equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, critical thinking abilities, and adaptability necessary to navigate the complexities of contemporary life in an increasingly interconnected world and contribute effectively to the nation's economic growth and cultural advancement.

Furthermore, increased compulsory education aligns with efforts to address the phenomenon of early leaving of education, the persistent inequalities and improve social mobility.

Main reforms over the years were:

#### Law 20 January 1999, No. 9<sup>22</sup>

- **Level:** National Law.
- **Year of Implementation:** 1999.
- **Fundamental Principles:** It aims to extend compulsory education lengthening the duration of mandatory schooling from 8 to 10 years, obliging children in Italy to attend school from elementary school (primary school), through middle school (lower secondary education), up to additional two years of compulsory Upper Secondary education. This change was introduced to ensure a stronger educational foundation for young students and to promote access to education for a longer period of time.

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<sup>21</sup> *Constitution of the Italian Republic.* (n.d.). Homepage | Senato della Repubblica. [https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione\\_inglese.pdf](https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Disposizioni urgenti per l'elevamento dell'obbligo di istruzione, Legge n. 9 (1999, January 27) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 21, 4–8. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/1999/01/27/21/sg/pdf>

- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:** The law and its following regulation for the application of the law<sup>23</sup> provided for measures to support schools in planning actions to accommodate those students who did not choose to spontaneously pursue their studies in Upper Secondary education. This related to adaptation of school facilities (adding classrooms, implementing educational programs), information and engagement campaigns addressed to society and families, as they had the responsibility to ensure their children's participation in school.
- **Characteristics and Processes behind the implementation:** Implementation of the law required changes in the Italian education system. This involved planning and allocation of resources to accommodate schools to this new requirement.

### Legislative Decree 19 February 2004, No. 59<sup>24</sup>

- **Level:** Legislative Decree<sup>25</sup>.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2004.
- **Fundamental Principles:** It established that the minimum required attendance to be admitted to the next year is three-quarters of the customised annual schedule. The law emphasized the importance of personalizing the school schedule, (approximately 50 days of absence per school year) allowing educational institutions to tailor schedules based on individual students' needs, taking into account factors such as their abilities, interests, and learning needs.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:** The decree encouraged the adoption of a continuous assessment system, which evaluates students' abilities and skills throughout the school year, rather than relying solely on final exams. Measures to support students with special educational needs or learning difficulties were introduced to ensure equal learning opportunities for all.
- **Characteristics and Processes behind the implementation:** Schools had to adjust their programs and schedules to comply with the provisions on minimum required attendance. The obligation of continuous assessment necessitated teacher training to implement a competency-based assessment system.

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<sup>23</sup> Regolamento recante norme per l'attuazione dell'articolo 1 della legge 20 gennaio 1999, n. 9, contenente disposizioni urgenti per l'elevamento dell'obbligo di istruzione, Decreto No.323 (1999, Settembre 16) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 218, 16-25. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/1999/09/16/218/sg/pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Definizione delle norme generali relative alla scuola dell'infanzia e al primo ciclo dell'istruzione, a norma dell'articolo 1 della legge 28 marzo 2003, n. 53, Decreto legislativo No. 59 (2004, March 2). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 51. <https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/riforma/allegati/dl190204.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> A Legislative Decree is a source of Italian legislation that is used to regulate complex and specific matters that would cause slowdowns or delays in parliamentary work, due to the complexity of the ordinary procedure for passing laws. It can only be issued when the Government has been previously authorised by Parliament by means of a delegation law.

### Legislative Decree 15 April 2005, No. 76<sup>26</sup>

- **Level:** Legislative Decree.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2005.
- **Fundamental Principles:** It affirms that students have a right and duty to education, as foreseen by the Law 28 March 2003, No. 53 "Riforma Moratti"<sup>27</sup>. It specifies that compulsory education and training must be provided for at least 12 years – beyond the age of sixteen or until the attainment of a 3-year course qualification by the age of eighteen.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:**
  - Establishment of a National Student Registry System (it.: *Anagrafe Nazionale degli Studenti* – ANS) for the first and second cycle of education, which collects and manages data on educational pathways. Each school institution is required to enter and update student data on a specific database (called SIDI).
  - Supervision of the fulfilment of the right-duty to education and related sanctions: parents or guardians are responsible for compliance, while the Municipality, school principal, and province have monitoring roles. Sanctions are foreseen in case of non-compliance.
- **Characteristics and Processes behind the implementation:** The ANS data constitute an indispensable information asset for the fulfilment of the Ministry's institutional tasks and for the evaluation of the school system. However the ANS was created with totally or partially different objectives from those of regional student registries. This initiative created havoc and overburdened schools with tasks, especially in the Regions that had already started the construction of regional registers.

### Law 27 December 2006, No. 296, Article 1, Paragraph 622<sup>28</sup>

- **Level:** National Law. Provisions for the creation of the annual and multiannual State budget (2007 Budget Law).
- **Year of Implementation:** 2006.
- **Fundamental Principles:** It reduces the lasting of compulsory education from 12 to 10 years; it should lead to the attainment of an upper secondary school diploma or a 3-year course

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<sup>26</sup> Definizione delle norme generali sul diritto-dovere all'istruzione e alla formazione, a norma dell'articolo 2, comma 1, lettera c), della legge 28 marzo 2003, n. 53, Decreto legislativo No. 76 (2020, May 5) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 103. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2005/05/05/005G0100/sg>

<sup>27</sup> Delega al Governo per la definizione delle norme generali sull'istruzione e dei livelli essenziali delle prestazioni in materia di istruzione e formazione professionale, Legge No. 53 (2003, April 2) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 77. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2003/04/02/003G0065/sg>

<sup>28</sup> Ripubblicazione del testo della legge 27 dicembre 2006, n. 296, recante: «Disposizioni per la formazione del bilancio annuale e pluriennale dello Stato (legge finanziaria 2007)», corredato delle relative note. (Legge pubblicata nel supplemento ordinario n. 244/L alla Gazzetta Ufficiale - serie generale - n. 299 del 27 dicembre 2006), Legge No. 296 (2007, January 11) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 7. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2007/01/11/07A00183/sg>

professional qualification by the age of eighteen. It switches the perspective from compulsory schooling to compulsory education, recognising the technical and vocational schools' pathways.

- **Characteristics and Processes behind the implementation:** Although its main purpose was to establish the state budget and financial measures for the year 2007, this law was used to introduce various amendments and provisions in various areas, including education. In Italy it is common for budget laws to include provisions on various issues in addition to tax and financial matters.

#### **Ministerial Decree 22 August 2007, No. 139**<sup>29</sup>

- **Level:** Ministerial Decree.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2007.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:** The ministerial decree establishes that compulsory education must last at least 10 years (from 6 to 16 years of age) and furtherly stress this duty is aimed at ensuring the achievement of an upper secondary school diploma or a 3-year course professional qualification by the age of eighteen.
- **Characteristics and Processes behind the implementation:** This ministerial decree was issued in implementation of Law 27 December 2006, No. 296, Article 1, Paragraph 622 and describes also competences and knowledge that pupils are expected to have acquired at the end of compulsory education.

#### **Law 4 November 2010, No. 183**<sup>30</sup>

- **Level:** National Law.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2010.
- **Fundamental Principles:** In order to resolve the contrast with compulsory schooling (Law 28 March 2003, No. 53 "Riforma Moratti") raised to 10 years and thus the raising of the minimum age for starting work to 16, this law confirm the possibility of complying with compulsory education through employment with an apprenticeship contract.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:** Apprenticeship, in all sectors of activity, both private and public, can also be employed for the fulfilment of compulsory education for young people aged 15 years and up to their 25th year of age (24 years and 364 days) who have not yet completed their education. The duration, established by the regions, is determined in relation to the qualification

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<sup>29</sup> Regolamento recante norme in materia di adempimento dell'obbligo di istruzione, ai sensi dell'articolo 1, comma 622, della legge 27 dicembre 2006, n. 296, Decreto No. 139 (2007, August 31) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 202. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2007/08/31/007G0154/sg>

<sup>30</sup> Deleghe al Governo in materia di lavori usuranti, di riorganizzazione di enti, di congedi, aspettative e permessi, di ammortizzatori sociali, di servizi per l'impiego, di incentivi all'occupazione, di apprendistato, di occupazione femminile, nonché misure contro il lavoro sommerso e disposizioni in tema di lavoro pubblico e di controversie di lavoro., Legge No. 183 (2010, November 9) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 262. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2010/11/09/010G0209/sg>

or diploma to be obtained and in any case cannot exceed three years, or four in the case of a four-year regional vocational diploma. It is an alternative pathway to school training but is supplementary to compulsory education for at least 12 years and in any case up to the age of 18.

### **Ministerial Circular 30 December 2010, No. 101**<sup>31</sup>

- **Level:** Ministerial Circular.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2010.
- **Fundamental Principles:** It establishes that compulsory education in Italy covers the age range between 6 and 16 years.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:** The circular clearly defines the age range for compulsory education, obliging parent or guardians to ensure their children attend school within this range.
- **Characteristics and Processes behind the implementation:** This ministerial circular aims to clarify and specify the period of compulsory education, setting the age by which children must attend school. It is a directive addressed to schools and families to ensure compliance with compulsory education.

### **Most recent measures**

On Thursday, 7 September 2023, following a trail of crime incidents in which the protagonists were minors, the Italian Council of Ministers has approved a Decree-Law<sup>32</sup> establishing urgent measures to combat youth distress, educational poverty and juvenile crime (known as Decreto “Caivano”)<sup>33</sup>. This choice is motivated by the impact of school dropout on society, as young people who are early leavers of education and training are more likely to engage in deviant actions.

In relation to compulsory schooling, in the case of a child who never enrolls in compulsory education despite a warning, a penalty of up to two years' imprisonment is introduced for their parents or guardians; in the case of school dropout before completion of compulsory schooling, the penalty is up to one year's imprisonment. Moreover, parents or guardians lose the right to money benefits from the social welfare system.

As a result of this reform process, today in Italy all young people must attend school for a minimum of 10 years, until they are 16 (**compulsory education**). This is combined with an **educational obligation**, which is the right/duty of young individuals who have completed compulsory schooling to attend educational activities until the age of 18, based on their interests and abilities, through the school education system or the vocational training system whose

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<sup>31</sup> Iscrizioni alle scuole dell'infanzia e alle scuole di ogni ordine e grado per l'anno scolastico 2011/2012, Circolare ministeriale No. 101 (2010) (Italia). [https://www.dirittoscolastico.it/files/cm101\\_10.pdf](https://www.dirittoscolastico.it/files/cm101_10.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Decree-laws are regulatory sources used by the Italian government to deal with urgent and extraordinary problems. It must be converted into law by parliament within 60 days. Otherwise, it has a maximum duration of 60 days, after which it loses effect from the moment it is enacted.

<sup>33</sup> Misure urgenti di contrasto al disagio giovanile, alla povertà educativa e alla criminalità minorile, nonché per la sicurezza dei minori in ambito digitale., Decreto-legge No. 123 (2023, September 15). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 216, 4–12. [https://www.sistemapenale.it/pdf\\_contenuti/1694988058\\_dl-1232023-caivano.pdf](https://www.sistemapenale.it/pdf_contenuti/1694988058_dl-1232023-caivano.pdf)



authority lies with the Region and Province, through an apprenticeship program, or at a Provincial Center for Adult Education.

The aim of this system is that young people should not leave education and training without at least a minimum qualification to enter the labour market: an Upper Secondary School certificate or a professional qualification awarded on completion of vocational courses of at least 3 years' duration (International Standard Classification of Education – ISCED 3<sup>34</sup>, European Qualifications Framework – EQF level 4<sup>35</sup>).

Anyway, **obligation is certainly ambiguous**. Italian law provides penalties for parents or guardians not providing education to their children: article 731 of the Italian Criminal Code<sup>36</sup> punishes anyone who, vested with authority or entrusted with supervision over a minor, omits, without justifiable reason, to provide them with primary education. However, in 2010 it was eliminated the provision that allowed extending the scope of this offense to also cover the violation of the compulsory education of lower secondary school. This means **there are no penalties for failure to complete the compulsory schooling cycles**: students who reach the age of 16 may drop out of school with no qualifications just because they have completed 10 years of continuous schooling – even if they are still in the first cycle of education, or if they have repeated grade levels – because the obligation to stay in education no longer exists. This situation makes the obligation of obtaining a qualification a mere moral obligation.

It is also worth mentioning that while Legislative Decree no. 59 of 2004<sup>37</sup> **has effectively limited absences, it has also produced negative effects**: apart from the necessity to invest more resources in dealing with disengagement in in-class activities, it was interpreted by a considerable number of students as a legitimisation to manage school attendance according to criteria of personal convenience, being vigilant only to ensure that the number of days of absence does not exceed the prescribed threshold, thus in many the paradoxical effect of increasing the number of hours of absences of each student.

### 2.2.1 Procedures for prevention and recovery

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<sup>34</sup> UNESCO. (2012). *International Standard Classification of Education - ISCED 2011*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:International\\_standard\\_classification\\_of\\_education\\_\(ISCED\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:International_standard_classification_of_education_(ISCED))

<sup>35</sup> *The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) | Europass*. (n.d.). Europass | European Union. <https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-tools/european-qualifications-framework?langcode=en>

<sup>36</sup> Codice penale, Regio decreto No. 1398 (2023) (Italia). <https://testolegge.com/codice-penale/articolo-731>

<sup>37</sup> Definizione delle norme generali relative alla scuola dell'infanzia e al primo ciclo dell'istruzione, a norma dell'articolo 1 della legge 28 marzo 2003, n. 53, Decreto legislativo No. 59 (2004, March 2). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 51. <https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/riforma/allegati/dl190204.pdf>



The articles 111-114 of Legislative Decree No. 297 of 1994<sup>38</sup> regulate the matter of complying with compulsory education and entrust the task of overseeing compliance with this duty primarily to the Mayor. At the beginning of the school year, the Mayor sends the list of students subject to this obligation, along with the names of their parents or guardians, to the school directors. If, at the start of the school year, there are inconsistencies between the lists of minors and the actual attendees, the school requests that the list of non-compliant students be posted on the municipal notice board for one month. After this period, the Mayor warns the non-compliant person, urging them to comply with the law. If the situation does not change within one week of the warning, the Mayor may proceed to report the offense to the Public Prosecutor or a judicial police officer. This action applies to unexcused absences that constitute a violation of compulsory education.

In addition to the role of the Mayor, the responsibility for monitoring compliance with the obligation of education also falls on school directors, in accordance with Ministerial Decree No. 489 of December 13, 2001<sup>39</sup>. They periodically verify the attendance of students throughout the school year and identify cases of both justified and unjustified absences. In the latter case, in the presence of students with repeated and unjustified absences, school directors, after consulting with the class councils<sup>40</sup>, are required to take action. If these circumstances persist, school principals will involve municipal authorities to initiate specific procedures.

In the most serious cases, when the violation of compulsory education is repeated and unjustified, responsible individuals are sanctioned in accordance with the applicable laws on non-compliance with the duty of education and training. It goes without saying that sanctions to combat the phenomenon of school dropout are a last resort. In addition to the law punishing the violation of compulsory education, all efforts are made to promote the culture of education, so that compliance with compulsory education is not merely an obligation to avoid sanctions but a journey of growth undertaken with full awareness that will positively influence the individual's entire life. This choice is motivated, as previously seen, by the fact that school dropout, in addition to having economic implications, also has social implications. Indeed, young people who drop out of school prematurely are more likely to engage in deviant actions.

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<sup>38</sup> Testo Unico delle disposizioni legislative vigenti in materia di istruzione, relative alle scuole di ogni ordine e grado, Decreto Legislativo No. 297 (1994, May 19) (Italia). *Gazzetta ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 115. <https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/111723/Decreto+Legislativo+297-1994.pdf/6127918b-8dab-448f-a262-7f5fa6365edd?version=1.2&t=1495211786845>

<sup>39</sup> Regolamento concernente l'integrazione, a norma dell'articolo 1, comma 6 della legge 20 gennaio 1999, n. 9, delle norme relative alla vigilanza sull'adempimento dell'obbligo scolastico, Decreto No. 489 (2002, April 12) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 86. [https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie\\_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2002-04-12&atto.codiceRedazionale=002G0084](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2002-04-12&atto.codiceRedazionale=002G0084)

<sup>40</sup> The Class Council is an advisory and decision-making body that operates within a school and is composed of teachers and, in some cases, other school staff members. Its main purpose is to discuss and make decisions on matters related to the management and organization of the class and the progress of the students.

This is why the Local Police plays an important role, as it possesses a comprehensive and direct view of the territory and the presence of critical situations.

It is the responsibility of the Local Police to ascertain the causes of school dropout, in addition to their surveillance functions related to compliance with this obligation, adherence to school and career guidance actions, and all interventions against school dropout, prepared in collaboration with other institutions. In cases of repeated and unjustified absences, the Local Police are tasked with collecting information about the minor's family and social living conditions, allowing the Judicial Authority to take civil action to protect the minor when it is determined that the individual is morally or materially abandoned or placed in dangerous contexts.

The competent Juvenile Court at the territorial level will initiate the most appropriate investigations to determine parental capacity and the suitability of the family environment. If the court's investigation reveals a state of abandonment, the Local Police will be obliged to place the minor in a safe location, utilizing social services to find the most suitable placement. The Local Police will provide detailed and immediate reports to the Juvenile Court, which will proceed to both validate the removal and cancel it after conducting the necessary investigations. In these cases, the Local Police will autonomously decide on the methods and timing of intervention, keeping in mind that the duty magistrate is not authorized to intervene.

If the investigation reveals offenses in which the minor is a victim, the Local Police will compile a report for the Ordinary Court and take immediate protective measures for the minor's safety.

## 2.2 National Policies

To make an analysis of school-related interventions in Italy, it is inevitable to begin with the 1990s, because it was precisely in those years that the foundations for school autonomy were laid. The various interventions that followed were aimed at enabling appropriate and rapid responses to locally emerging needs, to provide schools with a leading role, claiming and obtaining appropriate resources and spaces of freedom. The implementation should have provided, even to the problem of school dropout, a new and different framework of analysis and intervention, both didactic and organisational.

### Law 8 Agosto 1994, No. 496<sup>41</sup>

- **Level:** National Law

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<sup>41</sup> Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 10 giugno 1994, n. 370, recante interventi urgenti in materia di prevenzione e rimozione dei fenomeni di dispersione scolastica, Legge No. 496 (1994, August 12) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 188. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/1994/08/12/188/sg/pdf>

- **Year of Implementation:** 1994.
- **Fundamental Principles:** Known as the Framework Law for Lifelong Learning in Italy (in it.: *Legge-quadro per l'istruzione permanente in Italia*), it was enacted with the aim of promoting lifelong learning and the prevention of early leaving of education and training.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:**
  - Establishment of the Observatory for School Dropout t the Ministry to monitor, study, and address the phenomenon of school dropout in Italy. The main objective of the Observatory is to identify the underlying causes of school dropout, develop strategies and measures to counter it, and promote effective educational practices to prevent the phenomenon.
  - Psycho-pedagogical and Didactic-Educational Activities: The Observatory was responsible for promoting activities in schools to prevent school dropout. These activities aimed to identify and address students' difficulties, promoting targeted educational practices to enhance academic success.
  - Coordination with Schools: The Observatory had the role of coordinating school dropout prevention activities among schools. This was achieved through the planning and implementation of shared initiatives involving teaching and administrative staff.
  - Strengthening Lifelong Learning Actions: The law aimed to promote lifelong education, allowing individuals to acquire knowledge and skills throughout their lives. This approach aimed to counter school dropout by providing continuous learning opportunities, even for those who had prematurely left the educational path.
  - Inclusion and Equality: It emphasized the importance of promoting inclusion and equality in access to education. Through the Observatory and the activities envisaged by the law, efforts were made to create a more inclusive school environment to prevent dropout.
- **Characteristics and Processes behind the implementation:** The implementation of Law 496/94 required collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders, including educational institutions, local authorities, and community organizations. The law likely encouraged partnerships to ensure a comprehensive and holistic approach to preventing school dropout.

### **Decree of the President of the Republic (DPR) 10 October 1996. No. 567<sup>42</sup>**

- **Level:** Decree of the President of the Republic
- **Year of Implementation:** 1996.

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<sup>42</sup> Regolamento recante la disciplina delle iniziative complementari e delle attività integrative nelle istituzioni scolastiche, Decreto No. 567 (1996, November 5) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 259. [https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie\\_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1996-11-05&atto.codiceRedazionale=096G0589&elenco30giorni=false](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1996-11-05&atto.codiceRedazionale=096G0589&elenco30giorni=false)

- **Fundamental Principles:** It regulated complementary initiatives and supplementary activities within educational institutions aimed to provide students with extra-curricular and support opportunities that could contribute to their involvement, motivation and success in their education.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:**
  - Schools, within the scope of their autonomy, define, promote, and evaluate complementary and integrative initiatives for students, tailored to their age and maturity.
  - Creation of gathering spaces for young individuals, advocating for the utilization of equipped premises for extracurricular activities, allowing utilization on holidays and during summer breaks.
  - Schools' involvement in the cultural and social life of the community through collaborations with local authorities, associations, and projects.

#### Law 8 March 1997. No. 59, "Legge Bassanini"<sup>43</sup>

- **Level:** National Law.
- **Year of Implementation:** 1997.
- **Fundamental Principles:** It originated from drives for the harmonisation and administrative unification of the apparatuses of the various EU member states. It was essentially aimed at giving the government the power to issue delegated decrees in order to develop a vast activity of innovation and reform of the entire Italian administrative system. It reformed the Italian school system by organising it on the basis of a network of educational institutions endowed with functional autonomy. It loosened the hierarchical relationship between the Ministry of Education and schools. The former kept hold of the general governance of the system, outlining general principles of education and establishing threshold performance levels besides defining the national curricula and managing financial and professional resources through its regional administrative offices. The latter were no longer seen as mere providers of a service, following central guidelines on administrative and curricular issues. School ceases to be the passive terminal of rules, circulars and regulations, and becomes a service delivery centre, a key player able to design and plan school paths, develop new methods and fulfil research and experimentation tasks. All this must of course take place in compliance with national and regional regulations.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:** New spaces of autonomy were opened up for schools. Firstly, they became entitled to outline the Annual Educational School Plan (in it.: *Piano Offerta Formativa* – POF), within which they can plan individual/distinctive school projects, define local curricular priorities and outline at least in part their internal organisation. Secondly, schools were

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<sup>43</sup> Ripubblicazione del testo della legge 15 marzo 1997, n. 59, recante: "Delega al governo per il conferimento di funzioni e compiti alle regioni ed enti locali, per la riforma della pubblica amministrazione e per la semplificazione amministrativa", corredato delle relative note., Legge No. 59 (1997, April 29) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 98. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1997/04/29/097A3158/sg>

strongly encouraged to build partnerships with other public and private actors, in order to pursue their educational mission. Partnerships were explicitly identified as a potential channel through which to gain public or private extra-resources and enrich the educational provision.

### **Decree of the President of the Republic (DPR) 8 March 1999. No. 275<sup>44</sup>**

- **Level:** Decree of the President of the Republic.
- **Year of Implementation:** 1999.
- **Fundamental Principles:** It regulates school autonomy as a 'guarantee of cultural pluralism, which is embodied in the design and implementation of interventions of education, training and instruction aimed at the development of the human person, adapted to the different contexts, the demands of families and the specific characteristics of the subjects involved".
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:** It grants schools four types of autonomy: teaching autonomy, organisational autonomy, research, experimentation and development autonomy, and financial autonomy (see [Section 1.2.9](#) of this document).

### **Law 28 March 2003, No. 53 "Riforma Moratti"<sup>45</sup>**

- **Level:** National Law.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2003
- **Fundamental Principles:** Aimed to restructure and modernize the education system, addressing both the structure and duration of compulsory education. It adopts a model called 'demandist' (i.e. based on the expectations of the world of work), interactive (based on the ability to learn) and 'personalist' that placed educational institutions at the service of the individual, harmonising Italian schools with the common objectives of European training systems. The key principles that underpinned the Moratti Reform include accessibility, inclusivity, quality, and adaptability and is characterised by the principle of customisation: the centrality of the person in the educational process is reaffirmed and the educational offer is also differentiated in terms of content and methodology.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:**

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<sup>44</sup> Regolamento recante norme in materia di autonomia delle istituzioni scolastiche, ai sensi dell'art. 21 della legge 15 marzo 1997, n. 59, Decreto No. 275 (1999, August 10) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 186. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1999/08/10/099G0339/sg>

<sup>45</sup> Delega al Governo per la definizione delle norme generali sull'istruzione e dei livelli essenziali delle prestazioni in materia di istruzione e formazione professionale, Legge No. 53 (2003, April 2) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 77. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2003/04/02/003G0065/sg>

- The entire education system is organised into two cycles: first second cycle. Primary school (ISCED 1) and lower secondary school (ISCED 2)<sup>46</sup> are merged into a single school order. The primary school leaving examination that allowed the transition from primary school to lower secondary school is then abolished.
- School Autonomy: The law aimed to promote the autonomy of schools, giving them more control in the management of financial and decision-making resources. Schools would be able to set their own educational programmes, hire teaching and non-teaching staff, and manage funds more flexibly.
- Drawing up and implementation of Annual Educational School Plan (in it.: *Piano Offerta Formativa* – POF) by schools, which define in detail the educational, cultural and didactic activities offered. These plans must respond to students' needs, take into account their potential and promote the achievement of meaningful learning through innovative teaching approaches.
- With regard to subjects of study, since first year of primary school the teaching of a foreign (EU) language was introduced and the use of computers became compulsory. For these two aspects and for the school-to-work system – which provided working experiences for students over 15 years of age, planned by the school and evaluated as part of the study course – the reform was also known as the three 'i's': English (in it: *inglese*), Internet and enterprise (in it: *impresa*). In Lower Secondary School, a second foreign language was introduced for all classes.
- Evaluation of teachers and schools: More emphasis was introduced on evaluating the performance of teachers and schools. Procedures have been implemented to assess the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- **Characteristics and Processes behind the implementation:** The Italian education landscape underwent a significant transformation with the introduction of the "Moratti Reform." The reform has taken significant steps to establish a single education system educational system where *licei* and vocational education and training institutes had equal dignity, being certainly different in terms of curricula and methods but convergent in their aims, which tend to ensure the citizen lifelong learning. The implementation of the Moratti reform required the active involvement of schools in the decision-making process. Schools were to develop three-year development plans and implement measures to improve the effectiveness and quality of education. The implementation of the law required a system of constant monitoring and evaluation of schools and teachers; this included the use of performance indicators and quality standards to assess progress. In 2008, with the return to the Berlusconi government, the Moratti reform was shelved

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<sup>46</sup> UNESCO. (2012). *International Standard Classification of Education - ISCED 2011*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:International\\_standard\\_classification\\_of\\_education\\_\(ISCED\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:International_standard_classification_of_education_(ISCED))

because it was considered too costly in terms of investment and staffing, given the need to rationalise public spending, understood as staff reduction.

#### **Legislative Decree 15 April 2005, No. 76**<sup>47</sup>

- **Level:** Legislative Decree.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2005.
- **Fundamental Principles:** Apart from ensuring the right and duty to education, the Decree regulates guidance interventions against early leaving of education. It states that students need to stay in education beyond the age of sixteen until the attainment of a qualification lasting at least three years by the age of eighteen.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:**
  - Actions for educational success and prevention of dropout: the Ministry of Education adopts guidelines for plans of orientation, prevention, and recovery from school dropout. Lower secondary schools may organise orientation and information initiatives aimed at ensuring the attainment of the final qualification.
  - Monitoring: The Ministry in cooperation with INVALSI shall annually monitor the state of implementation of this decree and every three years the Ministry shall submit to Parliament a report.

#### **Law 27 December 2006, No. 296, Article 1, Paragraphs 605 and 622**<sup>48</sup>

- **Level:** National Law. Provisions for the creation of the annual and multiannual State budget (2007 Budget Law).
- **Year of Implementation:** 2006.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:** To enhance education effectiveness actions are established for:
  - a) revising class formation criteria to enhance autonomy and reduce student-teacher ratios;
  - b) identifying staff based on actual needs via collaboration among regions, school offices, health agencies, and certifications;

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<sup>47</sup> Definizione delle norme generali sul diritto-dovere all'istruzione e alla formazione, a norma dell'articolo 2, comma 1, lettera c), della legge 28 marzo 2003, n. 53, Decreto legislativo No. 76 (2020, May 5) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 103. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2005/05/05/005G0100/sg>

<sup>48</sup> Ripubblicazione del testo della legge 27 dicembre 2006, n. 296, recante: «Disposizioni per la formazione del bilancio annuale e pluriennale dello Stato (legge finanziaria 2007)», corredato delle relative note. (Legge pubblicata nel supplemento ordinario n. 244/L alla Gazzetta Ufficiale - serie generale - n. 299 del 27 dicembre 2006), Legge No. 296 (2007, January 11) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 7. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2007/01/11/07A00183/sg>



- c) planning indefinite-term hiring of teachers and administrative personnel with monitoring and evaluation;
- d) tracking short-term substitutes and reducing absences;
- e) training primary school teachers for English teaching via intensive courses;
- f) improving vocational education by reducing weekly teaching hours, enhancing flexibility, professionalism, and territorial connection.

Also, in alignment with the general and specific learning objectives of the cycles of education, educational pathways and projects can be established through collaboration between the Ministry and regions, with the aim to prevent and address disengagement and drop out and to foster successful attainment of compulsory education.

- **Characteristics and Processes behind the implementation:** Although its main purpose was to establish the state budget and financial measures for the year 2007, this law was used to introduce various amendments and provisions in various areas, including education. In Italy it is common for budget laws to include provisions on various issues in addition to tax and financial matters.

#### **Law 6 August 2008, No 133 “Riforma Gelmini”<sup>49</sup>**

- **Level:** National Law.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2008.
- **Fundamental Principles:**
  - **Streamlining of Education Levels:** The reform aimed to streamline the education system by reducing the number of years in primary and secondary education. It aimed to bring the Italian education system more in line with international standards.
  - **Autonomy of Schools:** The reform sought to increase the autonomy of individual schools, allowing them more control over curriculum design, teaching methods, and decision-making processes.
  - **Merit-Based Hiring:** The reform introduced a merit-based system for hiring and promoting teachers, with an emphasis on evaluating teachers' skills and performance.
  - **Curriculum Changes:** The reform introduced changes to the curriculum, including increased focus on core subjects such as Italian, mathematics, science, and foreign languages.

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<sup>49</sup> Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 25 giugno 2008, n. 112, recante disposizioni urgenti per lo sviluppo economico, la semplificazione, la competitività, la stabilizzazione della finanza pubblica e la perequazione tributaria, Legge No. 133 (2008, August 21) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 195. <https://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/08133l.htm>



- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:** The national Invalsi test for Italian and mathematics is introduced in the final middle school exam."
- **Characteristics and Processes behind the implementation:** The reform was implemented gradually over a period of several years, with different components being phased in at different times.

#### Legislative Decree 12 September 2013, No 104 “Istruzione Riparte”<sup>50</sup>

- **Level:** Decree-Law.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2013.
- **Fundamental Principles:** It addresses combating and preventing early leaving of education and training by strengthening learning from basic school.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:** Launch of an Integrative Education Programme for reinforcement of basic skills and individual teaching methods and the extension of the timetable for groups of pupils in the realities in which the phenomenon of abandonment and evasion of compulsory schooling is most prevalent, with particular attention to primary schools and the integration of foreign pupils.

#### Law 13 July 2015, No. 107 “Buona Scuola”<sup>51</sup>

- **Level:** National Law.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2015.
- **Fundamental Principles:** Aimed to fully implement school autonomy and enhance the educational offerings of schools, its main purpose was to introduce some elements, including flexibility in school organization and the possibility of receiving a (strengthened) staff.
- **Proposed and Adopted Measures:**
  - Three-year plan of educational offerings: every three years, schools are invited to develop a new plan for educational offerings that logically follows a careful evaluation of the improvement plan and their Self-Evaluation Report (in it.: *Rapporto di Auto-Valutazione – RAV*).
  - Introduction of the so-called "strengthened staff": however this measure was not based on schools' requests or proposed educational plans, but rather on the necessity to progressively exhaust all existing ranking lists in order to initiate new recruitments. Many

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<sup>50</sup> Misure urgenti in materia di istruzione, università e ricerca, Decreto-Legge No.104 (2013, September 12) (Italia). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 2014. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/09/12/13G00147/sg>

<sup>51</sup> Riforma del sistema nazionale di istruzione e formazione e delega per il riordino delle disposizioni legislative vigenti., Legge No. 107 (2015, July 15). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 162. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/07/15/15G00122/sg>

teachers were transferred to schools well into the school year, and additional subjects were introduced that might not have been requested by the schools.

- The law introduced a new system for recruiting teachers based on national competitions, aiming to bring in high-quality educators. This system included a new path for initial training consisting in a sort of three-year apprenticeship contract, including both training and actual work periods, designed for teachers to gain practical experience in preparation for their teaching profession.
- The law introduced the requirement for upper secondary students to spend a certain number of hours in practical training in companies (“alternanza scuola-lavoro”), in order to foster a better connection between education and the world of work.

### **Decree law 20 giugno 2017, No. 91, “Decreto Sud”<sup>52</sup>**

- **Level:** National Law.
- **Year of Implementation:** 2015.
- **Fundamental Principles:** Makes it possible to activate interventions aimed at networks of schools in agreement with local authorities, third sector subjects, territorial structures of the Italian National Olympic Committee, national sports federations, associated sports disciplines and sports promotion bodies or public educational services for children, in order to plan and implement two-year educational interventions in favour of minors in areas characterised by accentuated juvenile educational poverty and school dropout, as well as by a high rate of organised crime phenomena. Schools thus become the beating heart of the city communities and the place where it is possible to effectively combat juvenile educational poverty and school dropout in the areas covered by the decree, thanks to the synergy that can be activated with various public and private actors.

### **Next Generation EU and FUTURA “ The School for tomorrow’s Italy” [in it.: *La scuola per l’Italia di domani*]<sup>53</sup>**

FUTURA is the framework programme of actions for an innovative, sustainable, safe and inclusive school financed by national and European resources through the Next Generation Europe EU initiative (in Italy implemented through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan - PNRR 'Italia Domani'). Among the reforms envisaged for schools, the FUTURA programme identifies lines of investment concerning students’ competences, equal opportunities and the reduction of territorial gaps, technical and vocational education, and the development of digital, multilingual and technical-scientific skills. In relation to early leaving of education and training, we specifically mention:

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<sup>52</sup> Disposizioni urgenti per la crescita economica nel Mezzogiorno., Decreto-Legge No. 91 (2017, June 20). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 141. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/06/20/17G00110/sg>

<sup>53</sup> FUTURA – LA SCUOLA PER L’ITALIA DI DOMANI. (n.d.). FUTURA – LA SCUOLA PER L’ITALIA DI DOMANI. <https://pnrr.istruzione.it/>

- **Full-time<sup>54</sup> and canteen extension<sup>55</sup> plan – Mission 4-C1 – Investment 1.2:** finances interventions targeted at increasing the educational offer and preventing school dropout through the extension of school hours; this involves a rethinking of the educational offer during the whole day and the introduction of activities aimed at strengthening students' transversal skills, as well as improvement of the overall school services.
- **Reducing territorial gaps – Mission 4-C1 – Investment 1.4<sup>56</sup>:** finances interventions targeted at territorial contexts and customised to the needs of students, aimed at promoting educational success and combating school dropout. Particular attention will be paid to schools with the greatest difficulties in terms of performance.
  - Among the actions that can be activated are: individual mentoring and orientation paths for disadvantaged students, strengthening of basic skills and motivation, extracurricular training and workshop, school and professional guidance comprising family involvement, creation of teams for the prevention of dispersion, risk detection, planning and evaluation of interventions.
  - This measure also aims to encourage: networking experiences between schools and with the territories (projects can be developed through co-design and cooperation between the school and the local community), a better relationship between parents or guardians and teachers with opportunities for training and participation, integration between school and out-of-school by expanding educational time in all-day school spaces.

The schools, having autonomy, plan the overall activities deciding on which intervention they want to invest in, the format of activities, in compliance with the minimum standards laid down. Institutes may enter into network agreements with other schools, even those not financed by FUTURA, in order to extend their range of action.

Finally, mention should be made of '**M5C3 – Investment 1.3: Structured socio-educational interventions supporting the Third Sector to combat educational poverty in southern Italy**<sup>57</sup> of the PNRR 'Italia Domani'. This investment supports the Third Sector by promoting the implementation of socio-educational and cultural interventions aimed at minors in the Regions of southern Italy. Third sector organisations play an important role in supporting and complement the public sector in the provision and innovation of basic services, particularly in the most fragile areas of southern Italy.

<sup>54</sup> *Estensione del tempo pieno – FUTURA.* (n.d.). FUTURA – LA SCUOLA PER L'ITALIA DI DOMANI. <https://pnrr.istruzione.it/competenze/estensione-del-tempo-pieno/>

<sup>55</sup> *Mense – FUTURA.* (n.d.). FUTURA – LA SCUOLA PER L'ITALIA DI DOMANI. <https://pnrr.istruzione.it/infrastrutture/mense/>

<sup>56</sup> *Riduzione dei divari territoriali – FUTURA.* (n.d.). FUTURA – LA SCUOLA PER L'ITALIA DI DOMANI. <https://pnrr.istruzione.it/competenze/riduzione-dei-divari-territoriali/>

<sup>57</sup> *Interventi socio-educativi strutturati per combattere la povertà educativa nel Mezzogiorno a sostegno del Terzo Settore – Italia Domani.* (n.d.). Home – Italia Domani – Portale PNRR. <https://www.italiadomani.gov.it/it/Interventi/investimenti/interventi-socio-educativi-strutturati-per-combattere-la-poverta-educativa-nel-mezzogiorno-a-sostegno-del-terzo-settore.html>

### 2.3 National Operational Programmes (in it.: *Programmi Operativi Nazionali – PON*)

Since 1994, educational institutions at all levels can benefit from specific seven-year National Operational Programmes financed by the European Structural Funds (namely the European Social Fund – ESF<sup>58</sup> and the European Regional Development Fund – ERDF<sup>59</sup>, which are EU-funded initiatives, thus not burdening national public finances) to improve the effectiveness of the educational offer and the quality of school facilities, with a view to raising pupils' skill levels and reducing school dropout rates. The programme allows institutions to implement specific projects to compensate for their own contextual weaknesses that severely compromise service quality. The aim is to enable the full achievement of the common objectives of development, competitiveness, equity and cohesion defined at national and EU level.

Resources are allocated through public calls for funding to the entire national territory. However, while some PON target the entire national area, others only specific regions, all depending on their objective. It reflects the different intensity of the problems affecting the country's territorial areas:

- Less developed regions: Calabria, Campania, Sicily, Puglia and Basilicata;
- Transition Regions: Abruzzo, Molise, Sardinia;
- More developed regions: Val d'Aosta, Piemonte, Liguria, Lombardia, Veneto, Trentino Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Marche, Umbria, Lazio.

The choice of intervening on more than one category of regions (less developed regions, transition regions, more developed regions) makes it possible to strengthen the impact and effectiveness of the intervention strategies, foreseeing uniform types of actions on the territory, but declined with a different intensity of intervention according to the distribution of resources among the three categories of regions, the needs expressed by the territories and the complementarity with the intervention choices and priorities adopted at a regional level.

The actors running PON projects are not only schools, but also companies and non-profit organisations. Beneficiaries of the projects may be students, teaching staff or administrative staff or external. The PON funded by the ESF may target also external people, such as young people, women, the long-term unemployed and those at risk of exclusion from the world of work.

#### **PON 2000/2006 “School for Development” (in it.: “La Scuola per lo Sviluppo”)**<sup>60</sup>

This was the first National Operational Programme giving specific attention to the problem of school dropouts. Measure 3 'Prevention of school dropout' allowed the implementation of

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<sup>58</sup> *European Social Fund Plus*. (n.d.). European Commission. <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en>

<sup>59</sup> *Inforegio - European Regional Development Fund*. (n.d.). European Commission. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/funding/erdf\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/erdf_en)

<sup>60</sup> *Sito PON Scuola - Fondi Strutturali - Programma Operativo Nazionale “La Scuola per lo Sviluppo”*. (n.d.). Home page. <https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/fondistrutturali/documenti/docriferimento/progop.shtml>

initiatives and actions for the prevention and recovery of school dropout aimed at reducing social marginality, calibrated and differentiated according to the characteristics of the subjects and the conditions of social and cultural hardship of the family and the territorial contexts of reference.

- Action 3.1 – Prevention and recovery of school dropout of basic school pupils in areas with the highest risk of cultural and social exclusion;
- Action 3.2 a – Interventions for the prevention and recovery of school dropout of upper secondary school pupils and for the return of dropouts;
- Action 3.2 b – Interventions against school dropout and social discomfort to be implemented at the school dropout resource centres

**PON 2007/2013 “Competences for Development” and “Learning Environments” (in it.: “Competenze per lo Sviluppo” and “Ambienti per l’Apprendimento”)**<sup>61</sup>

The National Operational Programme 2007/2003 was meant to support specific and targeted planning in schools aimed at achieving:

- An in-depth study of the mechanisms of school failure and early leaving of education and training through appropriate field analyses and adequate detection tools so that counteracting actions could be improved. In this regard, the aim is to establish a close connection with the General Directorate for Information Systems of this Ministry, in order to make use of the information assets of the student registry and acquire monitoring data.
- An increase in the number of Resource Centres against early leaving of education and training, especially in the most disadvantaged areas.
- An increase in the attractiveness of schools, connected to a more active participation of students.

Schools were then encouraged to plan initiatives and interventions related to:

- the transition from Lower Secondary School to Second Cycle of Education.
- the involvement of families at all school levels, with training courses to make them aware of the work of the school, the study and problems of youth and the parental function in general.
- school orientation and reorientation paths.
- Induction activities: initial tutoring activities, information desks, orientation interviews with student and families.
- Student support activities: individualised pathways aimed at strengthening basic skills and/or the acquisition of a study method; psychological support and counselling conducted by external experts; peer-to-peer tutoring; activities for the integration of foreign students and the disabled.

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<sup>61</sup> PON - Fondi Strutturali Europei - 2007/2013 - Miur. (n.d.). Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito - Miur. [https://www.istruzione.it/archivio/web/istruzione/pon/2007\\_2013.html](https://www.istruzione.it/archivio/web/istruzione/pon/2007_2013.html)

- Activities in the fields of drama, music, arts, multimedia languages to combine subject content with the informal and non-formal knowledge of young people.
- Legality education activities, as there is a link between demotivation to school and lack of citizenship and distrust in the institutions.

**PON 2014/2020 “For the School – competences and learning environments” (in it.: “Per la Scuola – competenze e ambienti per l’apprendimento”)**<sup>62</sup>

The 2014/2020 National Operational Programme has contributed to the implementation of the EU 2020 strategy promoting a strategy for a profound revision and innovation of the educational processes aimed at effectively influencing skill levels and having an impact in terms of socio-cultural development and growth of the country. The main goals were: tackling school and training dropouts; strengthening pupils' key competences; professional development of teachers, strengthening adult skills; disseminating digital skills in schools; upgrading of school buildings; institutional capacity building. An additional objective 'Promoting overcoming the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its social consequences and fostering a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy' was added as a result of the allocation of additional resources from the Recovery assistance for cohesion and the territories of Europe (REACT-EU)<sup>63</sup>.

School dropout and school performance were addressed mainly in 2 Actions, where the following initiatives could be funded:

- ACTION 10.1 “Reducing early education failure and early leaving of education and training”:
  - Interventions to support students characterised by particular vulnerabilities, including people with disabilities (tutoring and mentoring actions, educational educational support and counselling, integrative activities including sports activities, during extracurricular hours actions aimed at their families, etc.).
  - Second Chance Education
  - Training of teachers and trainers also on innovative approaches and methodologies for tackling school dropout and for the effective integration of specific targets in school life
  - Guidance, continuity and support actions for the choice of training paths
  - VET training paths, accompanied by communication actions and adaptation of the offer in coherence with the economic and entrepreneurial development guidelines of the territories in order to increase their attractiveness

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<sup>62</sup> PON - Il PON. (n.d.). Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito - Miur. <https://www.istruzione.it/pon/ilpon.html>

<sup>63</sup> REACT-EU. (n.d.). European Commission. [https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/react-eu\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/react-eu_en)

- Reinforcement of the analyses on the school population and on the determinants of dropout, with reference to gender components, socio-cultural, economic and local contexts (also with declination at territorial level)
- ACTION 10.2 “Improvement of pupils' key competences”
  - Actions for the integration and enhancement of the basic subject areas (Italian language, foreign languages, mathematics, science, new technologies and new languages) with particular reference to the first and second cycle and also through on-line paths
- Training actions for teachers, school staff, trainers and staff, also in an international dimension, with particular regard to
  - methodological and disciplinary innovation
  - key and disciplinary competences
  - individualised learning
  - learning about assessment methodologies
  - competences for service quality and school management (also through pathways in other countries, summer schools, mobility, scholarships)
- Systemic actions for the definition of innovative models, contents and methodologies (also with declination at territorial level)

### **National Programme (PN) School and Skills (in it.: *Scuola e Competenze*) 2021 – 2027**<sup>64</sup>

It contributes to the achievement of Objective 4 of the Cohesion Policy, "A more social Europe"<sup>65</sup>, by aiming to improve the quality, inclusiveness, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems; promote equal access to and completion of inclusive and quality education; and to enhance lifelong learning. As previous PONs, it is divided into four priorities, two of which include interventions related to early leaving of education and training and school performance:

- **Priority 1 - "School and Skills (ESF+)"**, aiming at improving the inclusiveness and effectiveness of education and training systems, promoting equal access and lifelong learning.
- **Priority 2 - "School and Skills Facilities (ERDF)"**, aiming to improve equal access to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning services through the development of accessible infrastructure, including by promoting the resilience of online and distance education and training.

<sup>64</sup> *Programma Nazionale 2021-2027*. (n.d.). Programma Nazionale 2021-2027. <https://pn20212027.istruzione.it/>

<sup>65</sup> *Inforegio - New Cohesion Policy*. (n.d.). European Commission. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/2021-2027\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/2021-2027_en)



## 2.4 Regional policies

### 2.4.1 A Focus on Observatories against Early leaving of education and training

In Sicily, monitoring of early leaving of education and training is carried out through the system of Area Observatories: the organisational model is coordinated by the Regional School Office and has been operational for several years throughout the region. The model aims to emphasize the importance of the "context" both in determining school dropouts and, conversely, in the strategies for resolution that need to be implemented. This specifically entails viewing the school as a crucial "hub" within a necessary operational network that must be activated to prevent and address various school dropout phenomena.

The intention is to create an "operational" inter-institutional architecture against early school living, with all levels operationally intertwined: macro level (regional and provincial); meso level (micro-area: networks of neighbouring schools, districts and districts), micro level (individual school units and the micro-territory to which they belong). All levels are interrelated, in a constant interweaving of actions that allows for the optimisation of resources and the overcoming of constraint/obstacle situations, thanks to the involvement of the various institutional partners. This, also in order to provide guidance to the intervention policies of the various agencies, according to common objectives.

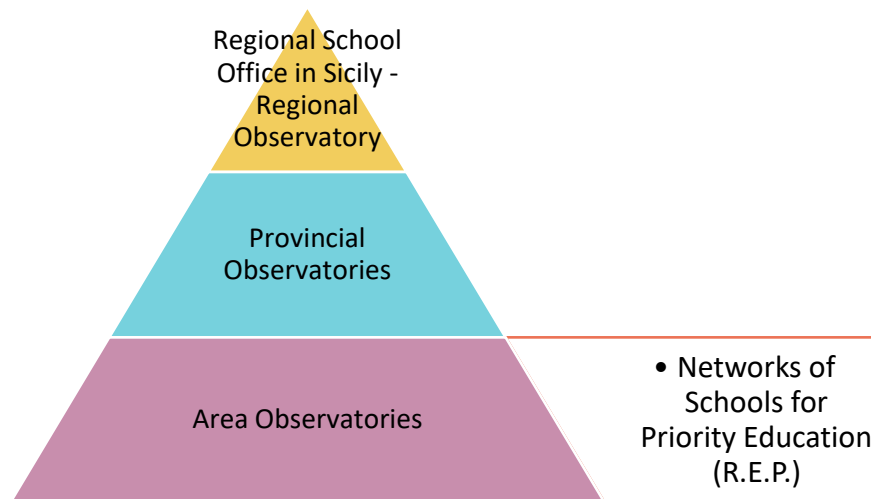


Figure 4 - Regional system of Area Observatories, developed by CESIE based on review, 2023

#### The Provincial Observatories

The provincial Observatories are made up of professional figures representing the various institutions in the territory: Ministry, territorial ambits, Local Authorities, Juvenile Court, Prosecutor's Office at the Juvenile Court, Juvenile Social Service Office of the Ministry of Justice, Juvenile Office of the Police Headquarters, Provincial Health Authority, School Trade Unions and



have the task of favouring and supporting the relationship between schools and the Authorities operating in the territory, in order to implement the maximum integration of interventions for the realisation of the educational and training offer.

Specific tasks are:

- drawing up a provincial plan to combat school dropout;
- identifying criteria for setting up networks of schools (Area Observatories) in territorial areas characterised by socio-economic-cultural hardship, risk of school dropout and juvenile deviance;
- monitor the phenomena of school dropout, also for the establishment/implementation of databases;
- to foster and support the relationship between schools and organisations operating in the territory;
- promote refresher and training courses for the operators of the various services involved in the fight against school dropout;
- promote and support inter-institutional initiatives aimed at protecting and preventing the abuse and/or mistreatment of minors.

#### **The Area Observatories**

The **Area Observatories** (38 in Sicily in September 2023) are located within a school institution selected by the Regional School Office and generally situated in the areas most affected by dropout. Area Observatories are supported by Territorial Psycho-pedagogical Operators Operators (OPT - teachers utilized in projects aimed at addressing school dropout phenomena) and are made up of representatives of the institutions in the area, in particular:

- the school directors of the networked institutions;
- the Teachers used in psycho-pedagogical activities on networks of schools or on individual schools, or engaged, within the individual school institutions, in tasks supporting the prevention of phenomena related to school dropout;
- Representatives of the Local Authorities, and of the social-health services present in the territorial area;
- Representatives of the organised Voluntary work present in the territorial area;

in order to:

- prepare a network agreement including a map of resources to tackle the phenomena of school dropout and socio-educational discomfort in the area
- collect quantitative-qualitative data to monitor the needs of the socio-educational community and to rationally orient the development of actions;
- identifying and activating links with agencies that provide socio-medical and educational services;

- promote an "anti-dropout" culture, favouring the circulation of information and the involvement of pupils, parents or guardians and teachers in the area;
- identify priority intervention objectives and formulate integrated area plans that favour the implementation of networked interventions, also with reference to ERDF, National and Regional Operational Programmes funds, etc;
- maintain a systematic connection with the Provincial Observatory and promote initiatives to facilitate the educational success of all students;
- monitor and evaluate the planned ongoing interventions and, if necessary, reformulate the objectives and strategies on the basis of feed-back.

Area Observatories are organised by **Priority Education Networks (REP)**. REPs are configured as specific micro-networks for schools in the same territory identified for a high dropout rate which are responsible for conception and implementation of integrated intervention actions to reduce the risk area. They serve as the operational hub where the inter-institutional teams, comprised of professionals from various involved institutions, carry out their activities. In each area, there can be as many Priority Education Networks as needed based on territorial requirements (risk situations).

#### **Territorial Psycho-pedagogical Operator**

Territorial Psycho-pedagogical Operators (OPT) are 49 teachers whose assignment does not involve any additional or supplementary compensation. The staff engaged in territorial psycho-pedagogical activities are assigned to the school that serves as the Observatory's headquarters and the working hours amount to 36 hours per week. The OPT provides support to schools through various levels of intervention:

- **For each School Unit:** OPTs serve as resources that support change through engagement with all stakeholders involved in the development of the Educational Offer Plan and the School Self-Evaluation Report. They act as a bridge between the institutional entities in the area and the school in which they operate, aiming to establish and strengthen the necessary connection among School-Family-Community. They also encourage research and the development of methodological and educational innovation to prevent and address learning difficulties. Lastly, they support groups of teachers engaged in guidance and tutoring activities related to meeting compulsory educational obligations.
- **For the territory:** In relation to the territorial scope, teachers involved in psycho-pedagogical activities will facilitate the creation of networks of schools and inter-institutional networks.
- **Networks for Priority Education (REP):** The Coordinators of the Area Observatories, in collaboration with the School directors within the Area Observatory and the teachers engaged in psycho-pedagogical network activities, can activate Networks in their respective territories.

### **2.4.2 Regional Plan for preventing school dropout**

A phase of the monitoring procedure, aimed at assessing the extent of school dropout in the area, is the list compiled by educational institutions containing all the data related to cases of non-compliance with compulsory education. This list is sent to the Municipalities, which, by the end of the school year, forward it to the Regional Education Office. Subsequently, by August 30 of the same year, the Regional Education Office provides the Region and the Province with the collected data. Once this information has been received, by September 30 of each year, a plan for preventing school dropout is developed. The plan is jointly prepared by the Municipality, the Region, the Province, and the Regional Education Office, and if necessary, with the involvement of public or private entities, primarily from the third sector. As for 2023-2024, the prevention plan set the following Guidelines on how to report early school leavers<sup>66</sup>:

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<sup>66</sup> Indicazioni sulle modalità di segnalazione degli alunni in situazione di dispersione scolastica (2023) (Regione Sicilia) (Italia). <https://www.usr.sicilia.it/indicazioni-sulle-modalita-di-segnalazione-degli-alunni-in-situazione-di-dispersione-scolastica/>

- **Non-schooling:** the situation of a minor who, despite being obliged to attend school, never enters the educational circuit and therefore is not known by the educational institution;

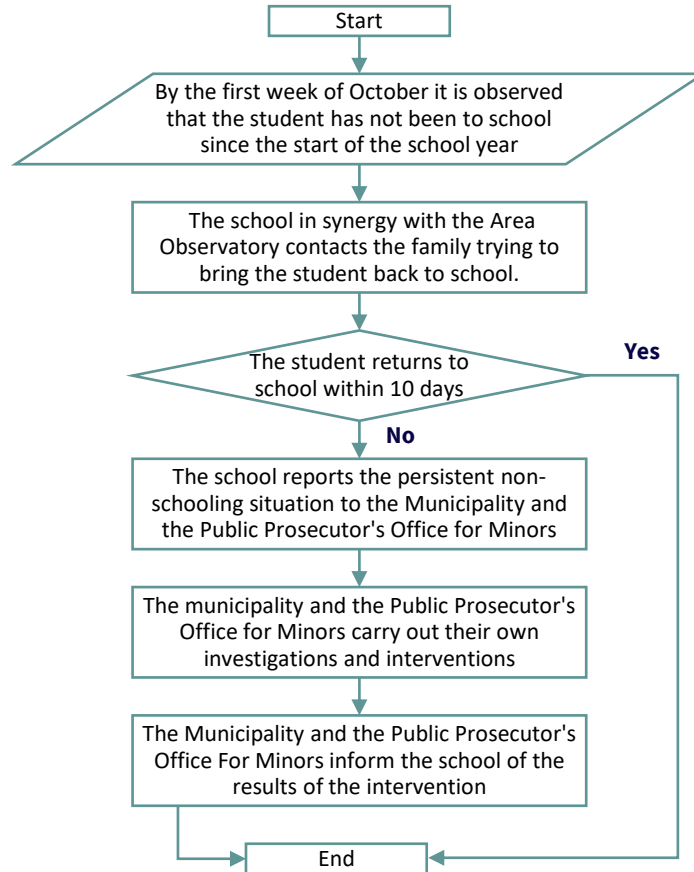


Figure 5 - Non-schooling reporting procedure, Source: Ufficio Scolastico Regionale per la Sicilia, 2023

- **Early dropout:** situation of the minor who, after having attended school for a certain school for a certain period, prematurely and arbitrarily interrupts attendance;

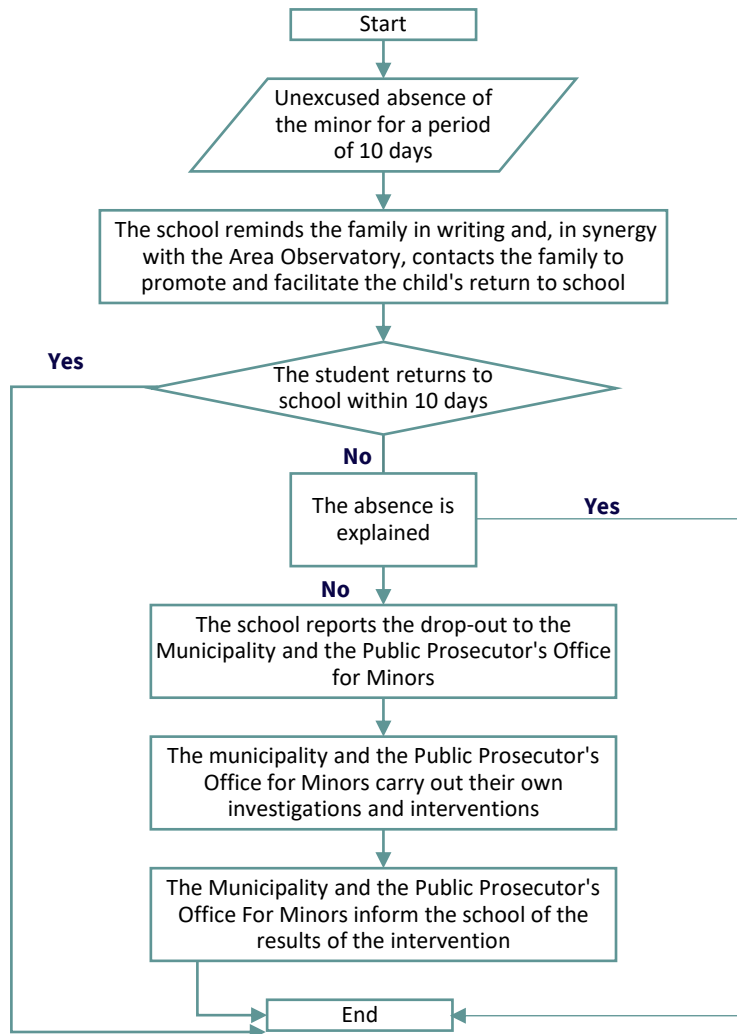


Figure 6 - Early dropout reporting procedure, Source: Ufficio Scolastico Regionale per la Sicilia, 2023

- **Irregular frequency or absenteeism:** situation of the minor who, although not abandoning school, attends irregularly, compromising the continuity of the educational process).

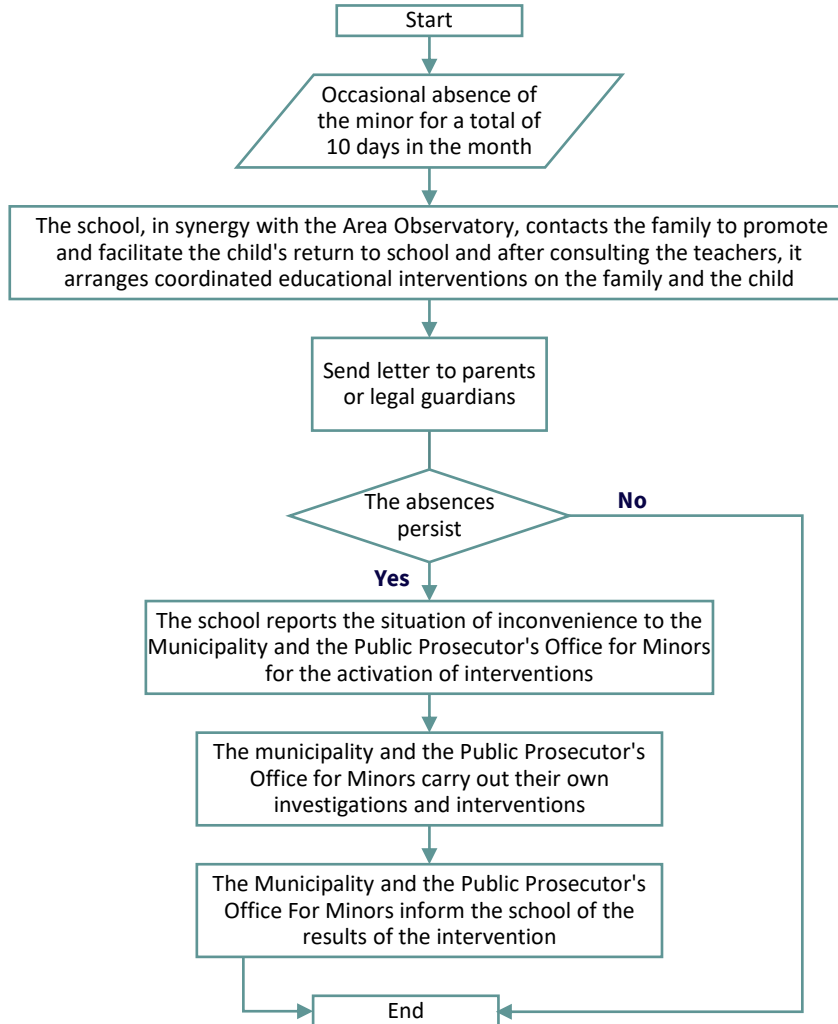


Figure 7 - Irregular frequency or absenteeism reporting procedure, Source: Ufficio Scolastico Regionale per la Sicilia, 2023

## 3.0 POLICY REVIEW

### 3.1 Policy Review as in academic literature

Early leaving of education and training and Underachievement have always been a persistent concern for the Italian Ministry of Education. The issue was further emphasized with the introduction of the Europe 2020 strategy, as Italy aimed to improve its position within the European Union. The cost and risks associated with increasing disparities among students and the relative competitiveness of Italy's human capital were clearly articulated as significant challenges at the beginning of the XXI century.

However, the focus national policies have had on autonomy of Educational Institutions – which potentially was supposed to provide appropriate and swift responses to locally emerging needs – has weakened the efforts, hindering effective interventions, precisely because of structural deficiencies and the way autonomy is implemented.

#### **Underinvestment**

To "provide quality, equitable and inclusive education and learning opportunities for all" (Goal 4 of Agenda 2030<sup>67</sup>) requires, among other things, increased funding in education. It must be noted that up to the present day, education in Italy has experienced a significant lack in funds. Italy is, among European countries, the one that spends the least on education. Unrestricted funds<sup>68</sup> were progressively decreased in years 2006-2014, and then raised slightly in the last years, but still in 2021 public spending on education in Italy accounted for 4.1 percent of GDP, compared with an EU average of 4.8 percent. Even the funds coming from the Next Generation Europe EU initiative (in Italy implemented through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan – PNRR 'Italia Domani'), will be just over 6 billion additional per year, still too little compared to the figures achieved by other European countries. Once distributed, even these funds will become insufficient to solve the many problems that stem from the underfunding of education and non-structural.

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<sup>67</sup> Goal 4 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (n.d.). Home | Sustainable Development. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

<sup>68</sup> Educational institutions receive unrestricted funds for their regular teaching and administrative activities, or for project interventions; allocation depend on specific parameters, including: the number of pupils enrolled, the number of SEN students, the number of classes, etc. This funding system, has often been accused of favouring schools already advantaged, which attract more students, or have in-house staff with the necessary professional skills (particularly that of putting in place effective project design), further increasing inequalities and creating A and B schools.



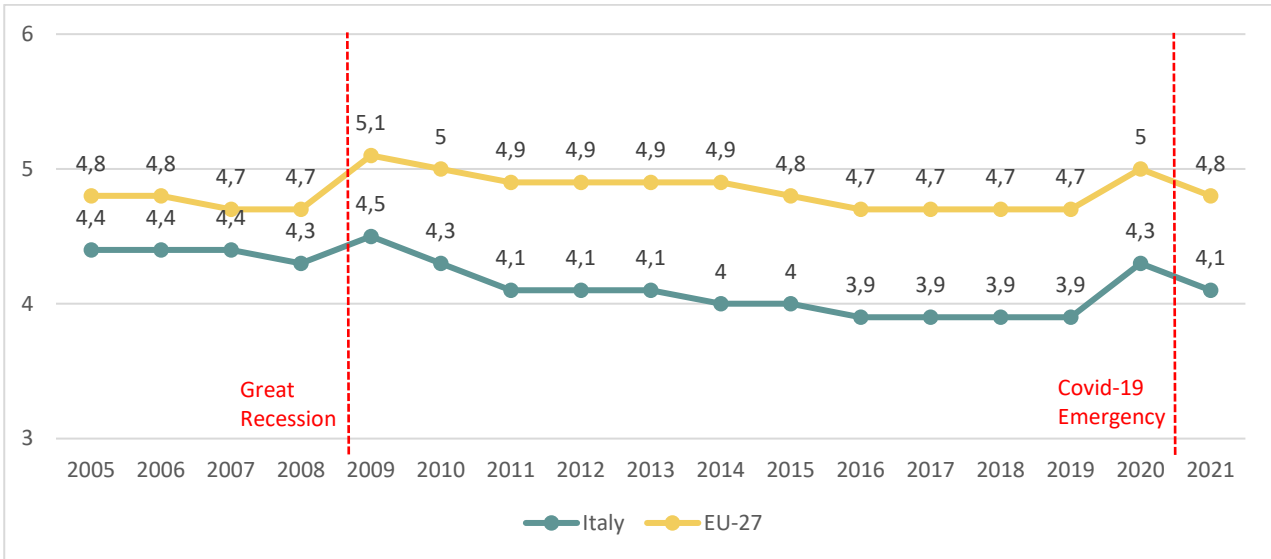


Figure 8 - Percentage of spending on education relative to GDP (2005-21) - Source: CESIE reprocessing openpolis data - With Children on Eurostat data, 2023

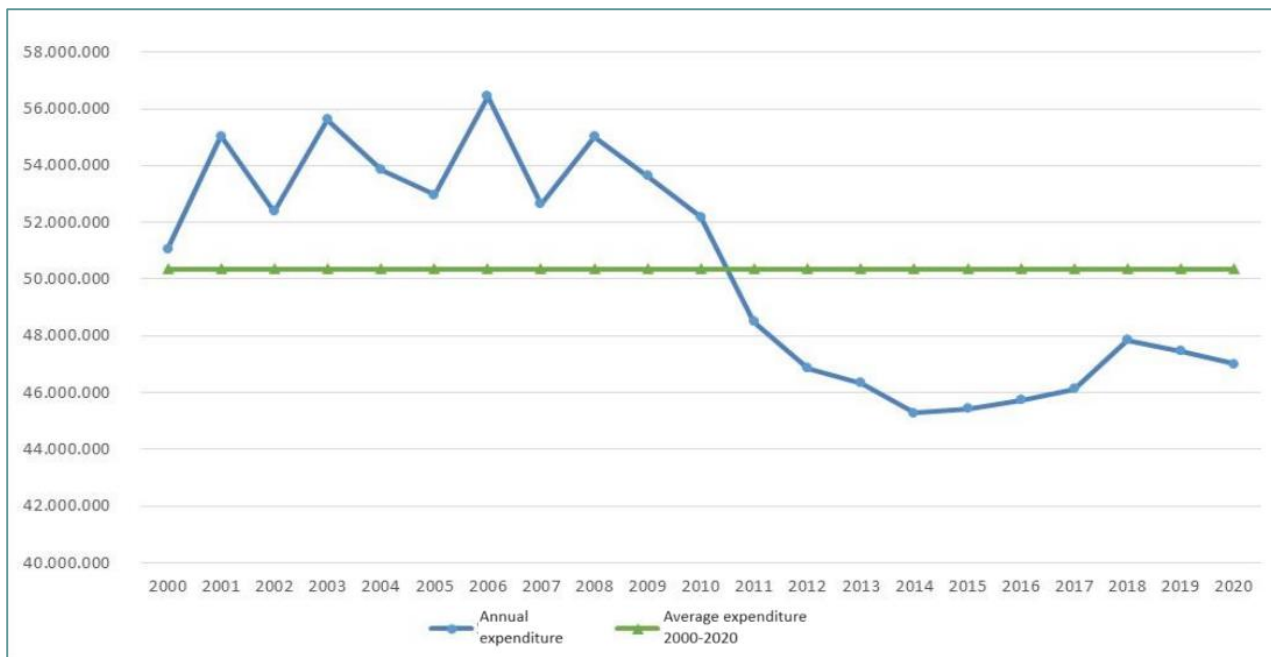


Figure 9 - Primary expenditure net of financial items in the Education sector - Italy years 2000-2020 (thousands of € in 2015 prices) - Source: elaborations on data from System of Territorial Public Accounts, 2023

### A belated awareness of the phenomenon

Early leaving from Education and Training has never been addressed as structural priority, and for years it might have been considered an endemic issue, the price to pay for a democratic opening of education to all citizens.

Over time public policies have been inefficient they lacked a comprehensive and updated reading of the phenomenon of early leaving of education and training. In Italy, research on the phenomenon has traditionally focused on the rate of continuing education after lower

secondary school and the rate of completion of upper secondary school. This concept of early leaving of education and training has at least two limitations:

- it assumes as a reference population the target of individuals at least 18 years of age, so has no predictive value, in relation to the possibility of developing prevention and intervention policies on young people at risk while they are still within the educational cycles;
- it focuses on the outflow of young people from the educational system alone, without taking into account the many manifestations of the phenomenon, which can be traced back to:
  - overt or actual dropout: total unschooling (school evasion); dropout (permanent interruption of studies); repetition (failures); delays (temporary interruption)
  - covert or hidden dropout: loss of interest with increasingly low academic achievement; failure to attain adequate skills despite acquiring the final qualification for the educational cycle attended.

The result is that pending the creation of the nationwide student registry (mentioned in policies for a decade now but never fully implemented), where lists exist that identify drop-auth, these lists underestimate the phenomenon. That is very worrying given Italy's already poor records.

#### **Decentralization of interventions and lack of strategic vision**

The level at which policies to combat early leaving of education and training are implemented is the school. But despite the strong organisational autonomy of the institutions, the trend towards school autonomy has led to a very loose central steering system, which essentially works on two levels: the definition of major strategic objectives by the Italian Government and the practical implementation of these objectives falling on local authorities and educational institutions, with the predominance of a funding model where financial resources are made available to educational institutions on a project basis, leaving.

Educational institutions interventions outside the basic didactic and administrative needs are primarily financed through these national and regional calls for tender, often matched by European funds (such as PONs or new projects related to the Next Generation Europe EU initiative). This funding model often leads to measures structured around specific categories and types of action, where educational institutions have little or no ability to fully adapt planned expenditures to the most pressing needs and must remain "within the purposes and limits of the call for funding".

Also, the massive and regular use of European funds to support educational activities and to implement forms of countering early leaving of education and training is not an indicator of the centrality of the phenomenon's emergency to policy makers over the years and financial attention at the national level. European funds do not burden national public finances.

A phenomenon of such complexity would instead deserve more structurally oriented interventions and a change in pedagogical, cultural, and institutional perspective. Instead in

Italy the fight against early leaving of education and training is not the subject of a coordinated strategy by the public authorities, particularly the Ministry of Education. Policies against school dropout and underachievement in Italy have never formed an organized and comprehensive set of decisions and interventions. Rather the system favours small-scale and occasional interventions, based on the availability of additional funds.

Besides, it must not be underestimated the lack of coordination of educational policies implementation without other no less important policies related to social welfare, healthcare, youth work, juvenile delinquency prevention, employment.

**However: non-convenience of fully implementing a top-down approach**

Early leaving of education and training represents a very broad phenomenon affected by numerous variables related to three macro-areas: institutional, socioeconomic and child-specific contexts. When focusing analysis on Italian territories, the extent and characteristics of the phenomenon are very different, and such must therefore be the interventions to be implemented, making indeed the school level the most efficient one for implementation of policies to combat early leaving of education and training.

In studying the relationships between the phenomenon and the social, cultural and economic characteristics of young people's background, it appears evident how standardized policies would not fully work as well: the phenomenon requires knowledge of the territory and its dynamics, awareness of contextual factors, as well as of the background of each individual student. In short, flexibility. Planning and implementation of interventions should be done according to the needs of the school and its target community, native and non-native.

The previous in-depth point must be confirmed: the current arrangement of school autonomy and funding system does not allow for efficacy and efficiency of interventions. Instead of operating through multiple calls for funding, it would be better to proceed with “participatory planning” and the whole school approach, including those actors and stakeholders who, territory by territory, compose the “Educating Community” (in it.: *Comunità educante*).

**A difficult impact assessment**

The progress in reducing early leaving of education and training in Italy has been notable. Italy managed to decrease the early leaving of education and training rate to 11,5% (2022), showing an 13,6% decrease between 2000 and 2022.

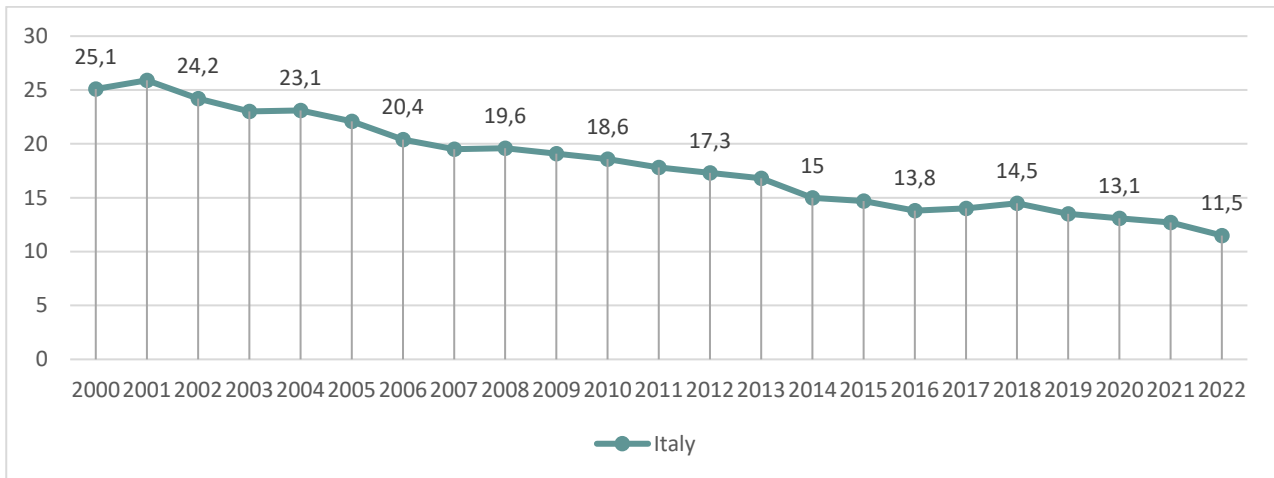


Figure 10 - Early leavers from education and training – Italy – Source of data: Eurostat (online data code: sdg\_04\_10), 2023

Despite the policies over the years, and despite the evidence that ‘something must have occurred’ to bring about such ESL rate reduction, the neat contribute of each single measure has been untested so far. At a national level there is none ascertained knowledge about what it has been done and how; how much has been spent and to obtain what results. There is a lack of definite publications that are not merely the result of estimates or sample local surveys.

In Italy, the cost-benefit assessments of these measures are rare and the evaluations of the outcome are more unique than rare; and even fewer are the follow-up studies on goals achievement. The studies carried out by the Ministry of Education and other authorities<sup>69</sup> repeat themselves in being statistical analyses and/or analyses of the nature of the phenomenon, without any impact assessment of previous policies in these analyses. This has to do with the widespread tendency in institutions not to consider cost-benefit assessments, evaluations of the outcome, impact assessment as relevant and a priority in the creation of strategies and planning. An impact evaluation would represent an extremely complex and expensive task because of the required collection of feedback on every single small-scale and occasional initiative implemented.

<sup>69</sup>

- Censis, *Analisi della dispersione scolastica in Italia in aree di rischio e disagio educativo* (MPI, La Documentazione Educativa, 1990, n. 3, 4, 5)
- Commissione VII della Camera, 2000, *Indagine conoscitiva sul problema della dispersione scolastica*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2013, *La dispersione scolastica: una lente sulla scuola*.
- Camera dei Deputati, 2014, *Indagine conoscitiva sulle strategie per contrastare la dispersione scolastica* (Roma, Atti Parlamentari)

## 3.2 Comparative Analysis of successful and less effective policies

### 3.2.1 Policy analysis in the light of european commission recommendations

It is thus generally hard to compute what has been put in place in Italy in terms of Prevention, Intervention and Compensation measures versus what has actually worked, given the huge fragmentation and diversification of projects and initiatives (according not only to the local scale of planning but also the episodic, unstable and unpredictable facets of funding).

Many funded projects have been implemented thanks to the participation of single establishments (or networks of institutes) in a wider project coordinated by the local municipality, or a third sector organization; other projects have been formulated and implemented by the school itself with the aid of private contributors; the projects supported by European funds (ESF, PON) have been intermediated by the Ministry of education, with periodical calls for projects, which strictly regulated both partnerships and cost, and the budget is distributed only if the school meets given requirements. As a result, at a national level there is no comprehensive knowledge of what it has been done and how and a comparative analysis is not feasible.

#### **Prevention measures**

The national policies of prevention, based on the so-called “preventive approach” have mainly focuses on compulsory education and legal control of school evasion. The enlargement of compulsory education (from 14 to 16 years of age), has shortly reduced dropout ratio. This is due also to the fact that, in line with EU indications, national strategies to combat early leaving of education and training have been geared above all to strengthening the vocational vocation of the vocational education and training system as a whole, through processes of reform of the education system, the empowerment of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector and the introduction of the dual system, aimed at strengthening the link between education, training and work. Vocational training, in fact, where it finds good conditions to function, does not constitute a second-choice training channel compared to the school system, but comes to represent an effective tool for combating dropout.

#### **Intervention measures**

As for intervention measures, there is a significant lack of responses at the policy level. Initiatives like targeted support for disadvantaged families and students, mentoring and personal tuition, alternative teaching and innovative educational methods, school-work alternation, etc., are left in the hands of educational establishments.

#### **Compensation measures**

In compensation, Italy has organised its interventions fundamentally along 2 axes: a greater articulation of the national education systems, and the strengthening of Vocational Education and Training (VET).

Beside VET, other measures to counter early leaving of education and training in Italy are the Provincial Centers for Adult Education (in it.: *Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti* – CPIA)<sup>70</sup>, the “evening school”<sup>71</sup>, and second-chance schools, but although they also play a crucial role in providing education and training to those wishing to complete their education or improve their skills, their role is perceived as more problem-solving in terms of reducing adult illiteracy (especially of migrants, refugees or asylum seekers) and the need to improve adult employability, than related to early leaving of education and training.

After a decade of experimentation and intense activity, second-chance schools are currently undergoing a downsizing phase, due to the scarcity and precariousness of funds, since the field has not been regulated and provided for in accordance with national legislation.

VET has, on the other hand, seen an increase in the number of trainees in the space of a few years, with a significant presence of those who have chosen it as a second chance after dropping out of secondary school. Over the time especially it has become the privileged way of re-engagement for many of those who have lived a previous drop out. Their function is dual: professionalisation (for those who have immediately made a vocational choice) and re-motivation for learning (for those who have come to vocational training after failing or leaving secondary school).

## Guidance

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<sup>70</sup> CPIAs, Provincial Centers for Adult Education, represent a particular type of public educational institution, intended for the adult population, in which they can enroll:

- adults who have not completed compulsory education;
- adults who are not in possession of the final qualification of the first cycle of education;
- those who have reached the age of 16 and are not in possession of the qualification concluding the first cycle of education;
- in some regions, those who have turned 15 can also enroll.

CPIAs play an active role in the realization of Lifelong Learning paths and in insertion or reintegration into the education and training pathway of young people and adults who have recently arrived in Italy (migrants, refugees, asylum seekers) or have dropped out or been expelled early from the school system. The compensation work carried out by these institutions has an educational, but also social and civic value.

<sup>71</sup> Evening schools offer the opportunity not only to make up for lost years of study, but also to shorten the educational path. The courses can be attended by anyone who is a resident of Italy and holds a lower secondary school qualification and they are aimed mainly at working students (who are busy with their job during the day), but also at students who have dropped out of education and want to re-enter and get a qualification, or students who have gotten back by multiple failures in school. They can attend a conventional course of study or a more concentrated and flexible programs, with fewer subjects and fewer hours per week of classes.

In 2013, the European Commission highlighted school and career guidance as an effective measure to combat early leaving of education and training and urged that all countries have strong and well-developed guidance systems. Italy has identified guidance as a key element of policies to counter early leaving of education and training and underachievement. Guidance interventions are mostly implemented in the transition between school cycles and in the start-up phase of vocational training courses (e.g. alternance school-work and dual system, internships and apprenticeships and experiences abroad, start-up of the Youth Guarantee courses).

The systematic adoption of guidance as a transversal tool in the various measures (prevention, intervention and compensation) envisaged to counter the early leaving of education and training is still in progress. A report drawn up by the Ministry of Education underlines how orientation and reorientation procedures are still not widespread; there are few opportunities to realise widespread paths for Skills assessment and training needs and activate suitable study or training opportunities; also, there is little information about existing opportunities and resources that reach the recipients of interventions, especially the most fragile ones.

### **Whole School Approach**

The “Educating Community” (in it.: *Comunità educante*) in Italy is a concept that emphasises the value of partnerships between schools, third sector organisations, public institutions, local authorities and other actors in the fight against early leaving of education and training. These multi-functional collaborations aim to create a comprehensive support network for students, addressing the various challenges that may hinder their educational pathway.

In the various Italian regions, the partnership is implemented in a more or less structured manner and animated by different actors depending on the types of actions implemented. The partnerships take the shape of “Community Educational Pacts” (in it.: *Patti Educativi di Comunità*), formal agreements between schools and other public and private entities to define the implementation aspects of educational and pedagogical projects also linked to territorial specificities and opportunities.

The purposes of these agreements are:

- To encourage the provision of other facilities or spaces, such as parks, theatres, libraries, archives, cinemas, museums, to carry out educational activities that complement traditional ones;
- to support school autonomies, taking into account the different conditions and criticalities of each one, in building collaborations with the various territorial actors that can contribute to the enrichment of the educational offer, identifying the aims, roles and tasks of each one on the basis of the available resources



It is an opportunity for community to be at the service of the School, not only to respond to the emergency needs of the moment, but to act vertically on other priorities such as educational poverty, dropping out of school, the lack of digital skills in schools.

However, despite the policy guidelines, there is no partnership decided at a strategic and centralised level. Local Authorities are entrusted with the task of promoting Community Educational Pacts through the organisation of special Services Conferences (in it.: *Conferenze di Servizi*), with the involvement of school directors, to bring out the needs expressed by schools and assess the cooperation proposals of educational and cultural institutions and the ways of implementing interventions and solutions. However, they are often built according to the activation of calls for tenders and/or regional operational programmes.

The Third Sector plays a more important role. Article 55 of the Italian Third Sector Code<sup>72</sup> has been a landmark in strengthening the relationship between public bodies and the Third Sector, considering these organizations as "allies" in finding solutions to ensure citizens' rights and respond to their needs.

At the national level, particularly in the most fragile and peripheral areas of the country, the Third Sector's network plays a vital role in the field of education, contributing significantly to achieving Goal 4 concerning education in the Sustainable Development Goals. Approximately 80,000 organizations collaborate with public institutions in various contexts, providing support in areas such as youth distress, assistance to foreigners, socialization, disabilities, and even parental support, all factors contributing to school dropout or underachievement.

The actions of the Third Sector differ from those of the school system and do not always work in synergy. While school initiatives are often directly related to the incidence of early leaving of education and training in their institution, Third Sector organizations work independently of the dropout rate addressing cultural and socio-economic factors. This diversity of approaches is complementary and aims to cover a wide range of educational needs and challenges, thus creating a comprehensive and inclusive educational environment, addressing educational challenges comprehensively and effectively.

### 3.3 Policies, gaps and solutions

#### 3.3.1 Gaps identified in existing policies

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<sup>72</sup> Codice del Terzo settore, a norma dell'articolo 1, comma 2, lettera b), della legge 6 giugno 2016, Decreto Legislativo No. 106 (2017, August 02). *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, 179. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/dettaglio/codici/terzoSettore>

The gaps identified include incomplete data monitoring, a limited understanding of the phenomenon, inadequate strategic action, and the need for a broader, coordinated societal approach to address early leaving of education and training. These gaps highlight the need for comprehensive reforms in the education system.

### Monitoring

- **Incomplete Data Registry:** The national registry of pupils was meant more than a decade ago, initiated in 2005 but remains incomplete. It appears the reason lies on the still inadequate digitalization of educational establishment (an issue which has been addressed by some of the policies mentioned in this Report and others not mentioned which would require a similar extensive analysis for being correctly presented to the reader). The absence of comprehensive data makes it challenging to monitor and understand the phenomenon, its causes and its different manifestations.
- **Need for performance data and long-term planning:** The performance data does not help understand whether various policy actions have produced any aggregated effects on reduction of early leaving of education and training (despite evident trends of improvement). Impact assessment data about policy implementation is important for more informed decisions about the continuation, modification, or termination of policies. Instead, a culture of learning and adaptation is still inexistent. This impacts the confidence on institutions.<sup>73</sup>

### Targeting

- **Conventional View of Early leaving of education and training:** Without understanding of the phenomenon, the prevention, intervention and compensation measures are thought and designed for limited categories of “at-risk students”, mainly related to the overt or actual dropout: total unschooling (school evasion); dropout (permanent interruption of studies); repetition (failures); delays (temporary interruption). This approach leaves out the covert or hidden dropout: loss of interest with increasingly low academic achievement; failure to attain adequate skills despite acquiring the final qualification for the educational cycle attended. The issue of underachievement is still poorly addressed by policies.
- **Alternative Paths:** Alternative pathways (VET, SCS, CPIAs, 'evening school') prove to be a valuable tool for compensating early leaving of education and training, but they too suffer from the lack of a national strategy, being the responsibility of the Italian regions. They also suffer from the lack of awareness and support students experience. Academic and career guidance are still

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<sup>73</sup> Italy is renowned for its governmental instability, impacting the continuity of the policy framework for combating early leaving of education and training. The regular changes in the Ministry of Education are a recurring complaint because of the constant shifts in direction. Each new Minister initiate their own reform, which will bear their name and inevitably lead to a confrontation with students, teachers and their unions and political opposition of course. Ministerial instability is a strong indicator of the lack of persistence and continuity of educational policies. Over 30 years the average tenure of an Italian Minister of Education is less than 2 years. In such a context, it is difficult to establish continuity in objectives and means that would be conducive to a strong public action capable of structurally addressing Educational System issues.

not widespread enough at all educational levels and geographical areas of the country. The lack of information or resources can result in students feeling like dropping out is their only choice. Also, in some areas, there may be limited or inadequate alternative schooling options available, leaving students with few viable choices.

### **Fostering Social Responsibility Around Early leaving of education and training**

- **Need for an empowerment of the “Educating Communities” (in it.: *Comunità educanti*):** Early leaving of education and training is not solely a problem of the education system or individual failure. It has broader societal implications, impacting social cohesion, competitiveness, and the overall future of the country. The Whole School Approach has set the direction but a lot more is to be done to formalise the integration of efforts of the “Educational Communities” so that educational institutes can benefit from the joint efforts of their stakeholders and community.

### **3.3.2 Recommendations for Policy approaches based on scientific evidence and research to address underachievement**

- **Awareness of the emergency must be accompanied a broad perspective and a forward-looking vision** and by a willingness to take long-term and sustainable action. Not just a new law or an additional set of measures but **a serious political direction** based on a shared national pact that serves to recognize what is already working, supports the prospect of consolidating best practices, avoids pursuing and funding unnecessary initiatives, coordinates the many good national, regional, and local measures and actions, and outlines policies and operations tailored to different contexts.
- **A strong national plan supported by the entire community**, concerted with the stakeholders of society to be implemented through a national leadership and local hub for intervention coordination. A plan that is organic, articulated and integrated between the various responsible actors at all levels (the “Educating Communities”, in it.: *Comunità educanti*”), which could benefit from the availability of reliable and open information system to facilitate continuous monitoring of the phenomenon and ongoing processes and of a systematic evaluation of the outcomes and long-term impacts of policies and intervention projects, from the national level to the individual student. A system of political coherence is required, with full agreement from regions and municipalities, and strong oversight at central level.
- **Increase investment in making schools safer, more welcoming and inclusive**, promoting the educational institutions’ role as a full-time community education hubs offering diversified interventions for students and their families in collaboration with various local stakeholders. This could be done through the extension of school opening hours at all levels of education, possibly starting from the most deprived neighbourhoods and depopulated inland areas that have suffered from a lack of integrated services over the years. This requires tackling the age-old issue of territorial disparities that do not

allow schools to become garrisons of education, personal development, physical and mental wellbeing and civic engagement. Move away from tender-based spending logics or at least support educational institutions in accessing, managing, and reporting on prevention, intervention and compensation projects, through increase of pedagogical, organizational, and financial staff trained in project design and financial reporting regulations.

- **Developing a unified, continuous, transversal, and vertical curriculum** covering the educational journey of the students from their entry into preschool throughout their entire growth to adulthood. This curriculum should support personal and professional development, encompassing changes, transitions, milestones, challenges, difficulties, and accomplishments. The personalization of learning, active student engagement, and openness to the external world and its demands are, indeed, the only methods capable of ensuring a solid and lasting learning experience, the development of personal skills and aptitudes, reflection on errors, understanding of one's direction, and what one wishes to pursue. This level of intervention is to be applied to all students and can enhance the quality of educational action, permeating the classroom 'climate,' which has the potential to serve as a protective, engaging and motivating factor.
- **Increase investment in the 'instrumental figures'** dedicated to prevention and intervention against early leaving of education and training, as a coordination point for a multidisciplinary effort and experienced to support teachers in addressing the different Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- **Revise the guidance system with a lifelong perspective**, developing intervention and support strategies disseminated at all levels and specific to the most at-risk groups, focusing on providing support to students in gathering information, aiming for autonomy and self-regulation in decision-making. While adopting a 'vocational' approach (career counseling), this should not limit aspirations to pursue higher levels of education beyond the skills already acquired, thus acting against segregation and exclusion. This should be accompanied by the availability of specialized professional figures and competencies in educational institutions to support the work of teachers, such as guidance counselors, educators, psychologists, social workers, promoting integration between schools and local services (social, educational, socio-health, employment).

## 4.0 Key takeaways

The key takeaways from this Policy Review include:

- **Incomplete Data Monitoring and Limited Understanding of the phenomenon of early leaving of education and training were identified as gaps in existing policies in Italy:** this gap in information hinders the development of effective policies and interventions to address the issue.
- **There is a need for comprehensive reforms in the education system to address these gaps and improve strategic action.** These reforms should aim to properly set measures for prevention, intervention and compensation at all levels of intervention but also to improve the overall quality of education.
- **Tackling early leaving effectively requires a coordinated societal approach.** This means tailoring solutions to suit the specific needs of each territorial context. It involves collaboration between educational institutions, local authorities, community organizations, and families.
- **The Review emphasizes the importance of a strong national plan** supported by the entire community and implemented through a national leadership and national hub for intervention coordination. Such a coordinated effort can ensure a more systematic and effective response to early leaving.
- To address early leaving of education and training, **investments in making schools safer, more welcoming, and inclusive is crucial**, with a focus on extending school opening hours to provide a safe, engaging and supportive environment for students. Diversified interventions for students, their families, and the community as a whole can help create a positive and inclusive educational setting.
- **Efforts should be made to support teachers in deal with the challenges diversity of backgrounds and Special Educational Needs (SEN) brings into classroom:** teachers play a pivotal role in addressing early leaving of education and training, and they need to be supported in their role.
- **The availability of specialized professional figures and competencies in educational institutions next to teachers, such as guidance counselors, educators, mental health practitioners, project managers and social workers, is essential.** Asking teachers to wear multiple hats has proven to be an inefficient measure, increasing workload and mental stress of teachers. Multiple professionals can support the work of teachers, provide valuable resources, and promote integration between schools and local services.

Overall, the Policy Review highlights that addressing early leaving of education and training in Italy requires a multifaceted and comprehensive approach, involving data-driven policies, societal coordination, strong leadership, investments in school infrastructure, and support for both teachers and students. These key takeaways emphasize the need for systemic changes and collaborative efforts to ensure that all students have access to quality education and the support they require to succeed.

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