

i SKILL

D3.2 – National Policy Brief ITALY

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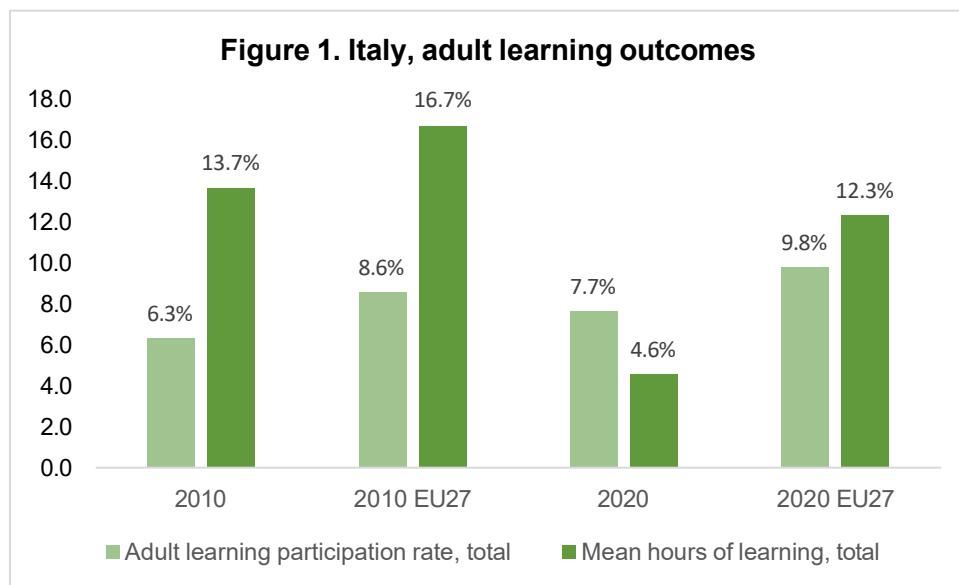
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National context on adult learning

Until the mid-20th century, adult education in Italy was provided mainly by private initiatives. From that time onwards it has begun progressively also to involve the social partners, the state and the regions. Today these different providers operate in a fragmented way and through self-referential systems. The state and the regions promote training through a public system of active labour market policies. At the same time, the state is committed to promoting closer forms of collaboration between training institutions and companies in order to create adult learning paths that are aimed not only at young people but also at adult workers, both employed and unemployed. Specific rights and tools have arisen from collective bargaining on training for workers (e.g. the subjective right to training). Sector-specific interprofessional funds for training activities created by social partners are gaining more and more importance and are today becoming essential for every company.

In short, although the Italian case ([see the National Report for Italy](#)) is characterised by the lack of a single system for training and adult education, there are multiple tools that are dedicated to this education and that contribute to a greater awareness of its importance. Indeed, the latest surveys show an increasing interest and participation in adult education and training.

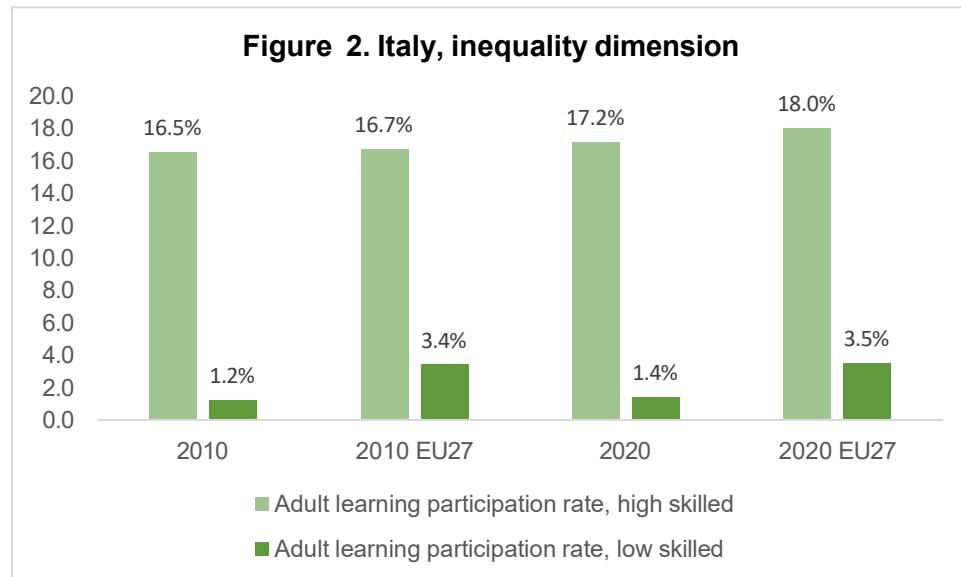
Participation in adult learning



Source: Own calculations based on the Eurostat Labour Force Survey 2010 and 2020.

Note: Variables refer to the population of employed adults, aged 25-64.

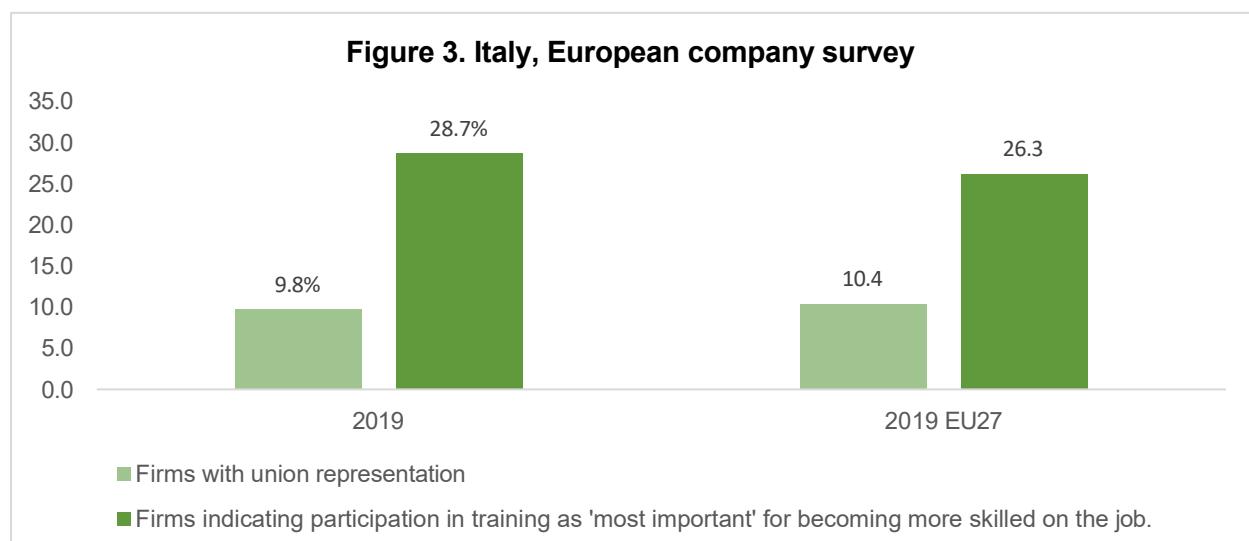
Inequality dimensions



Source: Calculations based on the Eurostat Labour Force Survey 2010 and 2020.

Note: Variables for low-skilled refer to the population of employed adults, aged 25-64, ISCED levels 0-2; variables for high-skilled refer to the whole population, aged 25-64, ISCED levels 5-6.

Firms, union representation and the importance of training



Source: Calculations based on the European Company Survey 2019 dataset.

Inclusive adult learning, industrial relations and social dialogue: main takeaways from the National Report¹

- There is no real system of continuing education in Italy. This is partly because of a rather fragmented regulatory framework in which there is no real law but only provisions spread

¹ Colombo, M., Tiraboschi, T. (2023) *I SKILL National Report – Belgium (Flanders)*. Working Paper I SKILL Project - Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue to Kick-in Inclusive Adult Learning – Deliverable 3.1. Retrieved at: <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-projects/i-skill/>

across different sources, with poor coordination among the various institutional actors involved.

- Looking at the statistics on education, it is clear that one of the main challenges in Italy for the coming decades is to raise the level of education in general because it is directly related to access to continuing education. The share of Italians with a secondary school diploma and a tertiary-level degree is respectively about 16 % and 13 % lower compared with the EU average.
- Employment status affects a person's access to adult education (formal and non-formal) in the EU. Adults in employment are more likely to be engaged in training activities than those who are unemployed, especially in Italy where the rate of participation in adult learning is half the EU average.
- A central role is played by the social partners (through the joint interprofessional funds for continuing education) and by the regions (which provide their own resources and those of the European Social Fund). Nevertheless, among the 60.2 % of companies that activate training pathways for their employees, most resort to self-financing.
- The importance of training is particularly recognised in the automotive sector, which in Italy consists mainly of small to medium-sized enterprises that today more than ever require skills enabling the technological and organisational transformation triggered by the green and digital transitions. A national observatory dedicated to the automotive industry has been set up to survey the sector, and all social partners take part in this in order to promote a common strategy that can meet the challenges.
- In the automotive industry and beyond, there are currently significant differences with regard to adult education. These differences depend on company size. Larger companies are often better structured and able to plan, manage and implement a large variety of training courses suited to the needs of their employees. By contrast, smaller companies struggle with this planning and management activity, as many interviewees repeatedly pointed out.
- Italy is characterised by a complete absence of industrial policies for the automotive sector that go beyond just making incentives available for the purchase of new vehicles. There is therefore also an absence of policies on skills-learning in this sector. Yet such policies should be widespread and inclusive, and they should also be related to economic and financial policies.
- The social partners have a central role in building the skills of workers in the automotive sector. In recent years the social partners have introduced a subjective right to training for every job in the sector. They have also introduced a digital platform for online learning (MetApprendo). These combine with other tools created by the social partners for continuous learning (see paragraph below for details).
- The current link between training policies (that are designed and managed by industrial relations) and public policies on the same issues is very limited, if not completely absent. While training policies designed and managed by industrial relations focus their attention on employed workers, public policies mainly focus on those who are unemployed or unemployable. However, there is currently no integration between these two types of policy.
- In the view of training institutions, some of the tools made available by public actors to encourage the continuing training of workers have not been adequately exploited or they present bureaucratic complications. There is also a difficulty in engaging certain groups of people in training activities (especially the NEETs – people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training) without great effort.

- In the view of workers, training is a valuable instrument for companies to be able to attract and retain staff, and to be able to cope with technological innovations. Workers believe that training, reskilling and upskilling should be more connected to a worker's remuneration and career path. Yet workers note the current absence of a mechanism for the certification of work-related skills.

The role of collective bargaining in promoting continuing education in the automotive sector

Trade unions and industrial relations today play an increasing role in the design, implementation and monitoring of various training programmes. This is often so they can guarantee the training that is proposed in terms of the qualification of workers (Ciucciovino et al. 2021).

As a result of industrial relations, there are now different tools that help foster access to training and continuing education, and that help with its quality and effectiveness. One of the most important of these tools is the subjective right to training (Maresca, 2017). During the renewal of the national collective bargaining agreement in the engineering-industrial sector in 2016, the social partners introduced this new right that provides for all employees in the sector to have access to 24 hours of training, which is to be carried out over a 3-year period. This right therefore also allows access to training pathways for low-skilled workers.

Another tool made for the automotive sector to be able to access continuing education is the MetApprendo digital learning platform for remote and/or asynchronous training on different topics. This platform also provides an online learning portfolio for the worker to be able to keep track of learning that has already taken place (Ciucciovino et al. 2023). MetApprendo combines with the subjective right to training in terms of improvement and strength.

In addition, the New Skills Fund (which is a public fund co-financed by the European Social Fund, and which was created in 2020 then refinanced in 2022) represents a specific policy measure for Italy in relation to worker training. This New Skills Fund is available for companies that retrain their workers and that modernise their production processes, and the fund has made it possible to reshape working hours through company or territorial agreements that provide for part of the total time spent in training activities (a minimum of 40 hours per worker, and a maximum of 200 hours). The fund also covers the cost of social security and the workers' contribution to the cost of training. The involvement of the social partners is central in the integration of financial support in the New Skills Fund (Impellizzieri, 2021).

All these tools are the result of collective bargaining, where the topic of training is today given increasing importance (Tiraboschi, 2022). In Italy, Fondimpresa is the leading interprofessional fund (of 19) for the automotive sector.

Recommendations from the National Report

The five policy recommendations listed below are based on findings from the National Report on Italy and in particular on the qualitative survey that was conducted for this report. The policy recommendations are all to promote inclusive adult learning processes, and they focus on the Italian automotive sector.

- *A new industrial policy.* For years, Italy has lacked an industrial policy for the automotive sector. Such a policy should be able to set objectives, establish stages to achieve them, and encourage development processes that are not limited to the sole provision of incentives, but that are able to integrate different resources. There is a need for an industrial policy to promote research and development through close collaboration

between companies and training institutions. This policy should also benefit SMEs. In addition, there is a need for an industrial policy that promotes innovation (especially product innovation) as well as training (which can guarantee access to quality learning processes in line with the emerging needs of the sector). An important element of this industrial policy must be the method pursued first to conceive it and then to implement it. This method must involve constant dialogue and discussion between the social partners, who are particularly important both at the national level (i.e. collaborating to identify, together with the state, the development trajectories that should be pursued in the sector) and at the territorial and corporate level (i.e. defining the policies designed at national level on the basis of local specificities and needs, as well helping companies and workers to manage – and not suffer – the change).

- *Training at the centre of collective bargaining.* Training is often still perceived by collective bargaining as a resource to be used in the presence of already established crises, with the aim of training programmes being to retrain the workers involved in these crises and to lead them to new employment. The National Collective Labour Agreement of the metalworking industries, which is applied in the automotive sector, started working to change this perception a few years ago. This is a process that must continue, with bargaining being strengthened at all levels, and in turn creating more space for the training of all workers in accordance with national industrial policies and their territorial variations.
- *Rediscover the role and function of bilateral bodies.* Bilaterality can today play a decisive role in promoting inclusive and quality adult learning paths, thanks to its participatory logic and constant dialogue between employers' representatives and workers' representatives (e.g. by activating or reactivating the numerous bilateral committees that have been established, with the aim of creating a branched system at a territorial level but with national control, dedicated to anticipating training needs). At the same time, committees at company and local level can promote knowledge of the tools that have been created by negotiation to increase workers' skills. These committees can promote the accessibility of the tools to all interested parties, and can provide assistance and support.
- *Funds for continuous training and integration between public and private sectors.* The joint interprofessional funds created by collective bargaining on a sectoral basis, and the recently introduced New Skills Fund, are important tools for the training and retraining of Italian workers. The social partners play a decisive role in this training and retraining as they approve the training plans that are then financed by the funds. Adding value to these training plans, by inserting skills that correspond to the identified needs and that are able to promote quality jobs, is a task that can be tackled by the social partners – firstly, by investing in their own representatives through providing them with skills on the planning of training, and secondly by providing their representatives with the work of the bilateral bodies as support. It is particularly important for the social partners to promote forms of collaboration between the private sector and public policies on continuous training in order to make the use of resources more efficient by avoiding overlaps. A crucial part of this collaboration is the creation of tools to facilitate qualification and retraining processes that are also for the unemployed and the inactive. Indeed, some interprofessional funds have already started to collaborate, thus improving the inclusiveness of these tools.
- *Clear rules and subsidiarity.* In Italy there is regulatory fragmentation, with various institutions that do not coordinate policies for continuous training, development and employment among themselves, and a bureaucratic complexity that complicates the

creation and access to forms of inclusive and quality adult learning. To avoid the risk of this situation being abused, it is important to introduce clear and uniform rules that are valid at a national level, and that will then help local institutions and territories in the definition of training policies. The ultimate objective of this should be the construction of territorial ecosystems for innovation where companies, training bodies, social partners and public institutions can collaborate regularly, with the aim of integrating research, innovation and training.

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