OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of non-formal and informal learning

Country Background

ITALY

ISFOL

This report was prepared for the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies by a working group of ISFOL ("Institute for the Development of Vocational Training of Workers"). The group has been directed by Gabriella Di Francesco (Head of Unit of the "Learning Systems and Methodologies Department"), in the context of the "OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of non-formal and informal learning", following common guidelines the OECD provided to all countries participating in the activity.
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OECD Activity on

Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

Italy Country Background Report[1]

July 2008

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[1] The Report has been produced in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour by a working group of ISFOL – "Learning Systems and Methodologies Department" directed by Gabriella Di Francesco.
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Component 1, Contextual Factors

1.1 Demographic and economic overview

Up to 31 December 2006, residents in Italy were 59 131 287 (28 718 447 males and 30 412 846 females 45% of them live in the North, 19% in the Centre and 36% in the South of the country. Italy is the fourth largest populated country in Europe and ranks twenty second in the world. The natural population movement (number of alive births minus deaths) in year 2006 is equal to 2 118 (+12 753 males and 10 635 females). The birth-rate was equal to 9.5 per thousand inhabitants. In year 2006, the estimate of the average number of children per woman was equal to 1.35[2]. The ratio between old population aged 65 and over and population aged 0-14, was equal to 139.9% with a steady increase compared with the previous years: 137.8% in 2005 and 135.9% in 2004.

Italy faced significant demographic changes in recent years: high longevity combined with a chronically low birth increased the proportion of retirees significantly and aged the economically active population. In advance, if inward and outward migration flows are compared, Italy usually loses more young and well qualified workers than it gains[3].

Italy belongs to the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialized nations; it is a member of the European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Italian economy during the last decades has changed dramatically: from an agriculturally based economy, it has developed into an industrial state and now is quickly moving away from manufacturing to services. Today, in fact, agriculture accounts for just 2% of GDP; and industry and services account for 29.1% and 69% of GDP respectively 6[4].

Italy has a lot of economic problems. The underlying macroeconomic environment is poor due to a consistent 20 year run of budget deficits. The fiscal situation has deteriorated sharply since 2000 and Italy's public debt/GDP[5] ratio was, at the end of 2006, 106.8%, more than 45 percentage points above the Maastricht reference value of 60% of GDP and among the highest in the world. According to World Economic Forum data7 (see illustration below), Italy's competitive position has continued to decline, falling four places to 42 between 2005 and 2006[6]. Referring to the Lisbon indicators, the level of performance of Italy appears no better when compared with other European economies, with an overall 24th position.

Concerning employment and unemployment, it is possible to state that, although employment has risen since the late 1990s, its rates remain low: Italy's employment rate, in fact, is one of the lowest (59% in 2006) in the OECD countries. These statistics reflect the Italian economic trends. The latest ISTAT data[7] shows the agricultural labour force steadily diminishing (from 6% in 1995 down to 4.3% of the total workforce in 2006); industrial employment shrinking due to the impact of the new economy (from 32.7% in 1995 to 30.1 % in 2006); and the service sector employing the largest percentage (65.6 %) of the Italian workforce.

Other relevant aspects of the Italian economy that should be briefly underlined are the types of contracts and the so-called 'hidden' economy. The ISFOL Report (2007) indicates that 10 workers in 100 in Italy are currently employed on fixed-term contracts. Almost half of the new jobs are fixed-term and their amount has increased in comparison with 2005.

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[2] Source: data processing from ISTAT (http.//demo.istat.it/bil2006/index.html).
[3] Please, see also paragraph 1.2 "Internationalisation".
[4] ISTAT, "Italy in Figures", 2007.
[5] Gross domestic product.
[6] WEF Global Competitiveness Index 2006 and 2005.
[7] ISTAT, "Italy in Figures", 2007.

The same report has estimated trends in the Italian ISFOL estimates that the unit of irregular work reduced from 3,280 in 2001 to 2,951 millions units in 2005 (i.e. from 13.8% to 12.1% of total employment). The sectors most affected by irregular work are those in which it is possible for inefficient production units to survive, or in which work activities are of low complexity, such as agriculture, tourism and retailing, domestic or personal care services, building.

Finally, concerning the five Lisbon benchmarks adopted by the European countries in order to guide progress on the *Education and Training 2010 Work Programme*, despite some progressions Italy scores poorly. In 2006, for example, the Italian score on the benchmark for early school leavers (rates to be reduced to 10% by 2010) was 20.8%. Progress and performance on the benchmark of upper secondary completion rates (the benchmark needs to reach 85% by 2010) are catching up: in 2006 Italy registered a score of 51.3% of adults (20-24 years old) with at least an upper secondary school certificate or an equivalent qualification (it was 50.4% in 2005, 49.3% in 2004). When it comes to lifelong learning participation of adults (to reach 12.5% by 2010) Italy has performance level below the EU average (6.1% versus 9.6%)[8].

1.2 Internationalisation

With regard to the migrant movement according to *ISTAT* (National Institute of Statistics), as of 1 January 2006, foreign citizens residing in Italy numbered 2,670,514 (1,350,588 males and 1,319,926 females). In year 2006 297 640 units from abroad have been registered against 75 230 cancellations.

However, these figures reflect a relatively low foreign presence in Italy when compared with other European countries: in Germany, as of January 2006, foreign citizen residents amounted to 8.8% of the overall population; in Spain and in the United Kingdom in 2004, the foreign citizen population amounted to 6.6% and 4.7% (respectively) of the total population; and in France, as of the 1999 census, the percentage of foreign citizens equalled 5.9% of the overall population.

With specific regard to the insertion of foreign citizens into the Italian educational system, two key considerations should be made:

- first, the presence of foreign students is very inhomogeneous and varied across the national territory;
- secondly, the change was extremely rapid. During the period between 2004 and 2006, the increase in foreign students averaged 60,000 per year, bringing the total foreign student population to over 400,000 for the current year (2005-2006) or roughly 5% of the overall student population in Italy. The available statistical data also indicate an increase in the number of foreign citizens enrolled in upper secondary schools, with an apparent tendency towards technical and vocational schools. Italy has identified the full educational integration of all foreign students and intercultural education as cultural objectives: Ministerial Circular No. 205 of 26 July 1990, "*La scuola dell'obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L'educazione interculturale*" (Compulsory Education and Foreign Students. Intercultural Education); Ministerial Circular No. 73 of 2 March 1994 "*Dialogo interculturale e convivenza democratica: l'impegno progettuale della scuola*" (Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Cohabitation: A Schools' Planning Commitment); and Article 36 of Law 40/98, not modified by Law 189/02.

Protection of the right of foreign minors to education was established with Immigration Law No. 40 of 6 March 1998 and in the Legislative Decree dated 25 July 1998, "*Testo unico delle disposizioni*

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[8] Source: ISFOL Report 2007.

concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero"
(Consolidated Act on Rules Concerning the Regulations of Immigration and the Provisions on the Status of Foreigners) which brings together and coordinates immigrant reception and integration measures with specific emphasis on school integration. Law 189 of 30 July 2002 (the so-called "Bossi-Fini" Law) guarantees reception procedures for foreign students in Italy.

In the current legislative framework, which reserves significant autonomy for schools, the Presidential Decree 275/99 is an essential measure with which to address all issues regarding foreign students – such as integration – that require the creation of appropriate and specific solutions.
The reform of the educational system, Law 53/2003, contains measures to develop the potential of all students through customised study plans in order to tailor training and education curricula for each student.

Legislative Decree 76/2005 on the right-duty to education and training includes and expands on the concept of compulsory training (Article 68 Law 144/99), identifying the targets as "everyone – including foreign minors – present in the national territory" (Article 1, para. 6).

The presence of students with diverse social, economic and training backgrounds poses a challenge in the assessment of competence levels and thus the insertion of students in the most appropriate training pathway.
The most relevant reference to this issue is found in Article 45, para. 4, of Decree 394 dated 31 August 1999 which states, "the teachers' board must adapt syllabi in relation to the level of competences attained by individual foreign students…". Though the Decree does not specifically mention evaluation, it can be easily inferred that the possible adaptation of syllabi for single students requires a transition towards evaluation methods (a basis for which is also found in Ministerial Circulars and Directives on this theme) which would closely examine each student's personal history. This priority is clearly expressed in the document, "*Indicazioni nazionali per i piani di studio personalizzati*" (National Policy Indications for Customised Study Plans) and in the objectives of the "*Profilo educativo dello studente*" (Student Educational Profile) which constitutes the new pedagogical, didactic and organisational framework of the Italian education system, according to Law 53/03, Article 3, in particular with regard to evaluation.
Class councils that evaluate foreign students inserted throughout the school year – whose individualised study plans include language education and activities to bring them up to speed on the regular curriculum - must have as much information as possible about the student's previous educational history, especially results achieved, the characteristics of the schools the student attended and the essential abilities, skills and knowledge acquired. Thus training 'evaluation' is more useful than 'certification' evaluation, in that it accounts for the student's progress, the processes already completed, personal objectives, motivation and commitment and especially demonstrated learning potential. In particular, when the decision is made to move a student from one school class to another or from one grade to the next, it is important to consider the plurality of elements included that comprise a student's development. The role and the responsibility of autonomous schools and teachers in student evaluation clearly gain importance in the current legislative context.

Law 182 of 30 July 2002, the "Bossi-Fini" Law, made no changes to school registration procedures for foreign students.
Ministerial Circular No. 155/2001 establishes support measures for teachers and staff of schools with high foreign student populations; Ministerial Circular No. 60/2001 lays the groundwork for the establishment of language courses for non-EU citizens, both adults and minors.

Article 9 of the 2002-2005 National Collective Labour Agreement (*CCNL*) for Education provides incentives for projects in at-risk areas where immigration is heaviest and educational marginalisation is highest; some of these projects have already been implemented according to Ministerial Circulars No. 40 of 6 April 2004, No. 41 of 24 March 2005 and No. 91 of 21 December 2005.

Concerning to what extent have foreign citizens been inserted into higher education, in Italy in 2005, 301,298 students graduated from university (172,429 of whom were women). Of these graduates, 4,438 (2,771 of whom were women) were of foreign citizenship; 3,237 of those foreigners were from European countries.
During the 2005-2006 academic year, 41,589 foreign students enrolled in Italian universities (of whom 24,357 were women). Thus, 2.28% of the Italian university population is of foreign citizenship. In terms of the comprehensive number of matriculated student population, the rate of foreign students is approximately 2.81%.

During the 2004-2005 academic year, foreigners enrolled in a post-degree course numbered 4,455 (of whom 2,013 were women). Of these students, 1,160 were from European Union countries. In 2004 only 1,247 foreign students (of whom 669 were women) obtained a post-degree qualification (Specialist Degree - Master of Science Degree - Research Doctorate Degree or Master's Degree); of these foreign students, 369 were from EU countries.

Participants in training courses provided by *CTP*s (Permanent Territorial Centres) included roughly 76,819 foreign citizens: 22,666 were pursuing a certificate; 11,298 were enrolled in short modular courses; and 42,855 were enrolled in courses specifically designed for foreigners.

1.3 New ICT

This section of the report provides a synthesis of the ICT policies and issues and presents the situation of ICTs at work which actually characterise Italy. Like other European governments, Italy is committed to modernising the country through the widespread use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and developing a model of the information society based on continuous innovation and creation of knowledge. Such a model should improve the quality of life and work and should prevent exclusion.

Italy has an adult computer literacy rate of 98.4% with 47% of the relevant age group involved in tertiary education. 90% of Italian secondary schools and 75% of primary schools are connected to the Internet with the number of students per computer being 35 at primary level and 15 at secondary level. 63% of Italian teachers are computer literate.

Education and ICT

In the field of ICT there are also important investments by the Ministry of Education in order to implement ICT in many educational experiences. The Italian government spends around 4.7% of its GDP on education and has been making efforts over the past few years to promote the use of ICT in schools. Italy is slightly above the EU average in terms of the percentage of the labour force using *e*-learning, and 41.9% of Italians use a computer for work. On the other hand, only 29% of central administration personnel are trained in ICT: one of the lowest figures in the EU.

National Programmes and Initiatives

Over recent years, the development of distance-learning methodologies and techniques witnessed remarkable growth in the various fields of vocational and educational activity, both in terms of the

number of initiatives and their output and, more specifically, in terms of the relevant setting-up and reshaping of training structures.

This increase could be interpreted as a 'symptom' of the transition from a socio-economic system that felt that it was enough to have a highly concentrated educational system in early life, to a system which is having second thoughts about the entire education and training paradigm.

Starting with the publication of the European Commission's *Memorandum on Open Distance Learning in the European Community* (1991), numerous European resolutions on the issue emerged, both in political terms and regarding financial support for programmes and policy lines of action.

Ministry of Labour Projects

At the national level, the interest of the Ministry of Labour was confirmed in 1999 with the start of the *FaDol* Project (a national network for online distance learning addressed to regional vocational trainers), in the field of routine ESF-funded trainer training initiatives

The *FaDol* Project targets the entire public training system: both teaching and non-teaching staff involved in regional, provincial or municipal public centres as well as trainers involved in the training of trainers.

Distance learning activities focus especially on updating, specialising and retraining staff involved in designing, running and assessing the various aspects of training pathways (teachers, tutors, vocational counsellors, course designers, administrators, etc.).

In the *FaDol* distance network format, besides having the opportunity of using training tools and contexts which are still customised, it is also possible to utilise parallel services such as in-training exchange between trainers, databank access, connection to other existing networks, etc.

The Ministry of Labour is responsible for the entire project. There are two structures involved: *SAT* (Technical Assistance Service), which is responsible for creating and managing the peripheral and central structures; and *SAF* (Training Assistance Service), which is responsible for designing and providing training pathways and for training assistance. The role of the *FaDol* regional centre is to monitor and support the local training process and to stimulate and guide discussion on the needs stemming from the local situation in terms of vocational training system innovation. It is appointed to direct central guidelines according to local needs and to oversee work carried out from its own remote position, thereby checking progress regarding other regional centres. It must document and publish on the internet experiences which have been a success locally in terms of cooperation between the vocational training system, the educational system and other institutions such as universities and research centres.

The *FaDol* Regional Centre is responsible for using the Internet to stimulate cooperation and innovation with its own vocational training system, widely integrating it with local labour market needs, SMEs, and access regulations for Community and national public funds.

At the local level, *FaDol* has its "local networked points", from which individual trainers can use courseware, access the database and talk to other trainers connected to the network. The local networked points are widely distributed, providing good geographical coverage and creating a visible system available for users in the vicinity.

Ministry of Education Projects

Another important initiative came from the Ministry of Education with *Progetto PSTD* (*Programma di Sviluppo delle Tecnologie Didattiche* – Didactic Technologies Development Programme - 1997-2000). This is a large scale programme involving the entire Italian education system and based on strong public investment. The programme set three broad targets:

- to promote the use of multimedia mastery amongst students, to teach them how to use and comprehend different tools and to adopt new cognitive styles in studies, research, communication and design;

- to improve the efficiency of teaching-learning processes and teaching organisation itself, both regarding individual disciplines and the general acquisition of competences;

- to improve teachers' expertise not only through training, but also by providing them with tools and services for their daily work.

At the same time as pilot projects were being conducted in some 8,000 schools in the 1999-2000 school year, vocational guidance and guidelines were also defined through Ministerial memoranda, which:

- underlined the necessity for all schools, at least those entering the programme, to have internet access (Ministry of Education Memorandum No. 196/1998);

- promoted the supply of digital satellite technologies for training activities (Ministry of Education Memorandum No. 430/1998);

- promoted the purchase of personal computers in schools (Circular Letter, para. No. 34332/BL);

- promoted the development of multimedia products and services (Memorandum No. 126/1999).

The Regional Level

In recent years at the regional level, there was some indication that open and distance learning was becoming more institutionally legitimised. The first Region to create a specific regulation was Emilia-Romagna, taking the cultural decision to deal with distance learning as a 'mainstream' form of training, rather than a 'secondary' system. Recently, the Piedmont Regional Authorities laid down conditions for the development of distance learning activities ("*Risoluzione sul mercato del lavoro*" - Labour Market Resolution, Point 13 "*Attività sperimentali innovative*" Innovative Experimental Activities).

Contribution of EU Programmes

Further acknowledgement of training and distance learning came from the Ministry of Labour, with Memorandum 43/99 (course activities provided through distance learning modules, for multiregional operational programmes and Community initiatives, jointly financed with the ESF Funds), which defines the provisions for monitoring activities.

Numerous training activities using distance and self-learning methodologies were implemented with Community and national funds (through the ESF, ADAPT and Employment Community Initiatives, Law No. 236/93, Law No. 125/91, etc.).

Surveys on the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of experimental activities conducted are still few and far between.

The monitoring of ADAPT Phase II projects reveals the lack and the awakening of training

structures: enterprises are in fact making increasing use of technological and multimedia aids and, on the other hand, are using less and less the traditional classroom, for reasons of time as well as economic costs. In ADAPT Phase II it is possible to find several projects approved in Italy that claim to run distance learning activities. Between the various types of promoters, the most active are the training bodies and enterprises in general (cooperatives, consortia, SMEs). The sectors mostly covered by these projects are: agro-biology, banking, commerce, graphics, publishing and vocational training.

The geographical distribution of projects reveals a higher concentration of training activities and, in the same way, a high percentage of activities conducted using distance learning both in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano and in the Tuscany and Lombardy Regions. In this case, the close correlation between distance learning and training projects shows how activities are mainly characterised by the 'distance' approach. Even though Emilia-Romagna numbers among those Regions with a limited concentration of training activities, it nonetheless shows particular interest in distance learning: more than half of the Region's training projects have adopted this approach.

Italian Centralised Actions

The actions and the policies undertaken by the Italian government have laid the indispensable premise for the development of a digital content market, intended mainly to favour the diffusion of internet and new technologies in the daily use of Italian families, as well as the spread of the use of ICT in schools and universities. In particular, support for the development of this market is provided by:

− The *Vola con Internet* (Fly With The Internet) Project, sponsored by the Minister for Innovation and Technology, aims to promote and generate incentives for internet use among young people. The initiative is backed through funding approved by the 2003 financial amendment which provides all teenagers born in 1987 with a subsidy of 175 euros if they decide to buy a PC with internet access;

− The *Progetto docente* Project: this initiative has been launched together with Microsoft and Elea. It is an intensive online course for 6-12 teachers with ICT skills. The course is free and is based on six modules for mastery of the Microsoft Office XP package. It will be complemented by an online workshop that will train teachers to combine technology with more traditional methods, enabling them to offer more active and creative ways of learning in all subjects, disciplines and competences. The course lasts 24 hours (there is also a shorter module lasting 16 hours); on its completion, the teacher will receive a certificate of "expert in applied technology";

− The financing destined for the schools in the South of Italy (the *CIPE Scuola* Project provides an allocation of 26.5 million euros);

− The *e-Inclusion* Project, that foresees the use of technologies for the inclusion of disabled students and the integration of non-Italian students;

− The *PC ai docenti* (PC to Teachers) Project and the *PC alle famiglie* (PC to Families) Project, financed by the Italian government, which allow teachers and families to purchase PCs;

Work

This section focuses attention on the specific situation of enterprises. In recent years, the issue of technological innovation has also centred on the modernisation of enterprises (especially SMEs) by

progressively introducing Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Policy measures fostering adoption of ICT by enterprises have been designed and the second Action Plan for ICT innovation in enterprises was launched on 10 March 2005. The "*Piano di azione nazionale per l'innovazione digitale nelle imprese 2005*" (Italian Action Plan for ICT Innovation in Enterprises 2005) is the result of the cooperation and joint efforts of the Minister for Innovation and Technology (*MIT*) and the Ministry of Productive Activities (*MAP*). This second Action Plan follows the first edition (2003) which has been considered a best practice for the governance of innovation in the study on "Benchmarking National and Regional Polices in Support of the Competitiveness of the ICT Sector in the EU" launched by the Enterprise Directorate-General of the European Commission. The Plan aims at promoting the diffusion and adoption of information and communication technologies by Italian enterprises, especially SMEs. To this end, the Plan includes a number of legislative measures, projects and operational instruments. The 2005 Plan confirms and reinforces the main objectives of the first edition to:

- increase innovation in the "made in Italy" sectors through the use of information and communication technologies to stimulate competitiveness;
- implement a policy of support for the development of selected high-tech sectors;
- improve the functioning of the Italian business system, turning it into a fertile environment for research, technological development and innovation;
- facilitate technology transfer from public research centres to enterprises.

1.4 Economic Developments and Skills Shortage/Mismatch

In the new economy, the vocational training, the accumulation of knowledge and the development of human capital are fundamental factors in a country's economic growth, innovation and employment. Education and training policies, in conjunction with effective employment and research policies, can undoubtedly further the common commitment to lifelong learning. In Italy, various initiatives have been launched to foster human capital development, allow greater flexibility in training pathways and favour the retraining and mobility of workers as they transition from one job to another.

At the national level, Pillar III of the 2000-2006 **National Operational Programme** (NOP), "*Ricerca scientifica, sviluppo tecnologico, alta formazione*" (Scientific Research, Technological Development and Advanced Training), seeks to enhance highly-qualified human capital through a series of actions, including:

- Qualification and reinforcement of human potential in the research, science and technology sectors. The objective is to develop competences and facilitate the transfer of know-how from the scientific system to the production system as well as to foster an entrepreneurial culture among research personnel of the scientific research centres and universities in southern Italy;
- Training for high-level profiles to bolster entrepreneurial competitiveness with priority to Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). The objective is to promote among the economic actors a new culture of innovation and financing among southern Italian third sector economic structures and service providers, in particular for SMEs;
- Training for high-level profiles in Public Administration to maintain and enhance an adequate level of competence development, project design and management skills with regard to Research & Development activities;
- The promotion and improvement of higher training through doctoral research, vocationally-oriented post-graduate courses (i.e., master's courses) and research grants for young researchers from universities, public and research bodies and enterprises;

- Increased female participation in scientific research, technology, development and innovation. The objective is to raise female participation in the labour market and change cultural orientations and institutional practices that hinder the improvement of women's living and working conditions.

The *Piano per l'Innovazione, la Crescita e l'Occupazione - PICO* (Plan for Innovation, Growth and Employment) was approved on 14 October 2005. *PICO* is the Italian plan to re-launch the Lisbon Strategy. The Plan contains 24 guidelines indicated by the European Council in 5 priority objectives,[9] laying out legislative measures and specific investment projects for the achievement of these objectives. The third of these objectives is the *Rafforzamento dell'istruzione e della formazione del capitale umano e una sua più ampia estensione dei benefici alla popolazione, con particolare riferimento ai giovani* (Reinforcement of Education and Training of the Human Capital and a Greater Distribution of the Benefits to the Population, in particular the Youth Population). The Plan cites the reform of the education and training systems and the reform of the university system as important tools for greater enhancement of human capital.

The Plan also aims to:
- improve the quality of teacher training, through updating programmes in new technologies, organisational innovation and foreign languages, as well as by stipulating agreements for the purchase of PCs;
- innovate teaching methods in schools and universities to include digital content and technological platforms (*e-Inclusion* Project);
- improve teaching of students with disabilities, favouring access to ICT tools (Law 4/04);
- assure the right to education through the introduction of *e*-learning programmes in juvenile detention facilities;
- reduce the digital divide through the creation of a media-promoted ICT literacy plan and a training plan for the use of IT networks in southern Italian Regions.

In addition to the above-mentioned innovations in formal learning, Italy created an initial body of legislation governing the implementation of the new system of certification.

In addition, some regional initiatives have been launched based on the concept of **Learning Region,** i.e.**,** a region able to create a network and form an integrated system for human capital development. Some such initiatives include:

The *Regiones* Project, a system approach to developing a learning region: a project conducted with funding from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, under Measure II.I of the "Technical Assistance and Systems Actions" National Operational Plan, Action II.Ic, OB.1 IT 161 PO 001, which seeks to support innovation of the education and training systems in the Italian Regions. In particular, the Project aims to reinforce a widespread network of regional administration officers and practitioners, as well as policymakers and socio-economic actors that all share common goals, namely to improve the quality and increase the flexibility and effectiveness of the training supply as well as encourage increased competitiveness among enterprises.

The primary objectives of the Project include:

• Accurate analysis and assessment of the organisation and overall functionality of the present regional training-employment system. The analysis will include an evaluation of operational

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[9] These include: 1. Extending the area of free choice of citizens and enterprises (Guidelines 3, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 21, 22); 2. Granting incentives for scientific research and technological innovation (Guidelines 7, 8); 3. Strengthening education and training of human capital and extending its benefits to the rest of the population, with particular reference to young people (Guidelines 9, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24); 4. Upgrading tangible and intangible infrastructure (Guidelines 16); 5. Protecting the environment (Guideline 11).

capacities, potential for future development, and recommend reorganisation and reorientation efforts;

• Increased inter-institutional and inter-organisational collaboration to identify the successful and unsuccessful elements of, and the obstacles and catalysts to, innovation in the various local contexts. This collaboration should unite training providers, schools, research bodies, university departments, enterprises, Social Partners and local bodies, through an integrated system of training, education and employment policies specifically created to promote regional socio-economic development;

• Interregional and transnational partnership development that goes beyond sporadic collaboration and inserts the Regions into a network of dialogue and inter-exchange with 11 other European regional administrations.

The primary activities of the Project include:
- Organisational analysis of the regional councillor department/s
- Construction of a network of policymakers
- Analysis of the local socio-economic context
- Technical assistance
- Quality plan
- Evaluation system
- Transnational activities
- Communication and organisation plan
- Creation of a regional INTRANET.

In the context of human capital development and the accumulation of knowledge and skills, it is important to focus attention on the phenomenon of *skill mismatch*, or situations in which workers find themselves over- or under-qualified for their professions with respect to their educational qualification[10] (*ISTAT* 2005) and/or the competences effectively utilised within the enterprise[11] (Cainarca and Sgobbi 2005; 2006).

According to the 2005 *ISTAT* report, three-fourths of Italian workers – 16.6 million people – perceive an appropriate match between the level of education they completed and their profession. Conversely, in the remaining one-fourth of the cases, workers report a mismatch between these two variables. Roughly 3.7 million workers (equal to 16.5% of the overall employed) have achieved a level of education superior to the qualification generally required for their profession.

The phenomenon of "under-qualification" most commonly involves men age 40 and over who have been engaged in their professions for several years. These workers have acquired the competences required for their profession generally through alternative as opposed to formal learning pathways; thus on-the-job training appears particularly fundamental. The most common professions affected by the phenomenon of "under-qualification" include: management and control specialists (management inspectors, administrative inspectors, etc), specialised ICT professionals, journalists and professional artists (painters, directors, etc).

Of the roughly 3.7 million employed workers over-qualified for their professional level, over half are young people under the age of 34 who began working less than 5 years ago. This skill mismatch reflects the difficulties encountered by young people upon entry into the labour market as they engage in positions which require a qualification level inferior to their completed levels of education. The lack of employment opportunities appropriate to one's level of education seems to

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[10] The *ISTAT* report refers especially to e*ducational mismatch* calculated through a comparison between level of education completed and level of education required for the position occupied according to Isco88.
[11] In this case, reference is made to the subjective perception regarding the quality of the service rendered for a certain task and the "optimal level" that the individual defines for himself/herself based on past experience, in comparison with peers, and from specific or implicit requests of the employer.

indicate the low 'spendibility' of the competences acquired throughout formal education. The share of "over-qualified" graduates in humanities, social sciences, economics and statistics is double the percentage of "over-qualified" graduates in hard sciences or engineering (40.0% and 48.8% compared to 26.1% and 25.3%). The phenomenon of over-qualified workers occurs less frequently among graduates in the fields of law and medicine as well. Among holders of a 4-5 year upper secondary-school certificate, those with vocational certificates appear to be at the greatest disadvantage; strong differences have not appeared between upper secondary-school and technical-school certificate holders. If these disparities are expressed by economic activity sector, the incidence of under-qualified workers is at its highest levels in agriculture (59.4%) and in industry (35.7%) while proportionally lower in the services (24.7%).

When addressing skill mismatch (Cainarca and Sgobbi 2005; 2006), it seems important to note the consistently positive judgments expressed by workers with regard to their professions. Over half of workers confirm that they efficiently complete their professional duties "practically always", "almost always", or at worst, "often". According to the level of education completed, lower incidences of skill mismatch are observed in individuals at the two extremes of the educational spectrum. While in the less-educated, lower mismatch rates can be attributed to the concentration of these workers in low-skilled positions involving more generic and simpler tasks, in the highly-educated, the risk of mismatch is reduced due to the specialisation of competences developed throughout one's education, which equip the individual to successfully complete complex tasks in constant evolution. As for vocational qualifications, skill mismatch decreases consistently from lower-level workers to executives. Finally, sectoral analysis reveals greater skill matching in the ICT and financial consulting sectors. On the contrary, 'only' 48% of manufacturing workers report matching between their responsibilities and competences.

Skill/educational mismatch can be 'resolved' in many cases with informal learning to develop new competences necessary to increase one's permanence in the labour market. The utility of training is evinced in a study conducted in 2005 by *ISFOL* (Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for Workers) on the quality of labour in which 75.5% of those interviewed state that they learn while working, while the remaining 24.5% affirm that they do not. Respondents who most frequently claimed to have learned on the job were: male (77.9% compared with 71.4% of women), individuals between the ages of 30 and 49 (77% as opposed to 73.6% of workers between the ages of 16 and 29 and 73.1% of those over age 50) and self-employed (78.5% compared with 74.4% of employed workers). Furthermore, workers in the north-western and southern Regions of Italy were more likely to learn more on the job (77.3% and 77.4% respectively) than workers in the central and north-eastern Italy (73.1% and 72.5%). These statistics refer mainly to workers employed in industry (75.3%), public utilities services (89.2%), small enterprises in the industrial sector (up to 15 employees), medium-sized enterprises in the services sector and in large enterprises (over 200 employees) in both industries.

On the job learning by sex, age, geographic area, type of work and sector

	Learning new things while working (% value)
Sex	
Male	77,9
Women	71,4
Age	
16-29 years	77.0
30-49 years	73.6
Over 50 years	73.1
Level of Education	

No title	80.0
Primary education	52.5
Low secondary education	65.4
Upper secondary education	79.3
Degree	94.8
Geographic area	
Northwest	77.3
Northeast	72.5
Centre	73.1
South	77.4
type of work	
self-employed	78.5
employed workers	74.4
Sector	
industry	75.3
public utilities services	89.2

Moreover, in the consideration of other variables, for example the vocational qualification obtained, it is possible to observe an even closer correlation between level of education and opportunities to learn new knowledge and develop new competences on the job. Only 53.3% of respondents with a lower secondary education claimed to learn on the job, while almost all university graduates interviewed (94.8%) claimed that they learned more from their professions. This figure indicates that opportunities for professional growth are tightly linked with levels of education completed. Examining the issue by type of employment contract, precarious workers learn less on the job than those with stable employment contracts: 35.1% of employed workers with fixed-term contracts, 26.3% of temporary collaborators, 30.8% of those with training contracts, 52.7% of apprentices, and 22.8% of workers with open-ended contracts stated that they learn on the job. Furthermore, with reference to the formality of the employment relationships, 36.5% of "non-formalised" workers declare that they do not learn on the job, as opposed to 24.7% of regular workers.

Data from the *ISFOL* "*Qualità del Lavoro in Italia*" (Quality of Work in Italy) study, published in 2005, reveal that those who consider their competences insufficient learn less on the job than those who believe themselves well-qualified. The outline traced up to now reveals that despite a high number of workers who state that they learn on the job and have the necessary, if not superior, competences for their required tasks, workers with lower levels of education in unskilled positions, workers specialised in the agricultural sector, workers with atypical employment contracts, undeclared workers and those who consider their competences insufficient for their positions claim that they do not learn on the job and thus do not develop new competences. This scenario exposes workers to an even greater risk of labour market exclusion if they become unemployed. Competence development seems less accessible to those who require it most in order to acquire a position of greater stability in the labour market.

Component 2, Description of Institutional Arrangements

2.1. Political and Legal Framework

Introduction

The establishment of a validation system for non-formal and informal learning has become a strong and widely shared priority in the last ten years in Italy. All social and political stakeholders, irrespective of their institutional aims and background (Ministries, Regional Authorities, Trade Unions, Employers' Representatives, VET providers, Universities, Youth Associations and voluntary organisations), actually agree regarding the need of validation of non-formal learning through formalised recognition pathways or certification procedures.

At the present, however, nothing comparable to the APL in the UK or to *VAE* in France has been implemented in Italy. This is due to social, political and historical-cultural factors such as the relevant formal and legal value of educational qualifications obtained through formal education pathways and the traditional weakness of short-term and adult education and training. The combined result is that the economic and social value of vocational education and training (VET), independently from the formal qualification, is not culturally perceived. Moreover, the professional and occupational regulations are largely based on the legal status of formal qualification and on the legal values of educational or academic qualifications. Such a crucial role of formal recognition is reinforced by the low level of institutional trust at a national level, especially as far as VET providers and employers' organisations are concerned.

The lack of national standards regulating qualifications and competences is considered by the different stakeholders as the main obstacle and may represent the main hindrance to the development of a national validation system.

Nevertheless, as a result of the mentioned political awareness about the basic principles underpinning the validation of non-formal learning, a relevant number of national agreements and regulations dealt with this topic (*IFTS*, Adult Education and Training, Certification of Competences), thereby envisaging the opportunity of validation of non-formal learning although not concretely defining a *system* (assumed as a whole organisational and resources framework composed of standards – both in terms of procedures and qualification contents – bodies, tasks and funding).

As a consequence of this systemic weakness, the different experiences and practices of validation undertaken within the different contexts (private, third sector, etc.) cannot be applied on a larger scale and the results cannot be fully recognised. Furthermore, such results are not comparable, since the purposes themselves, and the underlying principles driving each specific experience, are quite different in relation to different contexts and demands. For instance, in some cases the validation activities can be carried out for enterprises' purposes, in other cases for educational institutions' purposes or as a support to young or adult job-seekers. At any rate, in this report the general situation is presented underlining the most relevant points in the debate, the state of art concerning regulations and the bottlenecks that characterise the Italian approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Social Dialogue

Since 1993 in Italy, there has been a wide-ranging discussion to promote the adaptation and innovation of the supply and qualification systems, in particular, through agreements between the Social Partners and the national government focusing on the improvement of individuals'

competences and the development of training opportunities. These agreements became the core of the development and employment support policies.

In addition, the "*Patto per il lavoro*" (Pact for Employment) between the national government and the Social Partners of September 1996 contains several strategic guidelines for reforming the training system, including among its core points the determination of:

"*a certification system as a real guarantee to ensure a unitary and visible pathway of lifelong learning to every single individual, to allow the recognition of training credits and to register the effectively acquired competences*".

Therefore, the "*Patto per il lavoro*" explicitly introduced the concept of visibility. The visibility is as a new procedure for representing knowledge, in terms of the needs of new job-analysis categories (focusing on competences), and enhancing transparency and optimisation (recognising the knowledge acquired outside formal education and training; recording one's own competences).

The issue becomes even more complex considering the relationship between the educational system as a whole (school, vocational training, universities) and the employment system, and the need to create an equivalence between the experience gained in the two contexts and to develop a 'circularity' between them, instead of the previous rigid mono-sequential relationship or simple parallelism.

At the present time and during the last ten years, beginning with the "*Patto per il lavoro*", a number of policies and provisions converged on the topic of transparency and recognition of learning and permeability of VET sub-systems.

Those institutional responses can be articulated in three main clusters:

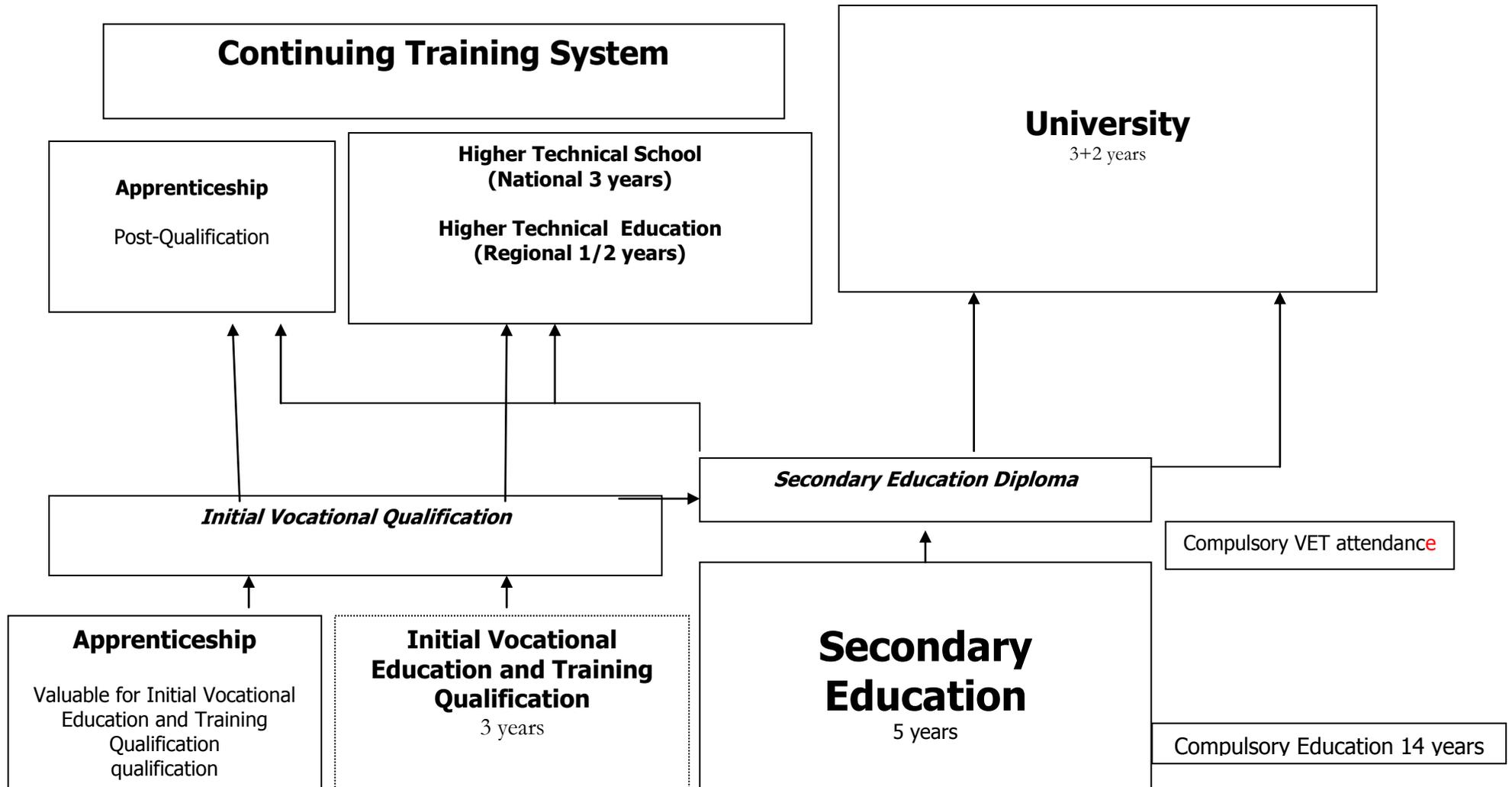1) Overall Framework policies. This cluster refers to all the general framework policies for lifelong learning transversally affecting every education and training sub-system dealing with young and adults trainees.
2) Education and University policies. This cluster refers to the school and university provisions.
3) Initial and Higher VET policies. This cluster refers to the VET pathways and sub-systems.

Chart 1 - A landscape view on lifelong learning policies in Italy (1999-2006)

	Main regulatory provisions	Aims	Roles and stakeholders	Degree of implementation	Results
1) Overall Framework policies	▪ Decree of Ministry of Labour n.174/2001 "Certification of competences in vocational training system" ▪ Decree of Ministry of Labour with Ministry of Education 10 october 2005 "Approving of format of the Citizen Training Portfolio"	Providing the opportunity of transparency, recognition and validation of the individual competencies however and wherever acquired.	Ministry of Labour Ministry of Education Ministry of University Regions Social Partners	The Citizen Training Portfolio is by now under experimentation within 4 Regions (Toscana, Molise, Liguria, Trento).	Not yet valuable.
2) Education and University policies	▪ Decree No. 509 dated 3/11/1999 "Regulation Containing Provisions concerning the Teaching Autonomy of Universities" ▪ Law No. 53/2003 "Delegation to the National Government to Draw up General Standards for Education and Minimum Service Levels in Education and Training"	Reforming the school and university system increasing quality and permeability of pathways.	Ministry of Education Ministry of University	The University Reform is fully implemented. The Education and Training reform is going to be partially modified by the present Government	Good political results according to Bologna and Copenhagen European Cooperation processes. Concretely the results can be evaluated in a medium/long term period.
3) Initial and Higher VET policies	▪ Article 68 of Law No. 144 of 17 May 1999 <u>Compulsory Attendance of Training Activities</u> ▪ Article 69 of Law No. 144 of 17 May 1999, "<u>Higher Technical Training and Education</u>" ▪ Law No. 53/2003 "Delegation to the National Government to Draw up General Standards for Education and Minimum Service Levels in Education and Training" ▪ Governament/Regions Agreements for the national	Achieving the national transparency, quality and recognition of initial and higher VET regional pathway.	Regions Government	The degree of implementation of these complex set of provision is difficult to evaluate because the monitoring actions in the different Regions is still underway.	Very good political results for the Regions that succeeded in giving to their system a National framework. From the technical point of view IFTS represent an advanced and more "European" experiences since it seems closer to the EQF "learning outcomes" concepts.

	framework of initial qualification VET system: 1) 19 June 2003 (Institution of the 3 year initial qualification pathways for 14/17 yeas old trainees) 2) 15 January 2004 (Key competence standards); 3) 28 October 2004 (Certification and validation devices); 4) 24 November 2005 (Mutual recognition of certification and competences between Regions); 5) 5 October 2006 (Technical and vocational competence standards.). Decree 25 January 2008 Institution of ITS (Higher Technical Schools) a non academic steady higher technical education and training (3 years).			

Chart 2 - The Training/Education System in Italy as envisaged in the Reforms (1999/2007)

Continuing Training System

Apprenticeship

Post-Qualification

**Higher Technical School
(National 3 years)**

**Higher Technical Education
(Regional 1/2 years)**

University

3+2 years

Initial Vocational Qualification

Secondary Education Diploma

Compulsory VET attendance

Apprenticeship

Valuable for Initial Vocational
Education and Training
Qualification
qualification

**Initial Vocational
Education and Training
Qualification**

3 years

**Secondary
Education**

5 years

Compulsory Education 14 years

1) OVERALL FRAMEWORK

The main ruling initiatives of this kind has been taken by the **Ministry of Labour** in coordination with the Ministry of Education, the Regions and the Social Partners. The present processes regarding this policies can be more clearly considered in the light of what happened after the mentioned Pact on Labour and especially in the last 7 years with the oveall aim of providing the opportunity of transparency, recognition and validation of the individual competencies however and wherever acquired..

An **Agreement between the Government and the Regional Authorities, in March 2000** defines, in a general way, the procedures for establishing a national system of *vocational competence certification*. This new system was supposed to be laid down by the Ministry of Labour, according to the results of a survey carried out by a Technical Commission, composed of the representatives of the Ministries involved, of the State-Regions Conference, following consultations with the Social partners. After this consultation the Ministry of Labour should *"formulate proposals in respect of the criteria and procedures for certifying the competences acquired by vocational training, in order to ensure standardization of certificates throughout the country and their recognition within the European Union"*. According to this new system, "*the vocational competences acquired through the regular attendance of vocational training provided by accredited training structures, through duly certified work, continuous-training activities, practice periods or self-training, are certified by the Regional Authorities, even upon request of the individuals concerned*".

Following this agreement, in **May 2001, a Ministry of Labour Decree ruled the "Certification of competences in vocational training system"**.

These are the main points of this important statement. The new competence certification system is aimed to the transparency of training programs, to give a value to individual experiences, to help matching between job offer and request in the labour market. Competences are defined as *"...structured cluster of knowledge and abilities, normally connected to specific job profiles, acquirable through vocational training programs, work experiences, self-learning, valuable also as training 'credits'"*

In order to ensure this kind of provision some technical arrangements were envisaged:
  a) a national standard framework of qualifications and certification of competences;
  b) 3 kinds of Certification devices: Vocational Training Qualification Certification, Vocational Training Competence Certification and Accreditation of competences acquired on the job or on self learning toward formal training or degrees;
  c) a "Training Booklet (or Portfolio) of the Citizen" that had to be instituted by the Region in order to document all these kinds of certifications.

In 2003 with the **Law 30/03 and the following implementation Decree 276/03, the ministry of Labour started to introduce the "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" (Citizen Training Portfolio)** for the collection and documentation of experiences recognised and acquired including those accrued through non-formal and informal learning.

In Article 2 of Decree 276/03, in fact, the "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" is defined as a device *"....that records competences acquired during apprenticeship training, training with work-entry contract, specialised training and lifelong learning activities conducted by organisations accredited by the Regional Authorities, as well as the competences acquired in non-formal and informal pathways according to the EU Guidelines on Lifelong Learning, as long as these competences are recognised and certified."*

The "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" ("*Citizen's training portfolio*"), established with Law 30/2003 and Decree No. 276/2003, has been approved and adopted through the national Decree issued on 10 October 2005 and it's by now under experimentation in some Regions. Concerning the "National standard framework of qualifications and certification of competences" the inter-institutional processes and also the social dialogue, were affected by several both political and technical difficulties in the last 5 years. Anyway in **2006 a new initiative of the Ministry of Labour, also under the pushing European EQF processes, established a Committee**, including also Ministry of Education, Regions and Social Partners, with the aim of designing and implementing the National Qualification Framework. The Committee is by now still working and between its goals there is also a national recognition and validation system for the non formal and informal learning.

State of art of Committee for National Qualification Framework

The 'Unified Committee' has carried out its first action, which was completed in May 2007, aimed at recognising/cataloguing all the institutional and social directories created in recent years in Italy concerning occupational standards (and regarded as the first step towards building a National Framework). A total of approximately 30 directories have been catalogued, containing more than 1300 professional profiles/occupations. Moreover, the methodological framework, lines of operation, and database/IT system for building the national occupational standards system have been developed and validated. These methodological and support tools were stress-tested by producing occupational standards for two professional sectors of the economy (tourism and metalworking). During the test phase, the creation and the active participation of Sectoral Committees has been envisaged consisting of representatives of Social Partners (privileged experts in charge of validating the methodological framework to build standards). By 2010, this phase will be followed by the finalisation of the methodology and support tools (e.g., lines of operation and IT platform) and the production of occupational standards for all the professional branches of the economy. Afterwards, the 'Unified Committee' will also implement training and skill-certification standards.

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2) EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Between 1998 and 2005, several framework laws for reforming education and university systems aimed at the integration between systems have been proposed and largely implemented. In this context, all the pathways for the educational supply, especially the pathways that have been most extensively overhauled or newly created (as in the case of Higher Technical Education and Training - *IFTS*), have developed innovative proposals for educational supply on the basis of the principles of lifelong learning, alternance between study and work and integration.

With regard to the **Ministry of Education**, the implementation of Law No. 53/2003 is a framework law (Delegated Law) for the reform of the whole VET system (concerning all the education and training levels) according to the basic principles mentioned above. This Law outlines a system divided into two different main pathways:

- The first, nationally managed, is composed of upper secondary schools (5 years), corresponding to Level 3a and 3b of ISCED code, and university (3+2 years);
- The second, regionally managed, is composed of initial vocational education and training (that can be three or four year courses or apprenticeship) and Higher Technical Education and Training - *IFTS* (one or two years).

There is the theoretical possibility of transition from one pathway to the other but with no 'automatic' recognition of credits: each school or VET provider can decide to accept the transition and the duration of recognition.

Moreover, this law reaffirms the need to consolidate regional authority in the VET system and national coordination of minimum quality assurance of a training supply provided throughout the country.

The Minister of the University and Scientific and Technological Research launched the process for transforming the university system with the enactment of Decree No. 509 dated 3/11/1999 "*Regolamento recante norme concernenti l'autonomia didattica degli atenei*" (Regulation Containing Provisions concerning the Teaching Autonomy of Universities), which was then implemented with the Ministerial Decree of 4 August 2000 "*Definizione delle classi di lauree*" (Definition of Classes of Degrees) and the Ministerial Decree of 28 November 2000 "*Definizione delle classi delle lauree* specialistiche" (Definition of the Classes of Specialist Degrees - or Master of Science Degrees).

The fundamental characteristics of the new university training may be briefly identified as:
- Replacement of the teaching approach with a learning approach;
- Reorganisation of the curricula for the achievement of training objectives connected with specific scientific and job profiles;
- Rationalisation of teaching through modular curricula;
- Greater active participation of students;
- Greater consistency between initial cultural preparation and expected final objectives.

The reform also redefines the timing and procedures for access to qualifications. To obtain a degree, three years will be needed, with the exception of those pathways focusing on the preparation of specific job profiles (physician, pharmacist, architect) governed by European regulations (specialist degrees – or master of science degrees - with a single 5- or 6-year cycle).

After obtaining the degree, students will be able to decide whether to enter the world of work immediately or further develop their competences with a specialist (or master of science) degree programme lasting another two years.

The degree and (or master of science) degree will be the leading pathways of the new university training, which may develop further through specialisation schools, master's degree courses and research doctorates.

3) INITIAL AND HIGHER VET POLICIES

Concerning the regional VET system (the second main pathway envisaged by the Law 53/2003), the reform of Title V of the Constitution (2001) has favoured and promoted the programmatic and institutional connection between the State and Regional Authorities, that, with various functions and modalities, contributes to the creation and management of the

integrated training system. Based on this reform, the State mostly carries out functions of strategic governance of the system. The Regional Authorities define political guidelines, technical and methodological elements to render operating systems and models of social and training development.

The **Initial Qualification VET Courses** managed by the Regions has been ruled in the last 3 years by several Government/Regions Agreements:

1) 19 June 2003 (Institution of the 3 year initial qualification pathways for 14/17 yeas old trainees)
2) 15 January 2004 (Key competence training standards);
3) 28 October 2004 (Certification and validation devices);
4) 24 November 2005 (Mutual recognition of certification and competences between Regions);
5) 5 October 2006 (Technical and vocational qualifications and competence training standards.).

It is to underline the relevance of the Agreements of 15 January 2004 and 5 October 2005 which actually identifies national qualification standard in VET both for key and vocational competences. Also the Agreement signed on 28 October 2004 on "*Certificazione e validazione dei crediti formativi*" (Certification and Validation of Training Credits) is very important as it allows individuals to access education and training pathways and affirms that people have the right to 'spend' the certification acquired and the right to validation of learning credits in the VET system.

It should be pointed out that together with and subsequent to this important Agreements, an Interregional Project entitled "*Descrizione e certificazione per competenze e famiglie professionali - Standard minimi in una prospettiva di integrazione tra istruzione, formazione professionale e lavoro*" (Description and Certification by Vocational Competences and Professional Families – Minimum Standards with a view to Integration between Education, Vocational Training and Work) aimed at proposing "an initial reference model for a national competence standard system with a view to integration between education, vocational training and work" was successfully launched. The Regional Authorities are thus performing considerable work to provide a contribution coordinated with the process of a gradual definition of the national standard and certification system.

Moreover, some Regional Authorities (Basilicata, Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont, Veneto, Valle d'Aosta and the Autonomous Province of Trento) are taking part directly in the political definition and strategic operating times to promote the Regional Qualification Framework based on learning outcome standards. Some Regional Authorities also worked on the validation of non-formal and informal learning for the recognition of credits in order to access specific activities of formal learning or for the acquisition of qualifications and certificates. In some cases the validation process has occurred within specific training systems (*IFTS*, *EDA*), in other cases the Regional Authorities have planned and implemented validation systems for the recognition of credits or official qualifications reported to specific contexts of learning (national civil service, specific productive fields).

A particularly interesting case in the panorama of the Italian VET system regards the ***IFTS pathways.***

The *IFTS* system was created, according to Law 144/99[12], "*to re-qualify and broaden the training supply for young people and adults, both employed and not employed*". From such a viewpoint, *IFTS* pathways are characterised as open options for potentially very different users (both young people and adults, employed and not employed), 'anchored' to the changing needs of local markets and not to the established training needs.

Following these principles, a concrete method of validation of previous learning has been envisaged in the *IFTS* system and has been launched through specific guidelines annexed to the regulation documents issued in 2001[13]. Such guidelines can be synthesised as follows:

- The validation is intended to facilitate access to *IFTS* pathways or transfer from one system to another;
- The planning of the validation process must be articulated in three sequential steps:
  - Guidance/counselling, aimed at allowing the active involvement of individuals in self-analysis and in the identification of their own specific training needs;
  - Assessment, aimed at collecting evidences of prior learning in a systematic way and verifying the acquisition of specific competences. A specific dossier is drawn up for this purpose;
  - Certification/recognition, allowing access (or crediting a bonus) to a specific training pathway.

According to these provisions, the competences acquired in *IFTS* pathways are valuable as credits towards the correspondent university degree courses (National Decree No. 436 of 31 October 2001).

The Regional Authorities plan the setting-up of *IFTS* courses, which are carried out following procedures which guarantee the integration among training systems, on the basis of guidelines unanimously defined by the Ministers of Education, Labour and Social Security, University and Scientific and Technological Research, the Unified Conference (…), and the Social Partners through the establishment of a special national committee. In the design of *IFTS* courses, the following organisations are involved: universities, upper-

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[12] Article 69 of Law No. 144 of 17 May 1999, "Higher Technical Training and Education", establishes the *IFTS* system, with the following characteristics:

"In order to re-qualify and broaden the training supply for young people and adults, both employed and not employed, within the framework of the Integrated Higher Training (FIS) system, the Higher Technical Training and Education (IFTS) system is established and, as a rule, is accessible to those who hold an upper secondary school-leaving certificate. With a decree adopted in co-ordination with the Ministers of Education, Labour and Social Security and of the University and Scientific and Technological Research, after consulting the Unified Conference (...), the conditions for access to the IFTS courses for those who do not hold an upper secondary school-leaving certificate, the standards of the various IFTS pathways, and the ways of fostering integration among the training systems (...) and of determining the criteria for the equivalence of the respective pathways and qualifications are established; the same decree also defines the training credits being acquired and how they are certified and used, (...).

[13] The subsequent Interdepartmental Decree No. 436 of 31 October 2000 (Official Journal No. 29 of 5 February 1999) signed by the Ministers of Education, Labour, and the University envisages the regulations containing provisions for the implementation of Article 69 of Law No. 144 dated 17 May 1999, concerning Higher Technical Training and Education (*IFTS*)".

secondary schools, public research agencies, vocational training centres and agencies accredited as envisaged in Article 17 of Law No. 196 of 24 June 1997, as well as enterprises or their associations, joined together even in the form of consortia.

The certification issued at the completion of courses (…), certifying the competences acquired according to a form attached to the guidelines (…), is valid nationwide.

2.2 Governance and the Role of Government

EDUCATION

The **Ministry of Education** is responsible for developing and formulating school and university curricula.

Moreover, the Regional Authorities may integrate the school curricula with local specifications and each University may be considered autonomous in developing contents and didactical processes.

Legal provisions:

Law No. 53/2003 *Delega al Governo in materia norme generali sull'educazione e dei livelli essenziali delle prestazioni in materia di educazione e formazione professionale* [Delegation to the National Government to Draw up General Standards for Education and Minimum Service Levels in Education and Training].

LABOUR MARKET

As previously specified, the **Ministry of Labour** is responsible for labour market rules but also deals with the coordination of workers' learning and learning recognition policies. Law 30/03 and the subsequent implementation Decree 276/03 introduce the "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" (*Citizen's training portfolio"*) for the collection and documentation of experiences recognised and acquired including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The **Regional Authorities** are responsible for developing and implementing VET curricula. Moreover, there are some national provisions that ensure a minimum quality of the training supply provided throughout the country.

The bodies responsible for validation theoretically and practically are:

- The Ministry of Education through schools and universities concerning the validation of credits to access the educational system.
- The Regional Authorities through VET providers and/or employment centres concerning the validation of credits for a vocational qualification and also for the "*Libretto formativo*".

2.3 Conclusions

According to this general view, we can notice that in Italy even if there is no structured and whole learning recognition and validation system, there is surely a continuous "work in progress" on this issue. This situation is sustained by a large political consensus and commitment but has as a point of weakness a lack of concreteness in its implementation

process. This is probably due to cultural and historical factors but also to some specific difficulties such as the one often met in the inter-institutional coordination between the national and regional authorities and administrations.

In Italy the national government has surely a central role in the progressive design of a non formal and informal learning recognition system as it is seen as a real overall provision strictly linked to a fundamental right for all the citizens.

From this point of view the Italian government aims to fix common national criteria and procedures that are able to guarantee citizens, professions, enterprises, VET agencies education providers. That is why we should state that Italy is going to be a (2) model (predominance of public authorities). The integrated and common policy between the different Ministries involved in the topic is one of the main problem to face in our country in order to create a broad and overall non formal and informal learning recognition system. At the present time as the Ministry of Education mostly focuses on the procedures for the admission (or credit recognition) to its pathways (school and university), the Ministry of Labour tends to establish overall criteria, standards and general agreements in order to provide the availability of a recognition system to all the citizens and mostly to the workers.

On the other side, the Regions, that are in charge for the concrete implementation of the system, seek for mechanisms easy to put in practice and not too strongly impacting their own existing VET and certification system

Component 3, Description of Technical Arrangements

3.1 Qualifications, Qualification Systems, Qualification Framework

As already underlined in the previous component, significant reform initiatives are underway in Italy to implement the European Union Recommendations contained in the Copenhagen-Maastricht Treaty; these foresee lifelong learning, mobility and transparency of competences among citizen workers. These initiatives aim to substantially reorganise the training supply in order to increase the visibility and the certification of learning results, regardless of where and how this learning is obtained.

For several years, the certification of competences and the creation of a training supply based on competence standards have consistently been focused on two key aspects. Consequently, numerous national and regional provisions, including regional pilot projects and shared agreements between Regional Authorities and Social Partners, have been formulated to this effect (among which Decree 174/2001).

Legislation and experiments developed in these last two years (2004-2006) have pursued two complementary policy lines:

- to define training pathways more transparent, thereby increasing the 'value' of certified competences; promote reciprocal *recognition* between institutions and social actors that are potentially interested in the application of these competences;

- to extend and make more transparent various learning experiences, even those completed in formal, non-formal or informal pathways.

Currently, some actions linked to the reform of the labour market and the education and training system have been undertaken that, with the context of competence certification, seek to create a solid 'system' within the Italian labour market, in keeping with the commitments made at the EU level.

The following are some of the main technical features deriving from these complex ruling activity of the last years.

The Basic Qualification and Certification Framework

At the completion of compulsory schooling (until several months ago, compulsory until the age of 14), students were all awarded the same educational qualification called *Diploma di Licenza Media* (lower secondary school-leaving certificate), allowing access to the following upper secondary schools:

Vocational Education and Training Pathways	*Upper Secondary School-Leaving Certificate*
State Classical or Technical Secondary Schools	- *after 5 years: School-Leaving Certificate*
State Vocational Training Schools	- *after 3 years: Vocational Qualification* - *after 5 years: Vocational School-Leaving Certificate*
Regional Vocational Training Courses	- *after 1/2 years ("Level I" PQ): Qualification Certificate* - *after short training courses (500-600 hours): Qualification/Attendance Certificate*

After 15 years of age (even without having completed compulsory schooling), young people could choose between two different work-training pathways (mixed-cause contracts) leading to a qualification: apprenticeship and training-employment contracts.

In both cases, the employer concerned independently 'grafted' training modules of variable duration onto the practical work. The modules were usually implemented by the employer and could be organised with contributions by the Regional Authorities.

The recent innovations have modified this training supply structure by raising the compulsory school-leaving age, reorganising certain training pathways, creating new training pathways, re-allocating the responsibilities and roles of the various actors involved and, lastly, by ensuring a flexible and integrated supply.

What has remained the same, although significant innovations are in the pipeline, is the system of certificates and vocational qualifications, which is as follows:

- All the *Diplomi di Maturità* (Upper Secondary School-Leaving Certificates) awarded at the completion of the five-year secondary cycle have the same legal value and allow entry to all university faculties;

- The *Diplomi di Maturità Tecnica-Professionale* (Technical and Vocational School-Leaving Certificates) allow their holders to either continue their formal education or to practise a profession/occupation, prior to the sitting of an *esame di abilitazione* (qualification examination);

- The *Diploma di Qualifica*, (Qualification Certificate) awarded by the State Vocational Schools may be used either to enter the labour market or to continue education;

- The *Attestato di Qualifica Professionale di I Livello* ("Level I" Vocational Qualification Certificate) issued by the Regional Authorities, not to be confused with the above-mentioned *Diploma di Qualifica*) is not an educational qualification and, therefore, cannot be used within the educational system, but it is valid in the labour market or for access to the higher levels of the vocational training system.

At present, there are no major innovations concerning post-secondary educational qualifications (after 19 years of age), except for the introduction of the new *IFTS* (Higher Technical Training and Education) pathways, which will be dealt with in greater detail further on. Among these, the following distinctions must be made:

- ***Lauree*** (Degrees) awarded by universities at the end of 4-to-6 year curricula, after which selected post-graduates may apply for a ***Dottorato*** (doctorate);
- ***Diplomi Universitari di Primo Livello*** ("Level I" University Diplomas) awarded by Universities after 2-to-3 year curricula; these courses were introduced in Italy's education by the University Reform Law of 19 November 1990.
- ***Attestati di Qualifica Professionale di II - III Livello*** ("Level II" and "Level III" Vocational Training Certificates) issued by the Regional Authorities.

Qualification Pathways: The Reforms

Article 68 of Law No. 144 of 17 May 1999: "*Obbligo di frequenza di attività formative*" (Compulsory Attendance of Training Activities) establishes the compulsory requirement for attending training activities up to the age of 18 so as to strengthen the cultural and professional growth of young people. The *N.O.F. "Nuovo Obbligo Formativo"* (New Compulsory Training) requirement may be accomplished within three different pathways:
- The school system;
- The vocational training system managed by the Regional Authorities;
- The practice of apprenticeship.

The integrated system, in which compulsory training is situated, considers the three pathways on the same level, enhancing their complementarity and subsidiarity in respect of the specificity and equal dignity of each participating system. The beneficiaries are young people nationwide who have completed their compulsory schooling.

In 2003 the framework law (**Law No. 53/2003**) was released for the reform of the whole VET system (involving all the education and training levels) according to the basic principles mentioned above.

In 2004, the agreement signed on 15 January between the Minister of Education and University, the Minister of Labour and Social Policies, the Regional Authorities and the Autonomous Provincial Authorities of Trento and Bolzano held great importance.
This agreement identifies some features providing national standardisation for the three-year experimental pathways for attaining vocational qualifications within the compulsory education and training system.
As far as the methodology is concerned, the first standards to be implemented subsequently have been clustered into four areas:
- Linguistic;
- Scientific;
- Technological;
- Historical, social and economic.

These standards, regarding the delicate segment of the compulsory education and training, are conceived not only with reference to the employability of individuals but also in order to guarantee the full rights of citizenship, starting from a cultural background of basic training.
A key aspect of the agreement is the definition of a pathway for the *governance of the national and local system*, involving a chain of 'cascade' functions.
The following is planned for the national level:
- The definition of the general system for the classification of vocational competences;

- The definition of standard general criteria for the certification of competences (*"Citizen's training portfolio"*);
- The definition of standard general criteria for the recognition of credits (training/training, training/education, education/training);
- The definition of the minimum competence training standards;
- The identification of the minimum standards for accrediting the providers of VET courses.

The following is planned for the regional level:

- The governance of the competence and credit system and the corresponding support services;
- The local contextualisation of competences;
- The methods and procedures for assessment, evaluation and certification of competences and credits at the beginning, during and at the completion of pathways;
- The design standards;
- The detailed definition of the indispensable needs expressed by the providers of VET courses.

It should be pointed out that together with and subsequent to this important Agreement, an Interregional Project entitled *Progetto Interregionale* "*Descrizione e certificazione per competenze e famiglie professionali - Standard minimi in una prospettiva di integrazione tra istruzione, formazione professionale e lavoro* (Description and Certification by Vocational Competences and Professional Families) aimed at proposing "*a reference model for a national competence standard system with a view to integration between education, vocational training and work*" was successfully launched. The Regional Authorities are thus performing considerable work to provide a contribution coordinated with the process of a gradual definition of the national system of standards and certification.

IFTS

As already mentioned, Decree No. 436 of 31 October 2000 signed by the Ministers of Education, Labour and the University envisages the regulations concerning *IFTS* (*Higher Technical Training and Education*).

It clearly defines the *IFTS* Qualification Framework by the establishment of:

♦ The pathway standards (Art. 4);
♦ The minimum standards of competences for access and the evaluation of outcomes (Art. 5);
♦ The recognition of credits (Art. 6);
♦ Certification and pathways (Art. 8).

Starting from this decree, the *IFTS* system has contributed to build a national system of competence-based standards over the 2002-2005 period.
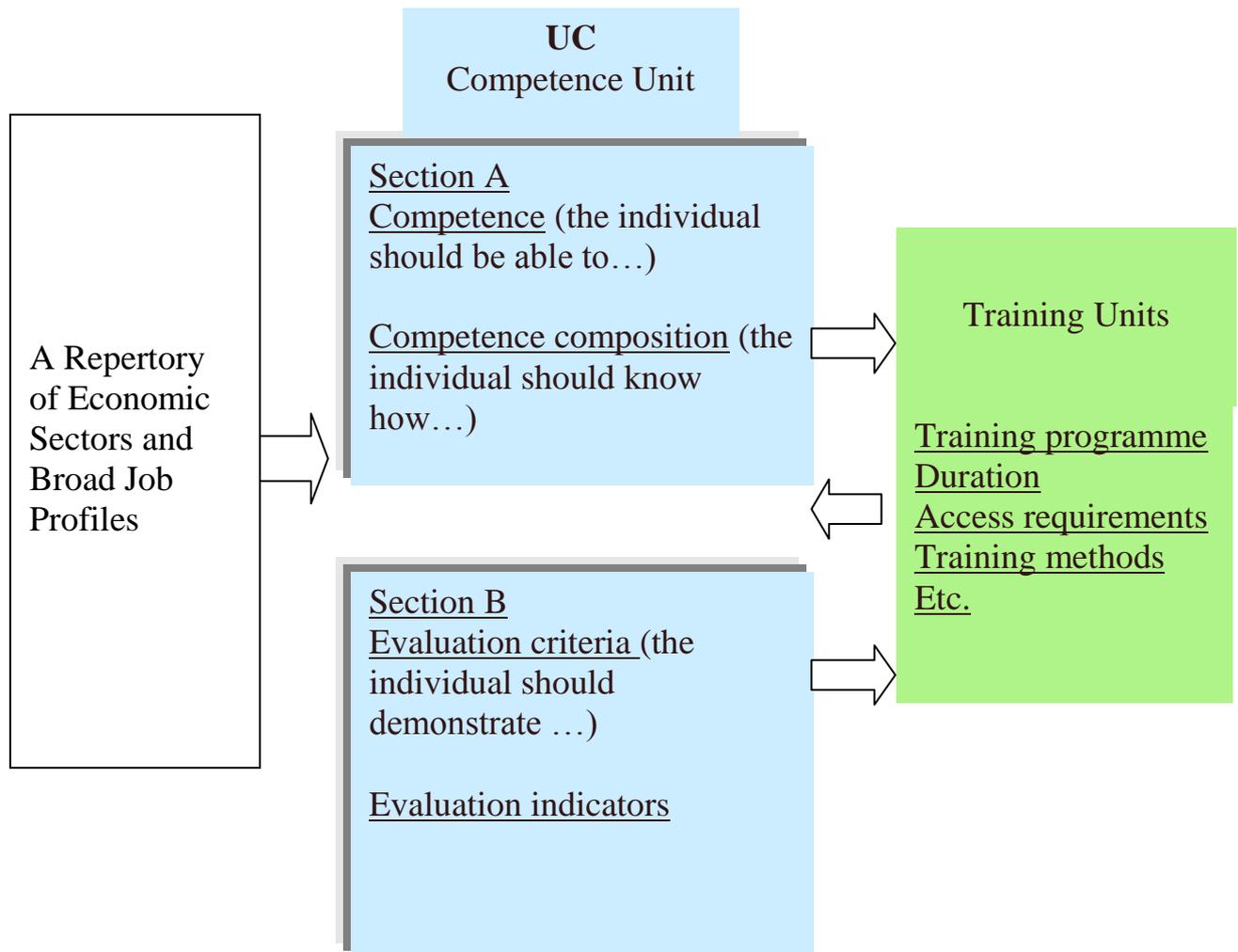
The *IFTS* Standard System

Structured in	Units of competence: a structured set of competences easily readable from all VET sectors, labour market, social actors. · Collectable · Certification object · Clusterable in qualification profiles
Centred on	Competences · basic · technical-vocational · transversal
Referring to	Basic requirements for employability Fields of action and organisational processes Behaviour of the individual in the job context
Perspectives	In the future, the Standard will also contain learning and training indicators (a range of contents, durations and training methods). (Training Units)

The *IFTS* standards are organised in *Unità di competenze* (*UC* – Competence Units) which, like the experiments conducted in other European countries (e.g., in the UK or more recently in Spain), represent sets of competences certifiable as such and valid as training credits for transfer to other pathways (other *IFTS* schools, VT courses, university) on the basis of specific agreements between the various training bodies which cooperate in the *IFTS* system. The competences described in the standard *IFTS* competence units involve a qualitative credit, also considering the detailed description of the composition of the

competences and the indicators of mastery of these competences, though no specific workload or number of hours of training is indicated. Nevertheless, on the basis of conversion mechanisms already successfully used in some locations, these credits are comparable with the quantitative system of ECTS credits widely used in all the Italian Universities.

The Technical Structure of the *IFTS* Standard System

UC
Competence Unit

A Repertory of Economic Sectors and Broad Job Profiles

Section A
Competence (the individual should be able to…)

Competence composition (the individual should know how…)

Training Units

Training programme
Duration
Access requirements
Training methods
Etc.

Section B
Evaluation criteria (the individual should demonstrate …)

Evaluation indicators

At the completion of the course a specialisation certificate is issued, valid throughout the territory, and indicates the training credits earned and usable by those who wish to continue their studies, even at a later time.

As specified above, following these principles a concrete method of validation of previous learning has been envisaged in the *IFTS* system and has been launched through specific guidelines annexed to the regulation documents issued on 1 August 2002 (Agreement between the State and Regional Authorities). Such guidelines can be synthesised as follows:

- The validation is intended to facilitate access to *IFTS* pathways or transfer from one system to another;
- The planning of validation processes must be articulated in three sequential steps:
  - Guidance/counselling, aimed at allowing the active involvement of individuals in self-analysis and in the identification of their own specific training needs;
  - Assessment, aimed at collecting evidences of prior learning in a systematic way and at verifying the acquisition of specific competences. A specific dossier is drawn up for this purpose;
  - Certification/recognition, allowing access (or crediting a bonus) to a specific training pathway.

The new phase of the reforms: "il Tavolo Nazionale (The National Committee)" aimed at defining and implementing a "National Qualification System".

On September 2006 the Ministry of Labour promoted a "**Tavolo Nazionale** (**National Committee**)" **aimed at defining and implementing a "National Qualification System"** composed by Ministry of Education, University and Research, Regions and Social Partner. This political issue will allow to integrate, in a common and national framework, the different titles, qualifications and diploma delivered by Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Regions and Universities and the classification adopted by the employment services.

The results of the interregional cooperation and the analysis of the Social Partners realised in the last years would be a starting point to implement the NQF.

The National Framework would be also an important point for the evolution of Italian system toward the definition of national criteria and methodologies able to give transparency and visibility of skills and competencies lifelong achieved by trainees and workers in any context (formal, non formal and informal).

The NQF is based on a distinction between the *professional standards,* the training *standards* and the *recognition and certification standards*; this is a priority in order to assure effective communication between educational, training and work systems

The practical steps to implement the National Qualifications Framework:
- Inventory of the national and regional best practices (regional standards; national systems etc.) and develop of the contributions and projects by social partners
- Definition and validation of the methodological aspects; database of standards (professional standards; standards for certification; training standards)
- Testing of the methodologies in specific sectors or professional families
- Guidelines and instruments for the sectoral groups
- Production and development of professional standards in different sectors by "sectoral groups of experts" (first concrete step by 2009)
- Each steps should be validated by the stakeholders involved in the "National Table (Committee)"

3.2 Credit Accumulation and Transfer

The validation of credits between different education and training pathways is something theoretically possible in Italy and it has sometimes also been practiced with different approaches in various contexts. All the stakeholders agree that, in order to allow it to become a real system of validation of credits, there should be a codification of education and training programmes according competence-based standards.

As previously mentioned, the lack of national standards regarding qualifications and competences is felt by various stakeholders as the main obstacle and may represent the main hindrance to the development of a national validation system. The two main and widespread experiences of structured systems for the recognition of credits are the *IFTS* and univerity systems. The "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" ("*Citizen's training portfolio*") should also be mentioned; not yet a real credit recognition device, it has been conceived to promote and facilitate the credit transfer of competences however and wherever they were acquired.

Credits in *IFTS*

As mentioned, the *IFTS* relies on a system of recognition of credits both for students entering *IFTS* courses and those heading to university upon their completion.

In particular, the access validation process is designed in three sequential steps as follows:

1. Guidance/counselling aimed to let the individual actively participate in self-analysis and the identification of specific training needs. This step is carried out by a counsellor and produces a basic individual project;

2. Assessment aimed to collect the evidences in a systematic way and to ensure the possession of specific competences. This step is carried out by one (or more) assessor who contributes the individual to compose a dossier that includes all the evidences (certifications, self-declarations, documented information about training, work or other experiences). Within the dossier, all the experiences are supposed to be translated in competences. The dossier is useful for the next step in the validation process but also for the creation of a further document, the Individual Portfolio, that will accompany the individual also after leaving the present training experiences with the progressive inclusion of any further certification;

3. Certification/recognition aimed to give concrete effects to the process producing a certification or allowing the access or a bonus towards a training pathway. This step is usually managed by a Commission in which all the education and training institutions involved are represented. After the evaluation of the dossier, the Commission formulates the decision in order to recognise the 'credit' for access.

Moreover, in the design phase, the *IFTS* project partnership agrees on the number and types of ECTS credits recognised for university courses, providing all students the opportunity to ask for the recognition as soon as the course is successfully completed**.**

Credits in the University System
It is thus a radical renewal, which takes into account several fundamental principles, such as the autonomy of the universities, the need for flexible training pathways and the application of a credit system.

In particular, with regard to the admission to the various pathways (three-year degree, specialist degree), basic and intermediate credits, connected with the certification of acquired competences and/or training pathways completed, will be recognised.

The regulation issued with Decree No. 509 of 3 November 1999 defines the credit as follows (Art. 1, para. 1):

"university training credit means the measurement of the 'amount' of learning work, including individual study, required of a student who possesses an adequate initial preparation for the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the training activities envisaged by the teaching systems of the curricula".

Art. 5 regulates the training credits as follows:

1. The university training credit, hereinafter referred to as 'credit', corresponds to 25 hours of work per student; by Ministerial Decree, it is possible to justifiably determine changes raising or lowering said hours for single classes, within a limit of 20 percent.
2. The average 'amount' of learning work carried out in one year by a student devoted full-time to university studies is conventionally set at 60 credits.
3. The Ministerial Decrees also determine, for each curriculum class, the fraction of the total hours of commitment that must be reserved to personal study or other types of individual training activities. This fraction cannot in any case be lower than half, except in the case where training activities with a high experimental or practical content are envisaged.
4. The credits corresponding to each training activity are acquired by the student by passing the exam or other form of achievement test, without prejudice to the fact that the evaluation of the achievement is made as specified in Article 11, para. 7, letter d).
5. The responsibility for the total or partial recognition of the credits acquired by a student for the purpose of continuation of studies in another course of the same university, or else in the same or another course of a different university, lies with the teaching structure that receives the student, according to fixed procedures and criteria established in the university teaching regulations.
6. The university teaching regulations may envisage forms of periodic assessment of the credits acquired, in order to evaluate the non-obsolescence of the cognitive content, and the minimum number of credits to be acquired by the student within certain time limits, diversified for full-time and working university students.
7. The universities may recognise as university training credits, according to fixed criteria, vocational skills and knowledge certified in conformity with the standards and regulations in force, as well as other knowledge and skills gained in post-secondary training activities when the university participated in the design and implementation of such activities.

The following table summarises the new training pathways envisaged by the university reform

LEVEL I	LEVEL II	LEVEL III

Degree Course	Specialist Degree (Master of Science Degree)	Specialisation School
1st year: 60 credits - 1,500 hours 2nd year: 60 credits - 1,500 hours 3rd year: 60 credits - 1,500 hours 180 FINAL CREDITS for 4,500 hours of work After obtaining the degree, it is possible to take a "Level I" Master's degree course	1st year: 60 credits - 1,500 hours 2nd year: 60 credits - 1,500 hours 300 (180+120) FINAL CREDITS for 7,500 hours of work	1st year: 60 credits - 1,500 hours 2nd year: 60 credits - 1,500 hours The final credits in the "Level III" qualifications are determined by the credits acquired in the previous levels. In any case, the final value cannot exceed 360 credits. Among the "Level III" qualifications, a "Level II" Master's degree and Research Doctorates are also envisaged.

3.3 Assessment Methods and Procedures

The most widespread methods for the assessment basically rely on three systems:
1   Individual interviews of a more or less structured nature, in which the self-declaratory components prevail (sometimes collected using grids).
2   Self-assessment of elements relating to personal characteristics using specially created tools.
3   Self-assessment using group sessions.

In detail, the outcomes are rendered objective by the practitioners, who act as external elements capable of interpreting what is declared or developed as a result of a negotiation process.
There is, in fact, little recourse to objective tests or to the analysis of documents or testimonials by third parties.

There is a strong need for procedural and methodological frameworks useful for comparing and 'accrediting' the different experiences developed so far. In Italy, it is not yet clear what exactly a validation procedure is, who is able to legitimately offer this type of service, what kind of general requisites the procedures should have. From this point of view, the Italian situation reflects many open issues raised at the European level through the work of a Technical Group on common principles for validation.

One may consider as a significant practice the process of accreditation envisaged both in Adult Education and the *IFTS* system. It is planned in three sequential steps:

1. Guidance/counselling aimed to let the individual actively participate in self-analysis and the identification of the specific training needs. This step is carried out by a counsellor and produces a basic individual project;

2. Assessment aimed to collect the evidences in a systematic way and to ensure the possession of specific competences. This step is carried out by one (or more) assessor who

contributes the individual to compose a dossier that includes all the evidences (certifications, self-declarations, documented information about training, work or other experiences). Within the dossier, all the experiences are supposed to be translated in competences. The dossier is useful for the next step in the validation process but also for the creation of a further document, the Individual Portfolio, that will accompany the individual also after leaving the present training experiences with the progressive inclusion of any further certification;

3. Certification/recognition aimed to give concrete effects to the process producing a certification or allowing the access or a bonus towards a training pathway. This step is usually managed by a Commission in which all the education and training institutions involved are represented. After the evaluation of the dossier, the Commission formulates the decision in order to recognise the 'credit' for access.

The Entry Validation Process in *EDA* and *IFTS*

Phase	Who and What is guaranteed	Actors	Product	Effect
1. Guidance/Counselling	Individuals	Individual/ Counsellor	Individual Project	Self-consciousness and planning of training needs
1. Assessment	Training requirements	Individual/ Assessor	Dossier of evidences	External information base
2. Certification/ recognition	Institutions	Commission in representation of all the subjects involved in the VET destination system	Formal recognition or certification	Access or credit towards the training pathway

According to the results of monitoring data and information, even if the outcomes concerning the above procedure are not yet available, it seems that the procedure has been applied in a good percentage of *IFTS* courses with favorable effects on accessibility of training activities by employed and unemployed trainees. The monitoring data related to the 2003/2004 courses is still being awaited.

Component 4, Stakeholder Behaviour

4.1	Characteristics of Stakeholders

The following is a summary of relevant stakeholders:

- The **National Government.** As a body of general reference and governance, and in accordance with the reform of Title V of the Italian Constitution (Law 3/2001), the national government regulates essential functions such as the definition of *L.E.P.*s (Essential Service Levels) in several contexts (such as education, teaching, training and employment). Another essential function of the national government is the creation of system infrastructures recognised as, and agreed to be, necessary for the recognition of competences (however acquired) as training credits: a national system of vocational standards, a system of training standards and a system of certification.

- The **Regional and Provincial Authorities** (including the Autonomous Provincial Authorities)**.** The Italian legislation entrusts the Regional and Provincial Authorities with the definition of vocational, training and certification standards, the effective organisation of related management devices and the regulation of vocational education and training supply and related providers (through an autonomously-defined accreditation device). Italian legislation (Legislative Decree 469/1997) also entrusts the Regional and Provincial Authorities with the programming, organisation and implementation of a wide range of "employment services" (including reconstruction and recognition of competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning and skill-matching in the labour market).

- **Social Partners.** Included in the "Social Partners" heading are enterprises' and workers' representatives. In enterprises a limited rise in "formal" learning and copious amounts of "non-formal" learning have been observed; moreover, Italian labour legislation measures give enterprises the authority to 'recognise' individual qualifications whether acquired in a training setting or in non-formal or informal contexts. Workers' representatives bear a common responsibility with enterprises (within the bounds of contract activities) on important issues of work organisation (for example, worker training and related certification; e.g., the establishment of a framework of job profiles that match workers' competences). While collaborating with employers' representatives, workers' representatives promote and defend the interests of workers on these themes.

- **Organisations** where 'typical' informal learning (in nature and functional mechanisms) takes place: specifically volunteer associations, non-profit third sector organisations (such as NGOs, the Italian Red Cross, etc.), as well as larger organisations such as the Armed Forces, the Police and *Carabinieri* academies and forces, local health agencies, etc.

- **School, VET and University Systems.** Currently these systems (and related providers) 'receive' (either between systems or from outside) students who apply for the recognition of (training) credits based on the value given to previously acquired competences. The practice of credit recognition requires a clear outline of the criteria, tools, methods and roles necessary to carry out this process. At the same time these systems 'turn out' individuals that manifest a growing need to receive

certification of the competences acquired within the system concerned to assure their capitalisation in other contexts.

- "**Intermediary**" **Bodies.** This category includes (public or private) bodies charged with the development and/or support and/or implementation of reconstruction, assessment and validation of learning completed in non-formal, informal and any other context: for example, public bodies (such as employment centres) and private bodies (staff leasing companies); third sector organisations such as trade unions or training and guidance bodies/organisations acting 'autonomously' or by commission for public actors empowered with programming functions (typically the Provincial Authorities); for-profit organisations providing assistance to individuals enrolled in formal curricula (such as *CEPU*, a private for-profit organisation that offers services that public universities may soon begin offering as well). The map of "intermediate actors" was revised and expanded in a national law (Law 30/2004 and Decree 276/2003).

- **Professional Associations and Registers** (of recognised and non-recognised professions). These organisations preside over critical professional issues such as codes of ethics, educational qualifications and professional requirements for access to recognised professions and related procedures. The participation of these bodies is particularly relevant in the definition of forms of internship and professional work experience as well as for the determination of professional recognition for current and prospective members of professional associations and registers. Recognised professions in Italy have for some time been subject to legislative reform: the most recent attempt is a draft bill to reform professional categories.

- **Individuals** (the beneficiaries or "final customers" of prior credit recognition and certification devices)**.** People who seek the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning to increase the certification and capitalisation of their competences and facilitate entry into formal vocational education and training pathways and/or for job insertion and professional growth.

Clearly, the *map of the stakeholders* presents an intricate scenario in terms of *levels of action* (national, regional, provincial/local), *categories of actors* (institutional, social, technical-professional), *legal status* (public, private for-profit, non-profit third sector) and *role in recognition and certification of acquired competences* (regulatory and governance body; implementation and management body; intermediate body; "customer" of the recognition system; beneficiary of the relative output).

Furthermore, this map highlights how the construction of a system and the creation of devices for the recognition of competences and their certification are a common goal for an extensive and heterogeneous group of stakeholders.
As will be observed in Chapter 5, (Benefits and Barriers), the diversity between stakeholders explains the difficulties encountered over time (see the Chapter on Legislation and Devices) in converting general principles into concrete practices of recognition and certification of non-formal and informal learning aimed at specific beneficiaries in various contexts.

These difficulties have led to the realisation of many interesting experiments and local and/or sectoral experiences in Italy which have not however translated to the creation of a 'transversal' national device for systems, training pathways and sectors, despite the presence of national legislation that lays the necessary groundwork with reference to at least one of the various education and training systems (see Decree 174/2001, introducing a system for the certification of vocational training).

The Positions of the State and the Regional Authorities

The positions of the State and Regional Authorities are evident in the following (also mentioned in the preceding chapters):

- Socio-institutional coordination documents (e.g., Agreements and Pacts) between Social Partners

- Inter-institutional coordination documents (e.g., State-Regions Conference agreements; interregional coordination documents and *Tecnostruttura delle Regioni* documents)

- National and regional laws and regulations

- Regional guideline documents and administrative acts (directives, regulations, etc.)

What emerges from an examination of the socio-institutional and inter-institutional agreements, national and regional legislation and regulations recalled in the preceding chapters is that in the past decade Italy has witnessed growing and convergent support among various stakeholders in the creation of a national system for the certification of acquired competences, including those matured through non-formal and informal learning. The creation of this system would entail reciprocal recognition of capitalisable training credits between education and training systems and the world of work. The national system would also include the issue of certificates and qualifications for acquired competences to facilitate access to or re-entry in vocational education and training pathways and improve employment opportunities (employability and employment).

The key-words *lifelong learning, life-wide learning and lifelong guidance* have become essential elements of the current debate between Italian stakeholders. It must however be noted that despite affirmations of principle and the existing regulatory-legislative definition of certification in the above-mentioned national Legislative Decree of 2001, there has been as yet no consonant, suitable *implementation* of qualitative and quantitative devices. What is also missing is an effective consensus on operational methods and procedures, or the concrete implications of recognition and certification.

The debate between stakeholders no longer revolves around 'strategic' opportunities to create an integrated system or devices for recognition and certification of competences however acquired (already a point of widespread consensus), as much as:

- The most appropriate *levels of action* (national, regional, local and sectoral)

- The '*competent*' *stakeholders* (those best equipped to manage certification processes and devices: in short, who does the actual certification)

- The intended *impact* and "*scope of application*" of competence recognition (What are the expected results? How should such devices affect the various stakeholders: individuals, enterprises, education and training systems, employment services, professional associations and registers, Social Partners, etc.?)

These are questions of great significance. The next chapter will discuss how indecision on these issues has prevented a national application of the continuative debate and stream of regulations and agreements which have yielded only 'local' experiences and not yet an effective 'system' in its own right.

A natural starting point in the process of reflection and practices on competence recognition and certification at the national level is the *1996 "Patto per il lavoro"* (Pact for Employment) – the agreement on employment and training ratified between the national government and Social Partners, also signed by professional associations. The "*Patto per il lavoro*" outlines some key principles that in subsequent years inspired experimental devices and legislation.

The "*Patto per il lavoro*" lays the groundwork for the creation of an *inter-institutional body* responsible for defining a "*system of certification* to standardise and make visible lifelong learning pathways, promote the recognition of training credits acquired in any context and document matured competences".

Law 196/1997 is the first coherent piece of legislation that incorporates all of the principles established in the 1996 "*Patto per il lavoro*".

This law assigns the authority to define "methods and criteria for the certification of competences acquired through vocational training" to a special committee created within the Ministry of Labour. Furthermore, this law establishes, within the context of training and guidance internship, "the assignment of training credits for activities completed during training and work-placement periods ….. to be used, where duly certified, to favour access to employment" (Article 18).

With *Law 122/1998* on the process of "administrative federalism" launched in *Law 59/1997*, the national government preserves several of its administrative responsibilities and tasks, among which is the "identification of vocational qualification standards - including higher technical training - and training credits and their certification methods …".

Another important agreement between the national Government and Social Partners signed in the 1990s is the so-called "*Patto sociale per lo sviluppo e l'occupazione*" (Social Pact for Development and Employment) (1998), which affirms that upon the age of 18 all young people have the right to "attain an upper secondary-school certificate or receive certification of competences that correspond to the job profiles requested in the present-day labour market… and that contemporaneously will guarantee future vocational retraining…".

Law 144/1999 introduces the *IFTS* (Higher Technical Education and Training) system, a particularly relevant starting point for the definition of devices intended for the recognition of credits upon entrance to *IFTS* courses whereby workers can receive certification for competences acquired through previous work experience.

Law 509/1999 "*Regolamento recante norme concernenti l'autonomia didattica degli atenei*" (Regulation Containing Provisions Concerning the Teaching Autonomy of Universities), and specifically Article 5 on "University Training Credits", affirms that "according to pre-established criteria, universities can assign training credits for the knowledge and skills gained in post-secondary training activities designed and carried out by the university". This Article refers in particular to the recognition of credits acquired through *IFTS* pathways.

The *State-Regions Conference Agreement* signed on *18 February 2000, Annex B* defines the "procedures for the creation of a national system of vocational competence certification" and affirms that the "Regional Authorities shall certify vocational competences acquired in vocational training activities at the structures accredited according to Annex A, on the job, in continuing training activities, or through internship or self-learning" and verifies the right of the individual to apply for this certification. Furthermore, Annex B states that "certification of competences shall be conducted by the Regional Authorities according to methods established in regional legislation, in compliance with the criteria and principles envisaged in Article 17, para. 1, letter c), of Law 196 of 24 June 1997, and based on the proposals contained in this annex". Finally, Annex B includes under the "certifiable vocational competences" heading "those elements which constitute the individual's skills and knowledge resources and the combination of which constitute a job profile or qualification". In order to document the training curriculum and the acquired competences, the Regional Authorities have created the "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*": a record of training credits that should facilitate the completion of a vocational qualification or the insertion into an educational pathway, based on specific agreements between competent Ministries, training agencies and interested Regional Authorities".

Ministerial Decree 436/2000 governing the *IFTS* system establishes "open-access to pathways also for those who are not in possession of an upper secondary-education certificate, but who benefit from the recognition of competences acquired in previously completed education or training pathways or from employment subsequent to the completion of compulsory education…," (Art. 3) and that "the definition of minimum competence standards, including assessment procedures, and certification are subject to inter-institutional coordination and approval of the Social Partners…" (Art. 5). Annex B of Article 3 on methods of access to *IFTS* pathways reaffirms that, "Access to *IFTS* pathways is determined through the recognition of acquired competences, which consists in the certification of knowledge gained through work and life experience and in the recognition of eventual training credits that determine the duration of an individual's pathway".

The extensive series of indications and suggestions that emerged from the second half of the 1990s to the year 2000 were rendered concrete with *Ministry of Labour Decree 174/2001 – "Disposizioni in materia di certificazione nella formazione professionale*" (Measures Governing the Certification of Vocational Training). This decree provides a 'comprehensive' treatment of the issue of vocational training: the Ministry of Labour's legitimate field of action. The Decree establishes the purpose of certification (Art. 2), recalls

minimum competence standards for certification (Art. 3), identifies responsible stakeholders (Art. 4), delineates types of certification (Art. 5) and provides guidelines for training credits (Art. 6).

Decree 276/2003 (in application of *Law 30/2003)* recalls the State-Regions Agreement signed 18 February 2000 and introduces the "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*", defined as "a personal booklet of the worker … with the coordination between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Education, University and Research, after an understanding at the Unified Conference (State-Regions) and having consulted the Social Partners. This personal booklet lists the competences acquired during apprenticeship training, training with work-entry contract, specialised training and lifelong learning activities conducted by organisations accredited by the Regional Authorities, as well as the competences acquired in non-formal and informal pathways according to the EU Guidelines on Lifelong Learning, as long as these competences are recognised and certified".

The *State-Regions Conference Agreement* signed on *15 January 2004,* "assigns authority" in the various fields of action, including for the recognition and certification of credits. Within this Agreement, authority to define general standardised criteria for competence certification ("*libretto formativo personale*") is assigned to the national government. Regional Authorities are entrusted with the regulation of the competence and credit systems and the related support services as well as the methods and procedures for assessment, evaluation and certification of competences and credits at the beginning, during and at the completion of pathways.

Article 1 of *Decree 270/2004,* establishes "the authority of universities (according to criteria set by the Ministry of Education, University and Research) to assign as university training credits, according to pre-established criteria, the vocational knowledge and skills certified in compliance with the current legislation as well as other skills and knowledge acquired in post-secondary training activities designed and developed by the university".

The *State-Regions Conference Agreement* signed on *28 October 2004* reiterates the right of the individual to 'spend' certification and to recognition of training credits, and defines the methods for reciprocal recognition of credits between upper secondary schools and VT providers.

Interministerial Decree 86 of December 2004 approves two different certification models (Model A for the transition from vocational training and apprenticeship to upper secondary education; and Model B for the opposite process).

Interministerial Decree 276 of October 2005 defines the format for the "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" and provides the standard format of the document in annex.

The "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" currently enjoys the consensus of the Italian State, Regional Authorities and Social Partners, as well as the approval of representatives from different education and vocational training systems. The "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" seems to be the most promising device of a standard – though not exhaustive – representation of personal certificates and recognised credits.

The constitution of a "*Unified Committee on standard and certification*" aimed at creating a National Qualifications framework.

During 2006 the institutional and social dialogue strengthened the issue of the national priority to develop and implement a National Qualification System coherent with the EQF.

The aims of this <u>new political phase</u> is to go forward the practices and experiences still now realized at national and regional level and to build a National System within the European framework approach, principles and instruments.

On September 2006 the Ministry of Labour promoted a "**Unified Committee**" **aimed at defining and implementing a "National Qualification System"** composed by Ministry of Education, University and Research, Regions and Social Partner. This political issue will allow to integrate, in a common and national framework, the different titles, qualifications and diploma delivered by Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Regions and Universities and the classification adopted by the employment services.

Besides, the National Framework would be an important point for the evolution of Italian system toward the definition of national criteria and methodologies able to give transparency and visibility of skills and competencies lifelong achieved by trainees and workers in any context (formal, non formal and informal).

The Regional and Provincial Authorities

Preceding chapters have described how the theme of the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning has become the *unequivocal object of regional policy and legislation* (regional laws; council decisions) subsequent to the approval of Ministry of Labour Decree 174/2001, a sort of legislative 'watershed' on this issue.

Before Decree 174/2001, the Regional Authorities had only paid 'selective' attention to two different issues of competence recognition. The first, relative to the *certification of competences acquired in formal learning pathways,* was the 1996 Decree (re-confirmed in 1997) which introduced a new model of qualification to increase transparency of final certification in keeping with the EU transparency standards. The second issue concerning 'selective' regional action was the realisation of *selected innovative and 'anticipatory' experiments* (e.g., experiences in Emilia-Romagna that anticipated the innovations introduced with the French *VAE (La validation des acquis de l'expérience* – Certification of previous experience) system in 2002, starting with the set-up of the *VAP – Validation des acquis professionnels* – Certification of work experience) system.

Numerous local experiences and experiments have yielded a sort of 'sedimentation' of national legislation, which is at times more direct and comprehensive (Decree 174/2001), while at others more limited and 'indirect' (Law 30/2003; Decree 276/2003; Law 53/2003). Regardless of their nature, these laws and decrees treat or at least touch on the theme of recognition and certification of non-formal and informal learning and at the same time impel the Regional Authorities to exercise their regulatory prerogative in a more 'systematic' way.

Following the certification decree, several Regional or Provincial Authorities passed laws to redefine their vocational training systems (namely Tuscany, Valle d'Aosta, Emilia-Romagna, Basilicata, Autonomous Provincial Authority of Trento), and four Regions in particular – Tuscany, Valle d'Aosta, Emilia-Romagna and Piedmont – have subsequently

passed laws (regional executive-council decisions) to create a precise method of recognition and certification of credits for the competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. The executive-council decision passed in the Piedmont Region is less oriented towards the recognition of "non-formal and informal" competences than executive-council decisions issued by the other three Regions.

These *laws merely "establish principles"*, postponing the regulation of credit recognition and certification systems and related devices to future regional executive-council decisions.

The law passed by the *Emilia-Romagna* Regional Authorities contains perhaps the 'clearest' statement of principle: it cites that "every individual has the right to obtain formal recognition and certification of acquired competences …" which can be used for the attainment of a "certificate, vocational qualification or other qualification". The law also affirms the responsibility of the Regional Authorities to "promote agreements with stakeholders in the training system and Social Partners … on the translation of competences acquired in the workplace to vocational training credits to be utilised in training pathways". The same Article (Art. 5) "assigns the stakeholders in the training system the authority for recognition and certification". Article 6 introduces the "*Libretto formativo personale*" (Personal Training Portfolio) (which can be requested by those who enrol for post-compulsory vocational education or training pathways). The portfolio "lists the certificates, qualifications and other certifications earned" by an individual and certifies "attendance in non-formal education pathways, and training credits otherwise acquired and documented, as well as declarations of self-learning".

Article 28 of a similar law from the *Basilicata* Region presents considerations that are virtually identical to the above Articles 5 and 6 of the legislation from Emilia-Romagna.

It is evident that *these regional laws are limited to incorporating the principles already extensively defined and agreed upon at the national level and sanctioned by Decree 174/2001*, perhaps with slightly less resolve (with regard to the range of 'recognisable' competences). The "*Libretto formativo individuale*" (Individual Training Portfolio) is an apparent attempt to differentiate the rhetoric of this device from a similar instrument which came out of the State-Regions Agreement of 2000, formalised in Decree 276/2003, which served to implement Law 30/2003.

These are also years in which policies, guideline documents and/or supranational programming (from the EU and OECD) on formal, non-formal and informal learning have inspired useful reflection and debate in Italy which, despite the various 'literal' interpretations of these three terms, established a consensus on the importance of non-formal and informal learning: such that practitioners begin to speak about "learning vs. training" and the need to 'elevate' the importance of learning and development of competences in those contexts which previously had been excluded from the debate (i.e., non-formal and informal learning).

Another relatively new concept which has emerged in the last few years is "new citizenship rights" in the new welfare/workfare system and in the development of a lifelong/life-wide learning system to enhance employability: these concepts (re)affirm the right of the individual to receive recognition for competences acquired in any context.

Between the second half of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000 (by virtue of socio-institutional coordination at the national level and resulting legislation, as well as the progressive transfer of powers to the Regional Authorities, due to the law implementing the *Reform of Title V* and to the subsequent debate on "*devolution*"), the Regional Authorities effectively assumed the responsibility for the organisation and management of competence recognition and certification policies based on generally-accepted principles.

The *three previously mentioned regional council decisions* are emblematic of the "free exercise" of new regional responsibility on this theme, which has been expressed not only nominally but also in concrete results.

In chronological order, these three council decisions are:

- Law from the *Valle d'Aosta Region*: "*Direttiva sulla gestione dei crediti formativi nell'ambito della formazione professionale*" (Directive on the Management of Training Credits in Vocational Training), *DGR* (Regional Executive-Council Decision) dated June 2004.

- Law from the *Emilia-Romagna Region*: "*Orientamenti, metodologia, e struttura per la definizione del sistema regionale di formalizzazione e certificazione delle competenze*" (Guidelines, Methodology and Structure for Defining a Regional System of Competence Recognition and Certification), Annex A of *DGR* dated September 2005.

- Law from the *Toscana Region*: "*Indirizzi regionali per l'attuazione dei processi di riconoscimento e certificazione delle competenze realizzati nell'ambito del sistema di istruzione e formazione professionale regionale*" (Regional Guidelines for the Implementation of Competence Recognition and Certification Processes within the Regional Vocational Education and Training System), Annex A of *DGR* dated May 2006.

The first law (Valle d'Aosta), the experimental phase of which has already been completed, focuses particular attention on communication and promotion efforts targeted to potential beneficiaries.

The second and third laws (Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany) are currently in the implementation phase with the support of system actions: nomination of both the presidents of the examination commissions and the certification officers, the training of practitioners, and the dissemination of information on the device.

These experiences demonstrate, at least in the most advanced Regions in Italy, an active attempt to construct and create coherent operational devices and systems with shared basic principles at the socio-institutional and inter-institutional level and in accordance with national legislation.

The Positions of Social Partners

Political-institutional and socio-institutional culture in Italy has traditionally (and even more so starting in the 1990s when it was explicitly stated as a framework for government action) been underpinned by a 'coordination' method. In the first half of the following decade, this method assumed the lighter tone of "social dialogue" in accordance with the prevalent culture in the European context. The coordination method entails a systematic, preventive and formalised agreement between the national Government, Programming Authorities and Social Partners that defines the main issues regarding the economy, the labour market, employment, education and training.

Institutions and Social Partners use preventive negotiation and stipulation of agreements, memoranda of understanding, pacts, etc., as essential tools to successfully introduce and implement a credit recognition and certification system in Italy.

Coordination, in this sense constitutes:

- a precious *resource* (a common definition of reference frameworks, strategies and action plans that provides invaluable guidance in the operational stages, yielding 'profits' in the implementation phase that exceed the 'investment' made in the coordination phase);

- a potentially significant *constraint* (a 'radical' conception of coordination implies the necessity of a point of equilibrium and agreement between all the interested stakeholders and various positions; it is natural to assume that this has the potential to 'slow' the decision-making process and 'lower' the level of negotiation).

In the evolution of certification in Italy, examples of both of these characteristics (resource; constraint) are evident as the guideline definition phase proceeds to the identification and implementation of 'infrastructures' and devices for the realisation of these principles.

An analysis of the 'products' of coordination clearly demonstrates that the credit recognition and certification system is considered by socio-institutional stakeholders (and thus by Social Partners) as an essential 'piece' of a larger 'puzzle'; considered not as an "end in itself" but as an 'instrument'. Moreover, the credit recognition and certification system is only one of a group of essential instruments that comprise a broader programme of reform and modernisation in the education, training and employment systems.

Other 'puzzle pieces' (other instruments) include:

- definition of a *national system of job profile standards,* expressed in *capitalisable competence units*;

- definition of a *national system of minimum training standards*, corresponding to a variety of training pathways and job profiles and valid throughout the national territory;

- creation of a *system of training quality assurance* (either through devices for the *accreditation and/or certification* of training providers and/or structures, through the

'certification' of practitioners, or through the establishment of standards along the various phases in the training process).

In stakeholder dialogue, these elements are considered "structural prerequisites" and as such are often referred to as the "*system infrastructures*": elements of vital importance to the achievement of common strategic goals.

In recent years, the issue of "*bilateralism*" (direct management of various aspects of labour, employment and training policies in equal partnership between Social Partners through the establishment of joint bodies) has gained prominence in the Italian context. Bilateralism is essential to the implementation of a certification system: both for its importance in the achievement of strategies and policies developed by the Social Partners as well as for its adherence to the subsidiarity principle, which is implicated and sustained by the most modern conceptions of the relationship between the State and civil society.
The bilateralism envisioned in Italy is based on analyses of "good practices" observed in several European countries (especially the French experience with collaboration on continuing training).

Equal partnerships in *national and regional joint bodies* and more recently the experience of *Joint Multi-Sectoral Funds for Continuing Training* constitute the two main systems through which bilateralism has been applied to training. These two venues of cooperation have provided important opportunities to transition from the statement of common principles to collaboration on management of sub-systems, models and devices related to the above-mentioned themes (certification, etc.), in keeping with shared socio-institutional principles.

The 'direct' experience of Social Partners with bilateral management, programming activity, needs analysis, design, implementation and evaluation of continuing training actions reveals a sustained need for "system actions" ('infrastructures') to support these efforts. The most recent initiatives promoted and financed by the above Funds were in fact dedicated to feasibility studies and the creation of models of devices for recognising and certifying competences acquired through initiatives promoted by these Funds.

This example seems to suggest that the assumption of 'direct' responsibility for the programming and management of sub-systems and fields of training action facilitates the necessary passage from "*principles*" to "*implementation*" and thus the transition from general principles to concrete applications, accompanied by a rigorous assessment of the effective level of shared responsibility on the various aspects of the issue.

Some stakeholders, even those in the same category, show differing points of view depending on their involvement with "confederated" national or regional representatives (i.e., transversal to various trade associations), or with regional vocational training practitioners' trade-union representatives, or further still, with representatives from the Managing Authorities of Multi-Sectoral Funds.

In particular:

- "*Confederated*" *national and regional representatives (i.e., transversal to various trade associations)* tend to voice concerns of a broader and more general nature (*the*

reasons for a system of recognition and certification; and *the configuration of the system as a whole*). At the same time, (at least in the present dialogue phase) these stakeholders preach caution and aim to halt the push towards the concrete implementation with concerns over *how* to carry out the necessary steps, *who* is responsible and *what operational implications* certification should have. Employers' organisations seem to lie on one side of this issue, while Social Partners lie on the other: the former are particularly concerned with preventing 'intervention' in an enterprise's prerogative of "contractual" recognition of skills recognised and certified by a public body; the latter category is concerned with the guarantee of a primary role for joint bodies. Secondly, this issue seems to cut across trade-union organisations: some of which are oriented towards the authority of public programming bodies to create "system infrastructures" as well as to directly manage operational devices (e.g., certification commissions), while others seek to guarantee this same authority for joint bodies, in respect for the principles of subsidiarity and co-responsibility on important employment and training issues.

- Some *trade-union representatives of regional vocational training practitioners* claim that a number of prerequisites must be met in order for the system of competence recognition and certification (even for competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning) to be effectively implemented; for example, practitioners themselves must satisfy a series of competence requisites to equip them to analyse, validate and evaluate training, professional and life experiences and to reconstruct and certify the acquired competences. In addition, the system currently has a 'surplus' of practitioners due to cuts in the ESF financial resources for the 2007-2013 programming period in Italy, though the extent of these cuts varies from Region to Region. Thus, one proposal offered by representatives is to create a mobility plan that includes updating and retraining of training practitioners, allowing those 'surplus' practitioners an opportunity for professional outplacement that is in keeping with their background of competences and experiences and that, at the same time, allows public structures (or joint bodies) to avoid hiring new personnel. These representatives view the implementation of a widespread system of certification as a potential opportunity for professional safeguarding and employment qualification for vocational training practitioners.

- Finally, *representatives of the Managing Authorities of Multi-Sectoral Funds* maintain that it is in the best interests of both workers and employers to proceed with a definition of a structured system of training opportunities expressed in capitalisable units, as well as the creation of a system to certify and recognise, and 'capitalize' on, the results of continuing training. These methods serve to render the vocational training supply more effective and efficient, and inspire both enterprises and individuals to access training more frequently. In Italy the demand for training among enterprises and individuals is growing, though it is not yet adequately expressed. In those cases where training needs are accurately expressed, there is an inability to translate this need into an appropriate system of supply. Consequently, even in the presence of an ample supply of training opportunities, there are rather unimpressive rates of access and participation.

Some additional considerations emerge from the examination of the different positions held by trade unions and employers' organisations on credit recognition and certification.

Not surprisingly, trade-union organisations favour the protection of the individual, especially "new citizenship rights", in a current economic scenario that is increasingly characterised by discontinuity and flexibility (which frequently degenerates into precarious employment). Trade unions argue that now more than ever, in this climate of greater instability, competences acquired both in employment and non-employment contexts must be expressed in a recognisable and transparent way.

In short, it may be concluded that the more critical the economic situation, the greater the mobility of workers. It is therefore necessary that the workers be assured the "transferability", the "spendability" and the "capitalisation" of competences acquired throughout their lifetime.

To assure these conditions, devices must be created to guarantee the transparency of competences as a pre-requisite for recognition and certification.

Employers' organisations (in particular, *Confindustria)* cite, from a more "business-oriented" than 'individual' perspective, the utility of an on-the-job training recognition model (considered *non-formal* learning) to increase opportunities for acquiring competences 'spendable' in the labour market and for promoting horizontal and vertical mobility in the VET system.

Better understanding of the effective "competence resources" available to an enterprise, and a continual tendency towards strengthening and developing competences, which would derive from an accessible system of competence recognition, are two 'major' advantages offered by a system of credit certification (the former for enterprises; the latter for individuals).

In employers' organisations (especially *Confindustria*), this position is counter-balanced in the *autonomous and 'inalienable' role of enterprises in the determination of the 'value'* to be assigned both to the employment experiences matured within the enterprise and recognised for formal qualifications as well as to employment experiences obtained in other business contexts.

In Italy, this specific element is one of the "key issues" still to be resolved in the *labour law debate* and in industrial relations: prevalence in the Italian legislation of "*subjective qualification*" (that is, the classification of the worker by the employer based on the former's effective duties, regardless of any qualifications or credits that the worker might possess) over "*objective qualifications*" (the qualifications or credits held by the worker, regardless of the specific and 'temporary' position).

For several years, this debate has become a political discussion (which is still in progress) on the *abolition of the legal value of educational qualifications*, an issue which encompasses a number of concerns. On one side of the debate are trade-union organisations that fear 'liberalist' or 'marketist' considerations when undertaking a decision of this kind; the other

side of the debate is host to the concerns of entrepreneurs who believe that this measure is fundamental to a HR policy founded on merit and equity.

For all stakeholders, what appears to be fundamental is the creation of a system that transcends a strict conception of formal educational qualifications and allows the necessary flexibility to permit individuals to pass from one pathway to another of the training system and to obtain recognition for competences acquired through work experience.

The various *trade associations* view competence certification as a positive step towards integration between various sub-systems; i.e., education, vocational training and employment. Furthermore, this measure is favoured for its guarantee of the rights of individuals to have their competences recognised regardless of where these competences were acquired. Thus emerges the autonomy of competence certification activities and the need to diversify the methods, settings and timeframes of recognition.

The *AgenQuadri-Cgil, AIDP, ApQ-CISL, CiQ-UIL and Federmanagement* organisations have launched a process to create "a common language for competences".

The main assumption behind these policies is that "employability" entails the possession (and constant updating) of competences and personal characteristics sought by potential employers.

Acknowledgement of the need to implement a system of recognition and certification of competences acquired even through non-formal and informal learning does not overshadow the need to underline a central issue with regard to the successful implementation of this system: "*Who will evaluate and recognise these competences and how will they do it?*"

Enterprises tend to employ individual and specific standards and parameters for the evaluation and recognition of competences, generating substantial problems with regard to visibility and transparency in other contexts.

It is clear that this entrepreneurial autonomy in competence recognition limits the "transferability" and "spendability" of competences, which, however, are essential elements of modern citizenship rights. What is needed therefore is a *"framework system"* that guarantees the recognition of competences for individuals and, at the same time, assures businesses a necessary margin of autonomy.

Employers' organisations contend that only through the definition of clear rules and procedures at the macro-system level is it possible to diversify and increase the number of *"learning settings"* where recognisable and certifiable competences may be obtained.

This consideration is echoed in the Italian debate with regard to the "*enterprise as a training provider*", which refers to the recognition (even formal) of the role of enterprises as "trainers" (as requested by the employers' organisations).

Various stakeholders contend that to maintain the delicate equilibrium between competence transparency devices for individuals and adequate autonomy for businesses, the rules and procedures established at the general level should be rendered more concrete through the

definition of "standard levels" or "thresholds" of service. Based on these latter, recognition methods and procedures can be implemented according to the specific realities of enterprises (e.g., through the creation of specific roles, productivity incentives and bonuses, fringe benefits, etc.).

Other Stakeholders: Some Indications on the Positions of Representatives from the Education, Vocational Training and University Systems

Representatives from the education, vocational training and university systems are important stakeholders, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

It is important to remember that the perspective from which such stakeholders consider and treat the issue of certification is twofold:

- certification issued to students upon completion of training modules, courses and/or other pathways as envisaged in the current legislation, to facilitate insertion into an external context (other training systems; labour market);
- certification issued to participants upon entrance to courses/pathways for competences acquired previously and the subsequent recognition of training credits in terms of course participation and attendance.

Beyond affirmations of principle, the education, vocational training and university systems have historically grappled with the need to offer concrete solutions to guarantee both types of certification (evaluation and certification upon exit; evaluation and recognition of credits upon entry).

Various systems have adopted their own procedures for certification (according to Italian legislation, training structures have 'exclusive' authority to certify upon completion of a course and to recognise credits upon entry).

As with all stakeholders who have a responsibility to "act", and not only to "regulate what those actions should be", the representatives of these systems have manifested pragmatic postures and behaviours aimed at resolving the problems of recognition and certification through the adoption of 'local' and 'step-by-step' practices that are usually 'vertically' coherent with existing practices of the same structure, but not necessarily 'horizontally' coherent with the existing practices of other stakeholders in the same system or in the same territory. What is missing is the adoption of definitive standard procedures and 'rules' with special reference to the numerous variables (type of problem, category of user/beneficiary; sector; type of training structure, etc.).

Certainly, the strong cultural 'pressure' created by socio-institutional agreements in the mid-1990s and the enormous body of legislation enacted during the same period (laws, directives, regulations) fostered consistent development over the years of various practices at the local level (agreements between upper secondary schools and VT centres in initial 'integrated' training), pathways (such as *IFTS* and transferable credits for workers and university enrolment) and system-oriented actions (as established by Law 509/1999, the development of a certification system that regulates university credits, with adoption of a 'model' inspired by the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system – ECTS).

The most recent legislation on universities (and vocational training) gives particular prominence to the evaluation and acknowledgement of competences previously acquired by beneficiaries through non-formal and informal learning and thus allows the individual the possibility to 'abbreviate' the pathways for formal qualification (certificates and degrees). In the university context, the new "earn a degree for your experience" approach mirrors the spirit of the promotional campaigns of private, for-profit structures (e.g., *CEPU*), and public structures (e.g., the polytechnic of a university in the Lombardy region / the Polytecnic University of Milan).

Furthermore, when considering the impetus to establish a system of credit recognition (and its logical and chronological predecessor: the system of certification established by Law 30/2003) for this category of stakeholders (as well as for the State and the Regional Authorities), the following are 'decisive' factors:

- potential to attract new "customers" thus raising "market share";
- possibility of reducing dropout rates, and thus raising internal efficiency rates;
- greater prospects of reaching employment and training targets set at the European level and adopted as a frame of reference in national programming documents (the percentage of individuals with upper secondary-education certificates and university degrees, etc.).

4.2	**Access and Participation**

The various stakeholders that as a whole are classified in Italy as "Social Partners" agree upon the necessity of an effective and 'methodical' implementation (rather than only experimental and episodic) of a recognition and certification system for competences acquired through formal and informal learning.

It is by now a widespread belief that guaranteeing the quality of competences and moreover reliable systems of competence acquisition and recognition is not a supplementary and secondary element, but rather an essential and strategic requirement for economic growth and competitiveness.

Social and institutional stakeholders have also reflected upon the *categories of beneficiaries* with the greatest need of recognition and certification of competences matured "on the job" or "off the job" to ensure occupational mobility and professional development in the labour market.

Trade unions argue that while in the past this need has almost exclusively pertained to the most disadvantaged segments of the population (the disabled, immigrants, and the less-educated), currently this issue affects a far wider array of individuals in the labour market. The enlargement of the target group demographic leads to the consideration of this as a relevant social problem.

There is widespread consensus in Italy that credit recognition and certification must be *an 'universal' policy*, and thus targeted to all citizens (the law from the Emilia-Romagna

Region is an excellent example of this philosophy), and not a 'specific' or 'selective' measure aimed only at specific targets.

Hence, non-formal and informal competence recognition should be available *not only to the weakest segments of the population* and workers who, for profession, age and sector, are not easily integrated in the labour market, but also to those individuals who up to now have been considered 'the strongest'.

In the process to create "a common competence language", trade associations also highlight the importance of adapting informal and non-formal competence recognition and upgrading systems for higher-rank job profiles (by international definitions, so-called *Professional and Managerial Staff)*. This broader conception of informal and non-formal competence recognition serves not only to account for the growing numbers of highly-qualified workers, but also to acknowledge that these profiles are the first to be affected by change. At the same time such job profiles are essential for the achievement of European objectives such as those outlined in Lisbon 2000: to make Europe the most competitive knowledge economy in the world.

All the cited associations stress the importance of defining a group of common European-level principles for the implementation of the validation of formal and non-formal competences and learning. These principles should include: validation proposals, individual commitment, responsibilities of the institutions and stakeholders, trust, impartiality, credibility and legitimacy.

European principles should then adapt to fit to local, regional, sectoral or national needs, guaranteeing - in all contexts - the principles of trust, impartiality and credibility.

In Italy in recent years, the 'tumultuous' increase of support systems and devices for all types of professional, educational and life experiences and the competences acquired, demonstrates the 'multi-target' orientation of stakeholders.

"Bilan de compétences", vocational competence analysis and validation processes, guidance counselling, employment centre pre-selection and job-matching, competence analysis upon entering the training pathways, the portfolio and more recently the "Libretto formativo del cittadino" are only some of the devices developed by institutions, Social Partners and stakeholders within the training system to satisfy the growing urgency for credit recognition and certification.

Each of these devices is usually applied towards a diverse category of beneficiaries, for example, "*Bilan de compétences*" for recent or soon-to-be university graduates, the unemployed, executives and managers, the employed, women seeking reinsertion into the labour market, disadvantaged and at-risk individuals, the disabled, etc..

Furthermore, these devices are applicable to a numerous and mixed group of beneficiaries-targets, with no limitations besides those of the "*organisational sustainability"* and "*financial capacity*" of the stakeholders that manage them.

4.3	Incentives and Disincentives

Previously in this chapter, it was explained that various stakeholders have long understood that a credit recognition and certification system is only one of many necessary components of a policy for lifelong learning that must be implemented in conjunction with other strategic "infrastructures". These 'other' infrastructures include a system of minimum national training standards, a national system of standards for job profiles structured in capitalisable competence units, etc..

This last section of the chapter will briefly describe some "*support measures*" proposed by several stakeholders to bolster the effectiveness of credit recognition and certification.

The first type of measure deals with the issue at the 'general' regulatory-institutional level (and is one of the key components of a policy for lifelong learning) through development of additional "system infrastructures". These 'infrastructures' are considered essential to the viable implementation of basic principles and their translation into concrete practices (job-profile and training standards, training quality accreditation and certification, etc.).

The second type of measure addresses the issue at a more 'specific' level and deals with the promotion and communication of certification devices needed for the stimulation of demand (the law from the Valle d'Aosta Region is a particularly useful example of this type of measure). Promotion devices include:

- dissemination of 'institutional' information through posters and leaflets;

- dissemination of information "for beneficiaries" through innovative forms of targeted communication (promotional trailers, local radio stations, television, totem displays, etc.), and in some contexts through the distribution of training vouchers;

- the use of the Internet for institutional sites and other online formats;

- information disseminated to the network of "intermediate stakeholders" (employers' organisations and trade unions, public and private training bodies, schools and universities, employment centres, information and guidance structures, employment consultants, etc.);

- information-training through seminars and public events (fairs, exhibitions and workshops, etc.).

A *third type of* support measure aims to create the right "organisational conditions" to sustain a system of certification:

- identification of 'relevant' facilities and key profiles (e.g., those responsible for certification in the Provinces and/or training bodies);

- definition of competence standards for key profiles;

- definition of operational procedures and protocols.

A *fourth type of support measure* focuses on "cultural preparation" and "competence development":

- seminars on the competence recognition and certification devices for the main stakeholder representatives at the regional, provincial-local and corporate levels;

- definition of training standards for practitioners engaged at various levels of device implementation;

- realisation of a systematic training plan, including distance learning modules (see the initiative currently planned by the Tuscany Regional Authorities);

- creation and dissemination of structured and standardised manuals.

Finally, *a fifth type of support measure* covers the issue of contracts:

- contractual rules that allow 'leaves' for certification tests (e.g., Law 53/2000);

- contractual rules that favour the validation of acquired competences in the workplace and their recognition through incentives and awards;

- territorial platforms for adult education, aimed at uniformly governing resources (European Social Fund, Law 236/93, Multi-Sectoral Funds), identifying priorities and avoiding redundant activities;

- contractual platforms that link certified training pathways to the development of job profiles and wages; contractual platforms that guarantee the right to training (also through a return of the 150 contractually-allotted training hours);

- social shock absorbers, especially for young people and older workers, that support training pathways for job insertion during all of the phases of unemployment caused by lay offs, firings or other;

- resources to either improve structures or provide incentives to individuals, such as an *educational time bank* or tax relief (also available to enterprises).

Component 5, Case Studies on Benefits and Barriers

5. 1. Basic Arguments for the Recognition and Certification of Competences

The institution of a formal, non-formal and informal competence recognition and certification system that is *uniform* at the national level, but that at the same time is sufficiently *flexible* (able to adapt to the regional specificities recognised by Italian legislation), is caught in a progressive, yet slow and discontinuous, implementation phase. This minimal progress is remarkable if one considers that over ten years have passed since the 'strong' pronouncements of the institutions and Social Partners in the coordination documents (especially in the 1996 "*Patto per il lavoro*") and the existence of a national legislation that clearly defines the issue (Decree 174/2001).

There have been numerous *local "micro-experiences"* implemented throughout Italy in different Regions and in a variety of sectors, promoted and led by various stakeholders, aimed at an assortment of beneficiaries-targets, which experimented with numerous procedures and devices, supported at times by various pieces of legislation. By contrast, the "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" seems to break from a trend of excessive 'specificity'. This device is inspired by a general legislative recommendation (in Law 30 and Decree 276, both from 2003), was defined operationally at the State-Regions Conference and is thus an example of socio-institutional coordination. The "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" is currently in the experimental phase in roughly half of the Regions of Italy.

As described briefly in another section of this report, the "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" is a document divided into two sections. One section contains a record of the professional and training history of the individual, while the other section lists those competences, legitimising these qualifications through certification, with a logic similar to that of the Europass portfolio.

The novelty of this new device is that the "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" is not merely a document or repository of information with a more or less effective format, but it also (if designed and implemented correctly at the local level) represents a real 'device': a process that defines, in addition to the document itself, relevant stakeholders, roles, settings, procedures, competences, behaviours and relationships.

The above-mentioned national system (which can succinctly be expressed as: *"culturally homogeneous", "legally articulated" and "operationally dispersive and discontinuous"*) and the various micro-experiences conducted at all levels and in various regional contexts suggest the need at this juncture for an appraisal of the *benefits* of a device for the recognition and certification of acquired competences and any *barriers* which might hinder its progress.

5.2. Basic Arguments for the Introduction of a System of Recognition and Certification

There are several 'fundamental' reasons for which the question of increased transparency, capitalisation, recognition and certification of experiences (and the 'competences' developed along the way) has, for more than a decade, represented a common priority in Italy both at the socio-institutional level and the inter-institutional level (as evidenced in the previous chapters).

The following are a few common principles valued by all stakeholders:

- The importance of *lifelong learning*: learning occurs throughout one's lifespan, not only in youth; this frequently implies an 'overlap' between periods of education, vocational training and employment. Moreover, lifelong learning requires reliable systems and devices for the recognition, certification and capitalisation of competences developed throughout one's lifetime. A necessary precursor is thus the "transparency" of those competences.

- The importance of *life-wide learning*: an individual learns not in only formal settings (schools and vocational training centres are institutions of *formal learning*), but also in employment contexts (where mostly *non-formal learning* takes place) and in one's free or volunteer time (where *informal learning* occurs). This implies the need to guarantee the "transferability" and "spendability" of competences from one context to another while ensuring their value.

- Increased *mobility* required in the labour market (geographical, sectoral, organisational, occupational): for reasons of social equity and the functionality of the economy and the labour market, measures must assure the "*horizonatal transferability*", "*accumulation*" and "*vertical capitalisation*" of competences however acquired.

- The progressive *flexibility* of the labour market (especially for certain stakeholders - such as trade-union organisations - often translates to *increased precariousness*): this renders instruments and devices indispensable for workers "*in transition*" (a state that is increasingly becoming "*permanent*") so that they may reconstruct, recognise, accumulate, connect, integrate and organise their various vocational training and/or employment experiences; this principle is particularly relevant to public employment services.

- The progressive tendency of training systems (undertaken in schools, vocational training centres, universities, enterprises) towards the *individualisation* and *customisation* of pathways for supporting learning, labour access, and professional development, in order to effectively 'tailor' training projects and actions (as stressed by the stakeholders) appropriate instruments and methods are required to analyse and validate individual competences and for the recognition of credits.

- The progressive change in focus (among employers) in training and HR management processes, from "intelligence" to "*competences*", which are specific characteristics (even if 'individual') crucial to professional effectiveness: this paradigm shift highlights the need for tools of analysis,

development, evaluation, appreciation and recognition of competences on the part of corporate management.

In this context and scenario, Italian stakeholders are progressively developing a shared awareness of the fact that "*competences*" constitute:

- *The output goal* of training curricula, work and "life" experience (the "product-result");

- *Input resources* necessary to conduct employment activities;

- *What enterprises require* to effectively manage their various "production" processes or provide "services" as part of the corporate *mission* (the roles, employment activities and tasks);

- *What employment services require* to effectively '*match*' labour supply and demand (which enterprises try to satisfy through selection, professional development or training, compensation, etc.).

It is clear why competences have become a "*common yardstick*" and an "*inter-operational*" language that allow various sub-systems to communicate, and why "competence standards" have become an important point of reference for schools, training providers, universities and enterprises: competences have the potential to become a "*single currency*" of economic exchange between systems.

"Competence recognition" becomes thus a strategic objective, the successful pursuit of which will have important implications for all the various stakeholders in the economic exchange between systems.

Legislation in the past decade and the socio-institutional and inter-institutional coordinated measures mentioned in the preceding chapters constitute tangible evidence of the level of shared "principles" of this "*common priority*".

5.3. Benefits

As described above, there is consensus in the Italian context for the introduction of a system of competence recognition and certification; however, it is now necessary to more precisely identify the concrete "advantages" for the main stakeholders.

It is naturally assumed that "*the primary benefit*" is the obtainment of recognition and certification of formally, non-formally and informally acquired competences. It is however also useful to highlight some "*secondary*" advantages.

First there are *benefits for the individual*: these advantages are promoted with particular emphasis by *trade-union organisations, vocational training representatives and institutional actors*. Each of these stakeholders is particularly sensitive to the protection of and support

for individuals in the processes of employment and training transition. The main benefits to individuals include:

- the possibility to *reduce times* required to achieve formal certificates (greater *efficiency*) and *increase effective opportunities to complete those certificates* (greater *effectiveness*);

- the possibility to *increase the opportunities for the recognition and certification of experience* acquired through non-formal or informal learning;

- the possibility to translate said certification and recognition into *economic gain*, as a result of wage adjustments associated with the competence recognition (e.g., where Competence-Based Pay Systems are used; or where the "Pay for Competence" principle is employed);

- the possibility to *reap the greatest reward from experience* in interactions with "intermediary stakeholders" such as education, vocational training and university systems, employment services and enterprises;

- the possibility to *unify fragmented experiences* bringing together a beneficiary's personal and professional history;

- the possibility to increase the opportunities for *re-motivation* and *re-orientation* that competence certification allows the individual;

- the possibility to encourage *self-esteem* and *self-confidence* (*empowerment*) which can derive from an experience of this nature;

- the possibility to stimulate individual *training and career design* among workers;

- the possibility to increase "*transferability" of competences* from one context to another through these practices and devices;

- the possibility to offer the benefits of further developing one's competences (due to *self-reflection* or to the "*metacognitive"* effect that are commonly products of competence reconstruction, validation and certification devices);

- the possibility for individuals to analyse their own *strengths and weaknesses* in order to more effectively boost and design a career;

- the possibility to compile a *professional portfolio* through reconstruction, validation and certification devices to present to prospective employers and to the labour market in general.

Competence certification awarded "*upon completion*" and credit recognition "*upon entry*" offer important *benefits for training providers*: these advantages entail the most important

implications on the *education and training system representatives* (that, as stated above, have transitioned from statements of "principle" to the implementation of "operational practices" in order to concretely address the problems of beneficiaries with "sustainable" solutions). The main benefits to this category of stakeholders include:

- the possibility to *recognise credits "upon entry"*, increasing efficiency (reduction of times; lower dropout rates; reduction in the use of human, time and financial resources needed to achieve the end result). Credit recognition also enhances both effectiveness (increasing numbers of qualified individuals/certificate holders) and relative quality (raising beneficiary satisfaction).

- the possibility to provide *transparent certification* upon completion of pathways. Appropriate and relevant certification ensures that "credits are 'spendable'" and at the same time facilitates communication between beneficiaries, employment services and potential employers.

- the possibility to gain *better understanding of beneficiaries*, both at the time of their enrolment and upon completion.

- the possibility to *optimise the customisation and individualisation* of training initiatives for beneficiaries.

- the possibility to *better evaluate the effectiveness* of training, requiring the certification of results in a transparent and 'communicable' way.

- the possibility to develop a *common language* among enterprises (in particular, an 'inter-operational' language of competences).

- the possibility to provide "*retrospective*" *evaluation of curricula* to include competences required for job insertion, thereby improving possibilities for beneficiary success.

- the possibility to *encourage training re-insertion of dropouts*, through the recognition and certification of training experiences of any derivation.

- the possibility to effectively practice *lifelong learning*.

Enterprises will also reap the *benefits* of these measures: naturally, these advantages have been reaffirmed by the employers' organisations and have contributed to their 'agreement' on credit recognition and certification. However, as was briefly indicated above and will be explored more in depth below, the perception of these advantages is tempered with a concern on the part of enterprises regarding the risks of recognition and certification devices, in particular with regard to "who" will have the authority of credit recognition and certification, and "how and where" this should occur.

The main benefits for enterprises are summarised as follows:

- the possibility to gain a *better understanding of the abilities of job candidates* (and thus improve the effectiveness and efficiency of *selection* processes and thus labour *productivity*).

- the possibility to enjoy more effective communication with education and training systems and employment services due to the adoption of an '*inter-operational*' *language*.

- the possibility to access a *more transparent,* better targeted, legible and qualitatively superior *training supply*.

- the possibility to develop *an awareness of the business's implicit training competences* as a place of *non-formal* and *informal learning* (*tacit knowledge*).

- the possibility to improve *personnel evaluation and development abilities*.

- the possibility to promote and encourage development and certification of competences among workers (through *Competence-Based Pay Systems* and *"Pay for Competence"* pay policies).

- the possibility to *construct better tailored "career paths", and real "observatories"* of workers' competences that transcend a mere consideration of degrees and certificates.

- the possibility to create *HR management systems perceived as more equitable and appropriate,* where value of *experience* is not confused with '*seniority*'.

Finally, competence recognition and certification entails benefits for stakeholders with the institutional responsibility to 'mediate' between individuals and enterprises and to promote job matching, namely *employment services*.

The main benefits to employment services include:

- the possibility to improve *databases* by including more complete and reliable individual profiles that are more 'legible' for enterprises.

- the possibility to better meet the demand from enterprises by increasing *effectiveness* and reducing *response time*.

- the possibility to better satisfy the *expectations and interests of individuals* in search of employment or professional change.

- the possibility to *improve 'matching'* of individual and job profiles through a more effective and efficient vocational training system and the use of active employment policy tools.

- the possibility to *promote occupational mobility* between enterprises throughout Italy.

- the possibility to construct more effective *insertion, reinsertion and outplacement* pathways.

- the possibility to *integrate support policies for the weakest and most at-risk segments of the labour market* (e.g., for ex-convicts such as the certification of competences acquired through experience obtained during the period of detention); these policies should not be merely social assistance measures.

Naturally, all the *benefits* of credit recognition and certification mentioned above also involve advantages for *society* as a whole and the *economy* of the entire country, such as: *greater flexibility and social mobility, increased productivity, better human resource distribution, enhancement of human capital, greater equity, recognition of effective merit, overcoming stereotypes with regard to non-formal and informal learning as opposed to formal learning, better integration between systems, etc.*.

5.4. Barriers

The previous chapter describes the most 'visible' benefits of credit recognition and certification for the various stakeholders: individuals, the training system as a whole, enterprises and employment services (as mediators between the various actors). Now it is necessary to explore some of the 'barriers' that seem to hinder the widespread implementation of such a policy despite its apparent support among stakeholders (the long list of potential advantages has been observed in only a few emblematic cases; however credit certification can certainly not yet be considered a consistently 'implemented' 'system' at the national level).

These barriers are divided into six categories:

- *The national institutional configuration*
- *The "system infrastructure" required to "make it happen"*
- *The strategies and attitudes of socio-institutional stakeholders*
- *The specific characteristics of proposed solutions*
- *Beneficiary awareness of and access to opportunities*
- *Policy costs*

1. The National Institutional Configuration

The law to reform Title V of the Constitution (2001) made the achievement of a "nationally cogent" agreement more complex on a number of issues, among these the system of credit recognition and certification. This reform, combined with the absolute autonomy of several stakeholders (the autonomy of the Regional Authorities in regulating certification devices; the autonomy of individual universities and schools to recognise training credits completed

elsewhere; "contractual" autonomy of enterprises in offering "objective qualifications" in the workplace regardless of the "credits" and "certifications" that the worker already possesses) creates a situation that is difficult to manage and that has limited the development of a national agreement to two areas:

- the definition of *Essential Service Levels (LEP)* which, according to the new legislation, fall under the purview of the central government;

- *voluntary bottom-up coordination* of socio-institutional stakeholders with various levels of responsibility (for example, State-Regions coordination committees extended to Social Partners; or Interregional coordination committees; etc.).

It is clear that this situation is on one hand extremely 'expensive' (in terms of necessary commitment, timeframe needed to build consensus, etc.) and on the other hand particularly 'fragile' (in terms of 'stability' of the acquired legitimacy).

The issue of "the legal value of educational qualifications" also falls into the category of institutional configuration, which in the Italian context constitutes an issue that is still present and relevant with regard to a theme like the one treated here; even if, with respect to this element, the positions between stakeholders are extremely divergent: in particular, employers' organisations have for some time expressed favourable opinions as opposed to trade unions and public institutions.

2. *The "System Infrastructure" Required to "Make it Happen"*

As often mentioned in this report, stakeholders are fully aware of the fundamental importance of a system of national policies that would constitute the 'infrastructure' for the system of competence recognition and certification (while each may have a different understanding of the implications).

These policies would include:

- *a common national system of analysis and interpretation of job profiles* expressed in capitalisable competence units (this presupposes a shared language as well as shared employment distribution and analysis methods);

- *a system of training standards* that correspond to professional standards;

- *a system of training "Quality Assurance"* (through accreditation of training bodies and providers; and the training and "certification" of practitioners).

3. *The Strategies and Attitudes of Socio-Institutional Stakeholders*

Despite the general consensus among stakeholders, an additional barrier to success is identified in the attitude of the socio-institutional stakeholders when it comes time to pass from "words to deeds". (These obstacles are due to the 'strategies' of some stakeholders, such as those seeking to impose or increase their influence over other stakeholders.).

Some examples of these 'inconsistencies' include:

- the creation of a specific language and a performance and competence analysis and interpretation model on the part of each of the main "*productive categories*" (as well as in the domain of *bilateral* sectoral coordination committees between trade unions and employers' organisations);

- the creation of individual "competence models", "directories of qualifications" and vocational standards on the part of various *Regional Authorities* and among the various *training systems* (*IFTS*, apprenticeship, right-duty to training, etc.);

- the development of *competence certification devices and various "formats"* by different stakeholders in different Regions (even individual incentive programmes derived from EU programming guidelines and financial resources).

4. Specific Characteristics of Proposed Solutions

Some barriers derive from the specific characteristics (stakeholders, targets, procedures, the nature of results, etc.) of recognition and certification devices which have been attempted so far in Italy. As has already been suggested, these devices are extremely varied and 'local' in nature.

The following are some illustrative examples:

- since the late 1990s, the *Emilia-Romagna Regional Authorities* have experimented with credits, portfolios, vocational competence recognition devices as well as competence certifications and statements, etc.. These have been applied in the spa sector, the guidance sector, the context of volunteerism and civil service, in the armed forces, in the relationship between regional vocational training and the first three years of upper secondary schools, in the relationship between *IFTS* and university and in the training of trainers.

- Since 2003 in the *Valle d'Aosta Region*, according to a regional law described in a previous chapter, numerous credit recognition experiments were conducted in several sectors: construction, ski instruction, cosmetology and hairdressing.

- Since 2002 the *University of Ferrara* activated an interesting and innovative project that entails an entire year of 'regular' employment – promoted, planned and 'guided' by the university – in conjunction with the third year of university coursework. The result is a well-articulated and comprehensive mechanism: a recognition of credits that is particularly consistent with the university curriculum.

- Since its creation in 1999, the *IFTS system* has consistently experimented with forms of 'work' credit recognition upon entrance to *IFTS* courses, whether from a situation of employment or unemployment. Additionally, the *IFTS* system has experimented with credit recognition "upon completion of an *IFTS* course" in order to enter the university system.

Considered as a whole, these experiences have allowed the identification of some *key problems*, useful to the discussion of 'barriers' in this chapter. Some problems include:

- the "episodic nature" of experiences, and thus the lack of a uniform frame of reference in which they might be applied;

- the lack of a homogeneous "format" for the collection and description of the analysis and reconstruction processes that lead to credit recognition and certification;

- the lack of 'adequate' devices, roles, personnel and competences with respect to the task at hand (procedures, commissions, presidents and internal/external members, etc.);

- the lack of homogeneity in the language with which professional pathways (roles, functions, activities, tasks) and training pathways (subjects/disciplines and content; duration; and educational objectives) are formulated;

- the "lack of sufficient trust" (lack of "mutual trust") caused by the reciprocal stereotypes with which various stakeholders represent one another;

- the need for a specific and tentative agreement between actors (in a determined enterprise, for example) that allows for an "assignment of value" within enterprises of recognised formal/institutional credits to ensure an effective impact on employment conditions (position, function, wage);

- the need to render credit certification effective 'in practice', and guarantee 'timely' access to training supply that is consonant with currently requested job profiles and contents. The availability of up-to-date training supply cannot, by definition, be global, permanent or exhaustive.

5. Beneficiary Awareness of and Access to Recognition and Certification Opportunities and Polices

Experience shows that widespread, accurate information on an available device (for 'direct' beneficiaries and more in general for all stakeholders) can constitute a critical factor of success in terms of access and effective use of the policy.

The following emerges:

- *"in negative"*: in the majority of cases the 'selectivity' of the experimental measures does not allow for a trustworthy assessment of the impact of promotion on implementation;

- *"in positive"*: the experience of the Valle d'Aosta Regional Authorities created a recognition device with a strong information dissemination component, including 'special' informational campaigns and the creation of informational materials distributed among practitioners and beneficiaries. This experience followed a philosophy of service management that reflects the belief that to offer 'quality' service it is not enough to train practitioners, but it is also important to inform and, in a certain sense, 'train' the beneficiary.

These examples inspired the possible solutions and methods mentioned in the final section of the preceding chapter, such as: 'institutional' information on posters and leaflets, information for "beneficiaries" through innovative forms of targeted communication (promotional trailers, local radios, TV, totem displays, etc.), training vouchers, the use of the Internet network for institutional sites and other online formats, information disseminated to the network of "intermediate stakeholders" (employers' organisations and trade unions, public and private training bodies, schools and universities, employment centres, guidance and information structures, employment consultants, etc.), and finally, training and information through seminar-like initiatives and public events (fairs, exhibitions, workshops, etc.).

6. Policy Costs

Last but not least, a barrier of great importance ('decisive' one might say, in particular during the current Italian "financial crisis" of the State and the overall reduction of financial resources allocated to Italy for the new Structural Funds programming period 2007-2013) is the problem of the limited resources available to economically sustain the system of implementation: its structures, personnel, activities, logistics, equipment, informational material, training, etc..

Once attention turns to the actual implementation of a recognition and certification device, the constant tendency is to "proceed by experimentation" (without the subsequent establishment of a structured method) which seems to be rooted in two different conditions:

- *A sort of "basic lack of conviction" of the superiority of the proposed solution over the many other potential solutions:* there seems to be a fear of adopting the 'wrong' solution in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. In this sense, to "progress by experimentation" means, in reality, reserving the possibility to change direction, even radically, if necessary. In this way, the experiments are numerous and sundry and programming bodies risk dedicating their time and energies to "regulate the interests of various stakeholders who create the system through their own actions" rather than "regulating the system itself".

- *The perpetual uncertainty of available and/or mobile resources*, thus the experimental approach allows policymakers to take advantage of this condition of instability to play an "avant-garde" role in a wider socio-institutional debate (a role which experimentation effectively provides), within their own specific political-institutional context, with other stakeholders and more in general with the general public.