In-VET

Preventing Initial Dropout and fostering trainee’s inclusion

IVET OFFERS, DROPOUT LEVELS AND LACK/EXISTENCE OF ATTRACTIVENESS, INCLUDING GOOD PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SITUATION

Italy

Project Number: 2013-1-PT1-LEO05-15461
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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
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THE DROP OUT ISSUE IN ITALIAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

The following report aims at analyzing the Italian national situation as far as the issue of school dropping within the Vocational Education System is concerned. The report is divided in two parts. The first one presents the current state of the art, introducing the national situation as far as organization of compulsory education in Italy is concerned, and specifying the differences between State Upper Secondary Education and Regional Vocational Education and Training, within the VET sector. Some figures concerning national dropout trends are presented, highlighting the differences at regional level and the influence of gender and social factors. The national bodies in charge of the prevention of the issue are indicated, as well as the national policies implemented to fight school dropping. The second part of the report revolves around good practices implemented at national level that might help tackling the phenomenon. Strategies developed at national and local level are presented, as well as training initiatives on the topic. Finally, best practices among those presented are summarized.

STATE OF THE ART

Introduction to the National Situation

Organisation of Compulsory Education at National Level

The education system in Italy is organised according to the principles of subsidiarity and of autonomy of schools. The State has exclusive legislative competence on general issues on education, on minimum standards to be guaranteed throughout the country and on the fundamental principles that Regions should comply with within their competences. Regions share their legislative competences with the State on all education issues except for vocational education and training on which they have exclusive legislative competence. Schools are autonomous as for didactic, organisation and research and development activities.

Education is compulsory for 10 years, from 6 to 16 years of age, and covers the eight-year first cycle of education (5 years of primary school and 3 years of lower secondary school) and the first two years of the secondary education cycle. After completion of
the first cycle of education, the last two years of compulsory education (from 14 to 16 years of age) can be accomplished either in the State-administered upper secondary schools (licei, technical institutes and vocational institutes) - whose courses last for five years - or through the vocational education and training courses falling under the competence of the Regions – that can last three or four years\(^1\). 15-year olds can attend the last year of compulsory education also through the apprenticeship, previous specific agreement signed by the Regions, the Ministry of labour, the Ministry of education and trade unions\(^2\).

Compulsory education refers to both enrolment and attendance. It can be accomplished either in a State and a paritaria (administered by private owners) school; regional three-year vocational training courses are offered by the relevant training agencies. Parents or caregivers are responsible for the accomplishment of compulsory education, while supervision on the fulfilment of compulsory education falls under the responsibilities of local authorities where pupils reside, and school heads of the schools pupils are enrolled in. Once compulsory schooling has been accomplished, pupils who do not carry on their studies receive a certification attesting compulsory education fulfilment and competencies acquired; these latter constitute formative credits for the attainment of any professional qualification. Rules applied to Italian citizens and citizens of member states of the European Union apply also to foreigner minors from non-European countries.

**Organisation of Vocational Education at Secondary Level**

After having completed the first cycle of education, students continue their studies in the second cycle of education. In fact, education is compulsory up to 16 years of age and covers also the first two years of second cycle of education. At this level, students can choose among the general and vocational paths offered by the State upper secondary education system (scuola secondaria di secondo grado) and the three and four-year courses offered by the regional system of vocational education and training (IeFP).

State general and vocational upper secondary education has been recently reformed. The reform applied from school year 2010/2011, starting from the first grades. The whole process will be completed in school year 2014/2015, when the new organisation will apply to all grades. Descriptions included in this chapter refer to the new organisation of State vocational upper secondary education.

**State Vocational Upper Secondary Education**

State vocational upper secondary education, lasting 5 years, is offered by technical institutes and vocational institutes. Technical institutes offer vocational education in the economic and technological sectors, while vocational institutes offer vocational education in the services sector and in the industry and handcraft sector. The Constitution of the Italian Republic establishes that it is a duty of the State to provide

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1 law 133/2008.
2 law 183/2010.
access to education to all young people living in the country, regardless of the geographical condition of the area they live in and of their individual social and economic situation. The State central and peripheral administrations, as well as regional, provincial and local administrations (municipalities) are responsible for reaching this goal. The general planning of the educational offer and of the school network is assigned to the Regions, in order to have a more rational use of resources as well as a more efficient school system. Except for the possession of a first cycle leaving certificate, no other admission requirement must be met to enter a technical institute or a vocational institute. Families are free to choose the school. However, limitations may be due to the lack of available facilities or to the lack of school staff assigned to each school by the School administration.

Studies at both technical and vocational institutes are generally addressed to students aged from 14 to 19 years of age and are organised - only for didactic purposes - into a two-year period and a three-year period, which is latter also organised in a two-year period and a last year. Generally, classes at upper secondary level have between 27 and 30 students in the first year, while in the following years the minimum required is 22 students. Usually, the maximum number of students per class is lowered to 20 if there are students with special educational needs. Class teachers are specialist in one subject or more subjects belonging to the same subject area (e.g. maths and sciences). In the technical institutes belonging to the technological sector, theory and practice in the laboratory classes are taught by two teachers working together.

The Ministry of education, university and research (Miur) is responsible for defining the dates for the first and the second cycle leaving examinations, and the calendar of the national festivities. The Regions are responsible for defining the school calendar (starting and end of school activities, length of holidays for national festivities, other holidays) in order to adapt it to the needs of their territory. Teaching activities, including end-of-term assessments, final assessments and exams, as well as in service training activities must be carried out between the 1st of September and the 30th of June (upper secondary leaving exams should be concluded within July). The compulsory annual and weekly (based on 33 weeks/year) teaching timetable is established at central level. The school is responsible for defining the weekly and daily timetable and the distribution of activities in the various days of the week. Lessons must be spread on no less than 5 days a week. Generally, the timetable is spread on six days, Saturday included.

**Regional Vocational Education and Training (IFP)**

Three-year and four-year vocational education and training courses can be provided by vocational training agencies and by upper secondary vocational institutes. Training agencies are vocational training institutions that have been accredited by the Regions according to specific criteria established in agreement with the State. Upper secondary

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3 Italian Constitution, art. 33 and 34.
5 Decree 31 March 1998, n.112.
6 DPR 87/2010 and 88/2010 for vocational and technical institutes, respectively.
vocational institutes follow the guidelines issued by the single Regions for the organisation of IFP courses. Training agencies mainly belong to the private sector (religious institutions or trade unions) and to the public sector (regional, provincial and local institutions). They are accredited by the Regions if they, and all their operative units, meet the following specific criteria:

a) to be part of an non-profit institution offering educational services to young people;
b) to have an educational plan fit for making youngsters acquire defined competences and skills;
c) to apply the National Labour Contract for vocational training to all staff;
d) to hire teachers qualified to teach at upper secondary level;
e) to create networks and relationships within the territory and families;
f) to take joint decisions on the planning and management of the didactic activities as well as to guarantee the recurrent and final certification of learning results;
g) to have adequate rooms and premises.

Upper secondary institutes of the mainstream education system can offer IFP courses according to the agreement between the State and the Regions, signed in 2010, that defines guidelines on ‘Systematic links between courses in vocational upper secondary institutes and regional vocational training’. Vocational upper secondary institutes can provide, on a subsidiary basis and with respect of the competences of the Regions, two types of IFP offer:

a) an integrative subsidiary offer which allows students attending 5-year upper secondary vocational courses (see previous chapter) to obtain a IFP qualification after three years of training;

b) a complementary subsidiary offer organised in special classes at vocational institutes and aimed at the obtainment of a three/four-year qualification within the IFP system.

So far, the majority of the Regions opted for the first of the two types of offer.

To access IFP courses the completion of the first cycle of education is required. To enrol in the first year, it is also required to be less than 15 years, while those coming from other education pathways are required to be less than 18 years. Classes are usually made up of about 20 people. However, maximum limits are set at regional level. A minimum number of learners is usually required for administrative reasons (e.g. 12 learners).

As for the courses organised by the training agencies, the overall amount of teaching hours for the whole three-year period is between 2 900 and 3 600 hours. Within this framework, the average time dedicated to the acquisition of cultural competences varies from 35 to 45%, while 45-50% of the time is dedicated to the technical-vocational area. The remaining time is left to stages and to the integrative activities. In most Regions/Provinces guidance activities are spread throughout the years, with an increase in the third year for helping the access to the work market.

The regional offer of integrated courses organised by vocational upper secondary institutes, generally follows the structure of paths in vocational institutes, saving the
15-30% of the technical-vocational area timetable to the integrative activities. In the courses organised by vocational upper secondary institutes, the subjects related to the acquisition of cultural competences are usually taught by school teachers of the ‘cultural areas' linked to the acquisition of competences to be acquired in compulsory education, while technical-vocational subjects are usually taught by the trainers of the partner training agencies. On the contrary, in courses organised by training agencies, trainers, included those specialised in key competences, are mainly recruited by the training agencies themselves according to criteria established for the accreditation of the agencies.

The year can be organised into either two or three terms (periods of three of four months each). At the end of each term students are assessed and families are kept informed on the students’ learning outcomes. Learners attend IFP courses for 5 or 6 days a week for about 5-6 hours, with a mid-morning break. Lessons follow the school calendar, i.e. starting in September, and ending in June-July; however calendars may vary locally according to the regional planning and the availability of funds annually allocated by the Ministry.

**MAIN NATIONAL TRENDS**

**Current situation in Italy and comparison to European standards**

The Europe 2020 strategy set the target of ‘improving education levels, in particular by aiming to reduce school drop-out rates to less than 10 % and by increasing the share of 30–34 year olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40 %’.

In 2005 the average dropout rate of the 25 countries of the European Union was 14.9 %. Italy was far above the average with 21.9%. During the first year of school the rate of failures was 18.1%, marking the passage from lower to upper education, when students are not always able to choose the most suitable kind of school among the many different possibilities.

Another important aspect: students who have been held back to repeat their classes, which is a sign of potential early leaving as nearly half the students who fail are not repeating their classes. The percentage of all upper education is 6.9% which compares with 8.6% for Technical Institutes and 10.1% for Vocational Institutes.

According to the latest data available, the number of dropouts between 2004 and 2010 has decreased overall by 3.2% at National level, and by 5.4% in the South.

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The southern Regions usually present higher dropout rates than the rest of Italy, although school dropout has decreased significantly, from 26.4% in 2006 to 21.7% in 2012. The differences across regions and targets set for 2013 remain far, confirming the need to continue to take action on this front. Accordingly, the South of Italy is a geographical area in which students tend to drop out more than in the rest of Italy at the end of the first year of high school. While in the academic year 2007/2008, at secondary school level, the national dropout rate in the first year was 12.3%, in the Southern Regions over 14% of students did not enrol the second year. These percentages reached peaks of 16.7% in Sardinia and 15.5% in Campania. High levels of school dropout can be found, however, also in the north-west regions, where the rate reaches 11.6%. The lowest dropout rates in the school year 2007/08 are found in the north-east (where in many regions the share of dropouts during the first year is close to 8%) and in Molise (7%), the only positive exception between the regions of the South. As stated above, the decision not to continue the studies mainly occurs during the first year of the course.

If one examines early school leaving in different types of schools (see table below), it is possible to notice great differences between general education and technical and vocational institutes, where the dropout rates are much higher.

The table below also shows that the first year of upper education, compared to the followings, reports a higher level of dropout rates in all types of school. The issue is particularly serious as far as Vocational Institutes are concerned, where a dropout rate of 11.6% is reported during the first year, as opposed to the almost irrelevant 1.6% of general education schools (Licei).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>General Dropout Rates</th>
<th>Dropout rates during First year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licei - classical, scientific, linguistic upper education</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licei - socio-psycho-pedagogical upper education</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical institutes</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational institutes</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts institutes</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to these data, we can see that Dropout rates during first year of school is higher in Vocational institutes (11.6), although his general dropout rate is already high (7.2, the highest among the other type of school), and very high compared to Licei - classical, scientific, linguistic upper education (1.6) - the average in Italy is 6.0.

The table below shows how many students out of one hundred attend their final examination (*esame di stato*) in different types of schools, proving how usually girls have better performances than boys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Percentage of Males attending final examination</th>
<th>Percentage of Females attending final examination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licei - classical, scientific, linguistic upper education</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licei - socio-psycho-pedagogical upper education</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical institutes</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>87.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational institutes</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts institutes</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data show that girls have better performance than boys especially in Technical institutes and Vocational institutes, whilst in the “Licei” the gap is small.

In general, the majority of students who manage to attend final examination are Licei students. Whilst many students from Vocational institutes and Art Institutes find difficulties in getting all through their school path.

The particularly bad figures for Vocational Institutes may derive from their two tier system, which provides the students with a first qualification at the end of the third year which may mark the transition from school to work, as well as from the concentration of students going through difficult, unpleasant conditions and discomfort. The research done by the 7th Parliamentary Commission in 2000 considered the social, economic background as the main cause of high dropout rates.

The Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 on new skills for new jobs has stated the need to raise the overall level of competence, giving priority to education and training of people at risk of social and economic exclusion, including young people who drop out school early. It also stressed the need to offer people looking for work a vocational
guidance and a personal training plan and to develop the validation of learning outcomes acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning\textsuperscript{12}.

**MAIN REASONS AND CAUSES FOR LEAVING EDUCATION**

A large number of Italian studies and researches indicate that students fail to complete high school due to the following external, internal or personal causes:

**External causes**
The first factor to be examined is the link early school leaving and economic development. In a country like Italy, characterized by the divide between highly industrialized areas of the north and underdeveloped areas of the south, the worst dropout rates come from regions with few industries and a low standard of living (mainly the Southern regions and the large islands) or from the deprived metropolitan districts of rich regions where immigrant communities are concentrated.

Home environment is considered as the second risk factor. In Italy the dynamics of economic, social change are more static than in the rest of Europe. In poor families the value of education is underestimated and the access to information and educational events is limited. In such environments school is no longer felt as an instrument of social change and its prestige is even lower than in the general public, whose opinions they reflect.

The third factor playing a role in the high dropout rate is the perception of the crisis of the school which is amplified by the media. For decades school, in spite of all policy makers’ speeches, has neither been a political priority nor a question to be solved, both at national and regional level. Images and articles in the media have made it appear as a run-down service, which has not helped initiatives to prevent early school leaving and has reinforced poor families’ attitudes.

While the first and the second causes need a long process to be stopped, solutions to the third one could be found by policy makers at national and regional levels.

**Internal causes**
There is general agreement that one of the main causes of early school leaving originates in the “malfunctions, stickiness, hostile factors” that operate inside the school system\textsuperscript{13}.

In Italy failures at school are much more widespread than in the rest of Europe and they start in the first two years of upper secondary schools with absenteeism and

\textsuperscript{12} http://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/buongiorno_europa/allegati/abbandono_scolastico.pdf.

\textsuperscript{13} 7th Parliamentary Commission, 2000.
repeating classes, both signs of potential school leaving. Many students at risk find the help they need inside their families or their communities, providing them with initiatives and instruments aiming at keeping them at school. Others who cannot take advantage of such supportive activities (and that is the case of many young people attending Vocational Institutes), soon become marginal students, social misfits until they drop out of school and enter a world of hardships, discomforts and black economy. All of this happens in the most delicate period of their lives, the first two years of upper secondary education, which corresponds to full adolescence, from 14 to 16 years of age.

Lower secondary education has a very low dropout rate, but a student’s maladjustment has its roots there. Upper education schools take responsibility for these youngsters but have to cope with such difficult situations as

- weak leadership, limited by institutional ties (teaching body), conditioned in the use of human resources by contractual obligations and by the frequent, yearly transfers of too many teachers,
- widespread shortage of facilities (buildings, laboratories, equipment),
- organizational and financial problems,
- consolidated tradition to use identical methodological tools with students whose needs are different, inflexible curricula which do not leave much room for new guidance and change,
- teachers’ cultural approach based on traditional, academic, bookish models, far from the youngsters’ everyday experiences and insisting on the enhancement of humanities rather than science and technology,
- teaching approaches centered on knowledge which ignore “problem solving” techniques and competence learning, follow top-down, deductive methods, are unable to transfer passion for learning and are often combined with bureaucratic assessments, which offer the students neither education nor guidance,
- lack of or poor relationship competence of teachers, who have never been trained, let alone assessed, and consequently experience problems in their relations with difficult students and families,
- weak and limited co-operation with regional vocational training agencies and Job Centers as well as with community organizations and professionals who could offer the youngsters psychological help and guidance to be successful in their learning activities.

The above weaknesses are generally recognized as such and have attracted the attention of national and regional policy makers, who have issued administrative regulations and important laws in order to assist the new 10 year compulsory education. For decades policies to prevent early school leaving have been planned and have recently been put into action with a more systematic approach. Though good
regulations and guidelines have been drawn up, governance of the process has been weak and we do not have a general plan providing teachers with training in new teaching methods.

If many regions show positive results in reducing dropout rates, that has happened because Regions and local institutions together with the schools, which are autonomous and sometimes aware of the needs of the local communities, have promoted successful initiatives. Yet, at the core of the majority of Italian schools we find opposition to accept and adopt the lines of new policies.

**Personal causes**

A student exposed to the danger of dropping out of school may easily come from weaker social, cultural environments, as it is confirmed in all researches. His/her difficulties depend on such closely intertwined causes as

- lack of motivation (he/she is no longer able to make up for the loss of interest in learning or working),
- unwillingness to take responsibilities which are felt as too hard to cope with,
- lack of models and ethical values, often together with a tendency to consider personal impulses as uncontrollable.

Other personality factors are linked to the above causes, which are common among youngsters, and add to the risk:

- low self-esteem,
- feeling unsuited for the required tasks,
- self-pity,
- difficulties in relationships with school friends and even more with adults,
- behaviors unsuited to the situation.

It is of common knowledge that at the age when the risk of early school leaving is at its highest level (14–16), all youngsters experience a separation process from parents to form their own identity and look for adults to replace them, and fill the void left in their pursuit of autonomy. Trainers, teachers, employers, though often unaware, play an essential role in their personal growth. Anyone whose job involves contacts with teenagers should be trained in order to be fully conscious that he/she is expected to offer helpful, supportive relations. On the other hand Italian researches insist on the difficulties of teacher/students relations (both in state school and in regional vocational training courses) but highlight their importance as an essential function, which cannot be effective if it is carried out in a voluntary, spontaneous, individualized way. Italian teachers, as a matter of fact, have to cope with these problems without being trained to tackle them, as they have been chosen on the exclusive basis of their knowledge of the subjects they will teach.
It is not surprising, after all, that many students at risk, particularly the weakest ones, unable to defend themselves, may join gangs of youths, inside or outside the school and cause trouble or fights against other groups. Disruptive behaviors, bullying, and hooliganism, linked to aberrant ideologies, are emerging problems which cannot be explained in terms of youthful exuberance. Policy makers and local communities should be aware of the depth and dimension of the phenomenon.

The fight against early school leaving should not only be felt as a target of Lisbon agenda or a means to make European markets competitive, it should also be a fight for a deeper, social cohesion in national and local communities.

In conclusion, risk factors are many, intertwined and difficult to prevent and control. Nonetheless there is room for great improvement on external factors, and we should start by removing the deficiencies of Italian general and vocational education systems.

**NATIONAL BODIES IN CHARGE OF THE PREVENTION OF THE PROBLEM**

For decades school reforms have devolved some legislative powers on school systems to local authorities (regions, provinces and town councils), mainly in the field of general and vocational education. The system works as follows:

National plans and programmes (regulations, guidelines, teachers’ training), inspired to European policies are determined by the central government and implemented by the regional and provincial offices of the Ministry of Public Education.

Regions must respect government guidelines but hold executive power in carrying out national plans. They draw up application guidelines and, via education councillorships; they propose experimental activities and offer funds, generally from central government, to perform them. They sign agreements on teachers’ training and activities with the regional offices of the Ministry of Public Education (teachers are state employees). Regions are autonomous in the field of vocational education and carry out their own policies according to their choices. To make an example Tuscany has not chosen to have a structured system of vocational training centres as many northern regions have, which is not irrelevant in preventing early school leaving.

State schools and regional vocational centres. With the extension of compulsory school attendance to 10 years, the government had to face the problem of the different choices made by the regions and had to consider attendance at private vocational centres as equivalent to compulsory education, even though in an experimental way. Tuscany, as a region, has chosen to consider the new law enforced only in state upper education schools – which actually means Vocational Institutes.
The integration between Vocational Institutes and regional vocational training agencies—two different subjects working together—is unanimously felt as a condition to fight early school leaving successfully. In Tuscany, more than in other regions, professionals from vocational agencies have worked together with teachers in the elaboration of modules to be used and tested in schools.

Other institutional organizations are involved in the prevention of early school leaving, such as Job Centres (run by provinces, they can also provide youngsters with counselling), provinces for certain aspects connected with upper education, town councils, district councils in large cities and the drug prevention offices of the National Health Service. Interviews to policy makers, to the regional education Councillor and to the Director of the regional offices of the Ministry of Public Education, carried out in the framework of the School Inclusion project, have all highlighted the importance of the distribution of tasks and of intervention integration.

Community services and volunteer associations, which are widespread in the country, are often involved in prevention and rehabilitation projects.

**NATIONAL POLICIES IMPLEMENTED TO COMBAT VET DROPOUTS**

In Italy, Act 144, dated 1999, which gradually rose compulsory education leaving age at 18 (with three options: school, vocational courses, apprenticeship) already proposed “integrated paths between school and regional vocational agencies”, a framework of credit assessment and transfer allowing students to pass from one system to the other, and the institution of a regional register of students to control compulsory attendance. The integrated paths include intersection segments between state schools and regional vocational courses, thus representing the link between national and regional policies. Integration, beyond offering solutions to reduce dropout rates, also aims at making offers and demands of higher qualifications meet.

From a historical point of view schools and vocational agencies have always had different teaching methods and educational approaches, the purpose of the former being theoretical knowledge, that of the latter practical skills; now they have to influence each other in order to promote new learning principles and techniques and reach Europe 2020 targets which are still very far.

Act 144 also drew up lines which the governments, together with Regions, continued to put into practice until the most recent legislation (ten years’ compulsory education, regulations for the first two years of Upper Secondary Education, qualification either at state schools or in regional vocational courses by 18 years of age).
The recommendations of the Ministry have “inclusion” as a main target and propose “educational, teaching strategies taking into account the singleness of each person, his/her complex identity, skills and weaknesses in the different phases of development and putting the student at the centre of educational activities in all cognitive, emotional, relational, physical, ethic, spiritual aspects” “in order to offer real opportunities of guidance and prevention of early school leaving”

The national legal framework of reference has been rapidly evolving for the past ten years and the continuous changes have generated, especially in recent years, a regulatory framework characterized by numerous elements of strong complexity that make it more difficult to read clearly and unambiguously agreed rules, those in the process of application and the provisions that provide for significant changes in the current year and in those to come14. The approval of the new reform of upper secondary schools complete a two-year period of deep change in which it is still difficult to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes with respect to objectives and guidelines, and also, perhaps, as far as the motivations and wishes expressed by the legislature are concerned.

With particular reference to Law 296/2006 and Ministerial Decree 139/2007 that have rewritten the rules regarding the duty of education, we have tried to update and integrate the description of the overall regulatory framework, focusing the attention on one hand on further news emerged last two years, with particular reference to the Reform of the secondary level, and, on the other, on some of the most significant issues that have accompanied the debate and the reforms of the last decade and, among these, the reform of Title V of the Constitution, which introduced significant changes with regard to autonomy and school federalism.

To complete the analysis of the regulatory environment it is useful to provide some hints to the most significant planning and management documents issued at the regional and provincial levels.

National legislation:

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<thead>
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<th>Measure</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Law 144/1999 - Law 53/2003</td>
<td>Right / duty to education and training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decree 15.04.2005 No. 77</td>
<td>Alternating between school and work</td>
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<th>Document Reference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Law of 27 December 2006. N.296 (Budget)</td>
<td>Compulsory education to 10 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministerial Decree 139 of August 22, 2007</td>
<td>Regulations on compulsory education fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interministerial decree of November 29, 2007</td>
<td>Quality Criteria for three-year experimental paths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidelines December 27, 2007</td>
<td>Orientation, training, monitoring, evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministerial Decree of October 25, 2007</td>
<td>Provincial centers adult education</td>
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<td>Decree 14 January 2008, n. 22</td>
<td>Definition of career guidance aimed at professions and work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministerial Decree of April 17, 2008</td>
<td>Program to promote excellence of students in upper secondary schools, state and private, for the &quot;school year 2007/2008&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministerial Decree Guidelines n. 82, October 2008</td>
<td>Guidelines for the implementation of the Decree of 29 November 2007, no. 263 &quot;Rules of Procedures to the inclusion and retention in the regional list of not equivalent schools&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidency of the Council of Ministers Decree, January 25, 2008</td>
<td>&quot;Guidelines for the reorganization of the system of higher education and technical training, and the establishment of higher technical colleges&quot;;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law 133/2008 (Budget 2008), art.64</td>
<td>Provisions relating to school organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law 169/2008 (&quot;Gelmini&quot; decree)</td>
<td>Evaluation students, unique teacher, textbooks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential Decree 89/2009</td>
<td>Revision of the order of the regulations system and of his organization, as well as childhood and first cycle of education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential Decree no. 81/2009</td>
<td>Standards for the reorganization of the school network and the rational and effective use of human resources of the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministerial Decree of 27.01.2010, n. 9</td>
<td>Certification fulfillment of obligation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential Decree no. 87/2010</td>
<td>Regulations for the reorganization of the vocational schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential Decree no. 88/2010</td>
<td>Regulations for the reorganization of the technical institutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential Decree no. 89/2010</td>
<td>Regulation for the revision of the organization and teaching high school</td>
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**Regional Context**

Tuscany, on the basis of an agreement signed with the government, conducted an experiment of integrated paths between state schools and vocational training agencies. The Tuscan experiment, which included Vocational Institutes, Arts Institutes and general upper secondary schools (*Licei*), was meant to oppose the reduction of compulsory education and launch an integrated educational plan for 14 year old students. In this framework the first year of upper secondary education compulsory and attendance at regional vocational courses possible only for students who had attended it. State schools can devote the 15% of the taught time to extra, autonomous activities and the modules integrated with the vocational agencies were elaborated to fully exploit this opportunity and make vocational agencies have a role in school curricula. Projects had to be set up together, presented and carried out by the two
systems of education, joined in a temporary association whose members should at least be one school and one vocational agency, both accredited by the Region.

Regional Act 32, dated 2002, defined education and lifelong learning policies accepting the targets of Lisbon Conference to reduce dropout rate to 10%. The law is still effective and is implemented through general plans (the so-called PIGI) which provide for the elaboration of an integrated system of general education, vocational training and work, of new policies giving the same value to different learning experiences and of a regional system of competences and credits.

It was on the basis of these recommendations that the Region issued the guidelines for school to be followed in all the first years of Vocational Institutes, if they wanted to carry out projects with accredited vocational agencies and apply for funds.

The guidelines included:

- Modules to enhance basic and cross curricular skills
- Modules to stimulate motivation and develop guidance
- Experiences of contacts with workplaces as “exploration of the operational dimension of knowledge in order to strengthen basic competences”
- Individualized supporting activities
- Flexible organization
- Qualifications issued by schools

Since 2001 the Region has been implementing a Regional Students’ Register (SISR) on the basis of the work done by the so-called Provincial School Observatory (OSP). The students’ register, which should control compulsory attendance, is considered as the main strategy to prevent early school leaving in the opinion of both the regional offices of The Ministry and of the Regional Education Councillor. Dropout maps could allow local institutions to develop their own strategies for dealing with the problem within specific areas and needs.

Students’ absenteeism does not appear as an important sign of potential early leaving (perhaps because there is no official data on the issue). Though in some provinces “studies into specific situations” are being conducted, policy makers have not shown great interest in new researches on the issue.
GOOD PRACTICES

Strategies developed at national level to prevent early school leaving

The strategies identified refer to students in the age of compulsory education, including the right/duty to get a qualification by 18 years of age; most of the examples come from Vocational Institutes but there are some from Licei, Socio-pedagogical or Technical Institutes.

Many are integrated projects, introduced with the 2003 agreement between Regions and the Ministry of Education; others have been financed by European Social Found on the specific measure C2, devoted to prevent early school leaving.

Most experiences come from Tuscany, others from Sardinia, Veneto and Liguria.

Some activities have covered the entire first, and/or second class groups of a school; others have provided students with more individualized interventions. Some school have worked on an autonomous project, others in a network of schools and educational organizations.

Students’ project activities integrate with the curricula, cover 20% class timetable (there are a few extracurricular activities), and meet both the cognitive and personal/relational needs:

- enhancement of basic knowledge
- counseling centres
- mini placements
- guided visits in the area
- renewed guidance
- laboratory, practical activities
- e-learning

The starting situations showed 20-23% dropout rate, caused by different factors. The areas are often deprived, with larger and larger immigrant communities, juvenile offenders and general discomfort. Such backgrounds make students feel estranged from school and undermine their confidence in school as an instrument to climb the social ladder.

Motivation is low as students do not see a real connection between study and work and have low self-esteem, mainly after repeated failures.

The first signs that a student is at risk are the intolerance of the system of social rules and targets involved in school work, truancy, disruptive class behaviour, evident
intolerance of traditional lessons, no power of concentration. The steady increasing number of foreign students makes living together with Italian students problematic, as well as with second generation students (inclusion and integration problems, families to be reunited, families unable to tackle difficult educational needs).

The strategies aim at supporting the recovery of basic learning and cross curricular competences, at preventing early school leaving, reducing failures, having back to school students who had quitted, and most of all creating a sense of “well-being” at school in a systemic view which includes synergy in actions, which implies a different idea both of the learning/teaching process and of the student/teacher relationship.

Most experiences begin with a phase of teachers’ training in order to make them master innovative teaching methods and stressful situations: coaching for teachers to train their relational competences and prevent burnout.

The teaching methods used with students at risk are varied, but they generally insist on strategies to make them welcome, on the development of learning-by-doing techniques, on tutoring and mentoring often personalized to the needs of the individual.

Among the favourite methods we see: active listening, small group work, narrative guidance, problem solving, practical activities, cooperative learning, and exercises in a context of role play, individual and group support. Particular results were achieved with the method of life skills and peer education. They allow obtaining direct involvement of monitors chosen and supported by teachers/supervisors, which emphasizes the value of peers’ relationship in facing difficulties and focuses on the relational dimension together with the deinstitutionalization of learning support.

Co-teaching and working with teachers from other class boards is frequent.

In all the experiences we have seen schools cooperating with external institutions, professionals and vocational agencies in order to plan integrated projects. Actions carried out with the counsellors from Job Centres appeared to be quite significant: as they provided students with services of new guidance to make them attend courses of vocational agencies in order to get a qualification at regional level. Also actions implemented by the local offices of the National Health Service were of great interests with their listening centres run by psychologists. Furthermore some local administrations have often made the educational offer richer and varied by financing such activities as theatre, film clubs, competitions, sports events...)

Employers from the workplace, who can witness the social, economic area where a school is located, have often played an important role and have accepted students’ placements, both to make them observe the activities or get trained.
The Provincial Offices of the Ministry of Education, which generally support the fight against early school leaving, favour and coordinate networks of school and project specific teachers’ training on intercultural and guidance issues. Teachers’ training is also organized in cooperation with University structures with blended methodologies. Certain experiences have planned initiatives to make families fully involved in their kids’ recovery process.

The projects examined have shown a high percentage of successful results, an average around 5% decrease in dropout rate, more active participation, lower truancy, increase of self-esteem thanks to the enhancement of personal potentialities, greater awareness of the choices made, stress reduction, new motivation, making a habit of continuing education, development of cross curricular, as well as learning, communicative, social, planning skills, together with a greater participation of families in the educational process.

IDENTIFICATION OF TRAINING INITIATIVES

National initiatives

Most strategies analyzed in Point 6 are integrated by training initiatives. Some interesting examples of the latter are:

- common training of state school teachers and professionals from vocational agencies. As highlighted above the two worlds of state schools and accredited regional vocational agencies did not have any channel of communication in the past and used different teaching methods and language. Though the common training does not appear adequate yet to make the two worlds cooperate and build an integrated system of education, nonetheless it is a remarkable achievement of good experiences. The joint actions have been generally promoted by those Provincial Councils which are most involved in the prevention of early school leaving.

- mentoring by external supervisors. In some situations training activities continue in conjunction with the whole experience with the prominent objective of innovating teachers’ methodological approaches through a long training activity conducted by external experts with a high level of professionalism

- coaching for teachers to train their relational competences and prevent burnout, a widespread phenomenon among those Italian teachers who are confronted with early school leaving.

In recent years the debate has mainly focused on the professional profile of teachers involved in compulsory education. The following knowledge, skills, abilities and competences have been identified as essential in teachers’ training:
Sound knowledge of the set of rules and of the wide range of possibilities offered by the legislation on school autonomy which actually allows to release schools from the bonds of national curricula much more than most Italian teachers think;

- The ability to understand individual educational needs and cope with them professionally;

- The ability to go beyond one’s own individual dimension and interact with other internal and external resources to start networking teams. The groups will have to follow students at risk with measures to be agreed by the team members even when students pass to other pathways which will allow class teachers’ board more effective interventions. At the same time the board will stop being a bureaucratic corporate body to become a professional team.

- Guidance competences. They lie at the heart of teaching professionalism. All the teachers have guiding responsibilities and together with their colleagues of the same educational areas have to give their teaching a guiding sense, e.g. combining European citizenship key competences with their subjects. Assessment has to be “formative” too, thus becoming an educational tool. The guiding approach involves active techniques which favours learning by doing, inductive techniques, practical rather than theoretical approaches. It calls for every teacher’s skill to recognize dropout risks at an early stage and communicate the problem to all the teachers and external professionals involved.

- A second, higher level of guidance competences may include small groups of school teachers, teachers in charge of students’ guidance, specifically trained, whose task is to support their colleagues, help create individualized pathways and cooperate with external professionals with more specific competences (e.g. guidance services of Job Centres)

- Relationship skills (unlike other European countries, completely irrelevant to the traditional Italian view) to work on students and with colleagues and have a good command of communication channels (including the terrible layout of our school buildings). In the same field we include the skill to cope with the critical situations which are frequent in the years of compulsory education.

- Intercultural competences to tackle the increasing number of foreign students

- The skills to identify, assess and certify students’ competences

This set of competences for teachers has also been integrated in many projects implemented at national and regional level in recent years thanks to the funding of European Commission. In fact, in order to prevent school dropping, these projects mainly focus on the training of teachers. Some of the most notable examples are given in the following section.
## IDENTIFICATION OF BEST PRACTICES

### Best Practice 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the Project</th>
<th>School Inclusion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Contact Organisation</td>
<td>PIXEL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td><a href="http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/">http://schoolinclusion.pixel-online.org/</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Seven partners were involved in the School Inclusion project. The transnational partnership included a consortium of schools, training institutions, research institutes and schools. Every partner involved a network of secondary schools and teachers to carry out the project activities. The partners of the project are presented below:

**Partners**
- Zepf. Center for Educational Research, University of Koblenz-Landau (DE)
- ASPETE (School of Pedagogical & Technological Education) (EL)
- Mayo Education Centre (IE)
- C.I.P.A.T. (IT)
- Pixel (IT)
- Connectis s.r.l. (IT)
- Wils thorpe Business & Enterprise College (UK)

**Location**
European

**Target group**
Schools (Teachers, pupils, school managers, councillors).

The School Inclusion project was funded by the European Commission in the framework of the Life Long Learning Programme - Comenius - Multilateral Projects. The project, promoted by Cipes and coordinated by Pixel, had the aim to identify the strategies developed in the different European countries to tackle early school leaving so as to develop a common strategy to prevent the phenomenon.

**Description (max. 2500 char.)**
The objective was pursued by:

- The carrying out of surveys in each of the countries involved in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the national contexts and to identify the main tendencies concerning school drop outs and the relative strategies in place to overcome the phenomenon.
- The carrying out of a transnational based discussion in order to
identify and use the successful cases to formalize a possible integrated proposal of intervention which valorised the best national practices in the field and to agree a common structure of a training initiative aimed at teachers to give them the necessary skills to prevent school dropout.

- The developing and testing of training materials aimed at transmitting the necessary skills to school teachers so that they know how to identify and prevent the risk factors which lead to students dropping out of school.

**Best Practice 2**

**Title of the Project**  Stay@School

**Contact Organisation**  PIXEL

**Website**  [http://stayatschool.pixel-online.org/info/index.php](http://stayatschool.pixel-online.org/info/index.php)

10 partners in four different European countries were involved in the project. The transnational partnership included school, public authorities, education and training organizations, a trade union and a technical partner. The partners of the project are presented below:

**Partners**

- Inforef (BE)
- Istituto Professionale F. Datini (IT)
- Pixel (IT)
- CIPAT (IT)
- Connectis (IT)
- IAL Toscana (IT)
- USR Veneto (IT)
- EuroEd Foundation (RO)
- Florida (ES)

**Location (local, regional, national, European level)**  European

**Target group**  Teachers in higher education, technical institutes and Italian vocational institutes

**Description (max. 2500 char.)**  The Stay@School project was funded by the European Commission in the framework of the Life Long Learning Programme - Leonardo Da Vinci - Transfer of Innovation Action. The project, promoted by IP Datini and coordinated by Pixel, intends to promote the use of the School Inclusion Portal in order to provide the
school teachers with the skills to prevent early school leaving issue.

The project aimed at improving the portal developed during the School Inclusion project in order to transfer its contents on a Geographical basis, focusing on the involvement of teachers from different countries that the ones that were involved in the previous project and as far as Italy is concerned, spreading the use of the School Inclusion Portal in different regions.
The integration between state schools and regional vocational agencies is an unavoidable choice for the country. It compares two systems which can take reciprocal advantage of the cooperation, the former overcoming an old, bookish approach, more and more distant from youth culture, the latter the insufficient dimension of practical activities. A fertile collaboration does not unite the two systems, but makes them play a functional role in the general system of education and in the development of the country. Integration should include local communities and their institutional, social, economic bodies: the best possible results can be achieved only through synergy.

The core of prevention lies in teachers’ training. Key competences to reach this goal have been identified. Mere dissemination of good practice is ineffective, mainly when it is spread as a pre-packaged set of tools from the top. Bench-learning is much more appreciated as a professional enrichment among peers which allows the exchange and integration of different experiences. Excellent pathways can be fully exploited once
they are mediated with one’s own experiences and not strictly connected with the particular, complex situations where they developed. That is why the materials proposed should be designed for flexible, rather than prescriptive, use.
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In-VET
Preventing initial VET dropouts and fostering trainees' inclusion