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Le politiche formative in Europa: valorizzare la valutazione
per rafforzare il contrasto alle disuguaglianze

ADULT VET policies in Europe: strengthening the value of
evaluation to tackle inequalities

SO.31-Valutare le politiche educative e formative di fronte alle sfide dell'innovazione
per la sostenibilità territoriale e il contrasto alle disuguaglianze

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Contemporary European societies are undergoing profound changes: technological and digital innovation, search for sustainability, climate change and global geopolitical dynamics, demographic transformations.

All these phenomena have an impact on labour markets and education and training systems.

In this “age of disorder,” education and training are often invoked as suitable tools to equip people to face ongoing changes, in a dual direction:

- as a “transformative” instrument that promotes the search for and experimentation with new solutions;
- as a tool to strengthen “resilience,” supporting individuals—especially the most vulnerable—in adapting to the changing context in which they must operate.



The focus on the most vulnerable groups—those most affected by the negative impacts of ongoing transformations—was one of the key drivers behind the study, conducted between 2025 and April 2026, on the training policies adopted in **France, Germany, the United Kingdom (England), and Spain** to address the challenges facing contemporary societies.

Through desk research and interviews with key informants, the study provides an in-depth analysis of the evolving trajectories of training policies implemented by governments in the selected countries. These trajectories are examined from a comparative perspective to identify differences and similarities, as well as points of convergence and divergence in the repositioning of national systems.

The findings relating to the four countries are subsequently compared with the Italian adult education and training system.



Concerned about the potential negative impacts of global megatrends on adults' employment prospects and on the competitiveness of national economies, the governments of the selected countries have, over the past two decades, developed strategies, programmes, targeted interventions, and ad hoc instruments to enable education and training systems to respond to emerging challenges.

These interventions have been implemented with the following key objectives:

- **Strengthening productivity, competitiveness, and economic growth;**
- **Reducing the risk of labour market exclusion,** particularly for the most vulnerable groups, including individuals with low skill levels, limited qualifications, and low educational attainment.



To address inequalities in access to training in the countries examined, several specific initiatives have been adopted.

Germany



Full qualification: funded by the State, this measure fully cover the costs of training for those without any formal qualifications, regardless of age.

Partial or modular qualifications: a measure that enables low-skilled workers or migrant workers to acquire partial or modular qualifications through a pathway that allows them to progressively build a full qualification, step by step.

France



Skills Investment Plan (PIC): aimed at training low-qualified jobseekers by developing “integrated” pathways—from re-engagement activities to access to employment, passing through the attainment of a formal qualification. Several actions focused on reaching the so-called “invisible” individuals (those who are not known to or registered with employment services), who often have histories of educational and/or professional failure and face combined economic, social, and health-related difficulties.



Spain (Navarra)



The Departments of Education and Social Rights work in close collaboration to create training opportunities tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable populations, in particular of migrants. Where dedicated training centres do not exist, municipalities or other organisations may provide venues, which are then equipped with the necessary tools and materials to operate. For migrants, personalised support is provided to help them acquire pre-employment skills, particularly language proficiency and basic work-related skills. Programmes are usually structured around short and flexible modules.

England



Skills Bootcamps: introduced in 2020, they offer free courses aimed at individuals over the age of 19, whether employed or unemployed, to develop skills in sectors facing labour shortages, such as construction, digital technologies, and heavy vehicle driving. They provide a minimum of 60 hours of training delivered over a maximum period of 16 weeks. Courses are often arranged in a modular format and may include real-world projects and company placements. They can be provided at a college, a training provider, an employer's premises, or even online.



EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MEASURES

The interviews (n. 80) with experts and stakeholders from all the countries involved converge in highlighting that, despite the numerous initiatives underway, VET systems continue to benefit primarily those who are already qualified, leaving others behind.

- In Germany, 23% of adults without a secondary school qualification participate in training activities, compared to 65% of graduates.
- In France, 27% of adults without a tertiary education qualification participate in training activities, compared to 72% of those with qualifications above a university degree.
- In Spain, 67.1% of individuals holding a tertiary education qualification participate in training activities, compared to 28.7% of those with low educational attainment.
- In England, just over one third (34%) of adults who left education by the age of 16 have taken part in training activities in the past three years, compared to 62% of those who continued their education at least until the age of 19.

This dynamic reveals the lack of a real capacity of adult education and training to compensate for the failures and shortcomings of initial education.



EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MEASURES

«The more educated continue to participate more in VET activities, while those who further away from the labour market participate less»

A high degree of convergence emerges in the critical issues identified by the various stakeholders interviewed across the selected countries, which refer to:

- individual factors related to disadvantaged individuals;
- the involvement of enterprises;
- strategies, funding, and governance mechanisms.



INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS

Adult participation in training activities depends on individual factors related to:

- **attitudes, perceptions, and expectations** of adults (dispositional challenges), such as being discouraged by tests and exams or lacking self-confidence, perhaps due to unsuccessful educational experiences. Some low-skilled workers do not see training as leading to tangible improvements in their employment situation (low return on investment);
- the individual's **personal and family situation** (situational challenges), including household economic conditions, the **cost of training** and/or **lack of support services** such as transport, childcare, or other family responsibilities; or **lack of time**, especially among workers in physically demanding jobs or with significant family responsibilities;
- **cultural and knowledge-related conditions**, such as lack of language skills or other minimum competencies required to access certain programmes, limited awareness of available opportunities in the local area, and difficulties in independently navigating access procedures;
- **territorial conditions**, including an insufficient supply of courses in some areas; there is often an overlap between social and territorial inequalities: poorer and peripheral areas show lower participation rates, but significant disparities are also observed within urban areas.



INVOLVEMENT OF ENTERPRISES

- **Enterprises**, as the primary funders of training for private-sector employees, **tend to involve mainly highly qualified workers**, who are more likely to generate substantial returns on training investments;
- **Access to public funding often requires co-financing by enterprises**, and many companies—particularly SMEs—are either unwilling to support long and costly training pathways or lack the financial capacity to do so;
- **When companies anticipate restructuring, they often reduce or halt investment in the training of the affected workers;**
- **Some programmes targeting disadvantaged groups include work-based learning components**, typically organised within a dual system. However, enterprises participate in such initiatives only when they perceive a clear and measurable benefit.



STRATEGIES, FUNDING, AND GOVERNANCE

- **A lack of strategic vision aimed at reducing inequalities:** measures to address inequalities are fragmented, often relying on temporary projects or uncoordinated local initiatives, whereas long-term and universally accessible policies would be needed to ensure access to learning for those in disadvantaged situations.
- **A funding framework aligned with short-term interventions rather than structural investment:** the lack of a strategic vision is reflected in the prevalence of short-term financing, which does not ensure continuity of services or support sustainable policy development.
- **Weak governance of adult learning policies:** interviewees consistently highlight the absence of effective governance mechanisms to support the development of comprehensive adult learning policies. In the case of disadvantaged groups, placing the individual—and the full range of their needs—at the centre of policy action would require broadening governance structures to include a wider range of stakeholders and strengthening coordination among social, health, and education policies.



A general lack of attention to the evaluation of VET policies and to the analysis of their effectiveness, both in terms of the implementation of planned activities and their impact on final beneficiaries;

A lack of a long-term strategic vision, combined with fragmentation and discontinuity of interventions. This situation does not support the evaluation of VET policies—equally fragmented and discontinuous—and such evaluation is rarely considered a core element in the cooperation dynamics among institutional, territorial, and social actors, on a par with policy design and implementation;

Policy volatility, with frequent changes in political direction, programmes, and funding schemes. This generates uncertainty, undermines the sustainability of programmes, and hinders meaningful impact evaluation.



Monitoring and evaluation tools often remain rooted in a predominantly quantitative approach, focusing on indicators such as the number of participants, completion rates, and employment outcomes, while overlooking other equally important dimensions;

Policies tend to assess success primarily in terms of short-term employment outcomes, neglecting broader aspects of social, cultural, and democratic inclusion;

This approach limits the system's capacity to learn from experience and to adapt interventions to diverse local contexts, preventing the transformation of evaluation from a form of bureaucratic oversight into a tool for participatory governance and continuous reflection, and ultimately constraining transparency and development.



Evaluation mechanisms are hindered by the fragmentation of competences, which results in incomplete and disjointed policy assessment;

Effective multi-level governance also depends on the ability to promote the sharing of empirical evidence across institutional levels, in order to support impact-based decision-making. This should take into account not only productivity and employability, but also broader outcomes such as social inclusion, citizens' well-being, and social cohesion;

Multi-year planning, supported by stable evaluation tools, is essential to strengthen stakeholders' trust and enhance the overall effectiveness of the system;

There is a need to develop intersectoral monitoring and evaluation tools capable of capturing the overall impact of policy synergies, particularly when addressing multidimensional phenomena that require integrated approaches and are often at the root of vulnerabilities that hinder, rather than facilitate, access to training.



THANK you for your attention

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