



SANDRA D'AGOSTINO, SILVIA VACCARO

# TRAJECTORIES OF ADULT LEARNING POLICIES ACROSS EUROPE

EDUCATION AND/FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

PANEL C.01 ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION FOR A SOCIALLY JUST  
SOCIETY: APPRAISING POLICY AND PRACTICE

June 3-6, 2024 | University of Cagliari, Italy



# CONTENTS

**THE CONTEXT, THE  
OBJECTIVES, THE STUDY**

**EUROPEAN LIFELONG LEARNING  
SYSTEMS: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE  
/DIVERGENCE**

**CONCLUSIVE REMARKS**

**ADULT VET IN ITALY**



Technological innovation and digitalisation - together with other global phenomena such as population aging and climate change - have triggered extensive renewal processes in advanced countries.

**Adult VET systems**, called to respond to the needs induced by the transformations of work, haven't been excluded from this wave of renewal since learning is more and more considered as a way to accumulate the skills necessary to ensure people's employability and secure their professional paths, as well as support growth and competitiveness of national and territorial production systems.

To tackle the challenges induced by **mega-trends**, over the last twenty years many European countries have defined strategies, programs, specific interventions and devices to modernize their adult VET, often along the requests from the EU institutions.



## THE OBJECTIVES



The study conducted by Inapp has analyzed in a comparative way the evolutionary trajectories of adult VET systems in some European countries, investigating the policies implemented by the governments to counterbalance the effects of the global mega trends of change.

The aim was to identify differences and similarities, points of convergence and divergence in the process of repositioning of VET in some EU countries; the analysis allowed us to investigate the capacity of the VET systems to provide adequate responses to current challenges.



## THE STUDY



In the study we investigated adult VET systems in Italy and other “similar” European countries, namely: France, Germany and England.

The results have been published in INAPP, D'AGOSTINO, VACCARO (2023), "European lifelong learning systems between innovation and equity: a study on England, Germany, France", Inapp Report (downloadable from Inapp website).

Building on these results, a new study is going to be launched in 2025, covering the same countries plus Spain, which will deepen, through a desk analysis supplemented by interviews with experts and stakeholders, some main issues related to adult VET systems, like as inequalities in access to training, and the capacity of vocational training to promote and support the double transition, which represents a challenge and a vector of transformation for all.



# EUROPEAN LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE / DIVERGENCE



The analysis started by considering the wide heterogeneity within and between these national contexts and the difficulties of investigating phenomena which often appear as fragmented or non-linear over time.

The comparison was eased by using the criterion of the greater or lesser proximity to five *ideal-typical lifelong learning regimes* proposed by Verdier (2008), each regime entailing a different combination of political principles, actors' logics, rules and devices in use.

The first three regimes – the “academic”, “professional or corporatist” and “universalist” ones – mobilize merit, vocation and cohesion as constitutive principles. The other two look at education and training from a utilitarian perspective: the “competitive or market” regime assumes a competition between training providers and the individuals' free choice between different offers; in the “regulated market” regime, market principles retain a preponderant role in regulating access, use and promotion of training, but the market is regulated by a public intervention to ensure transparency and prevent/correct the distortion of information.



If in relation to its dual system **GERMANY** has remained firmly anchored to the "corporatist" regime over the last twenty years, as far as continuous VET is concerned, we are witnessing a **progressive adherence to the "regulated market" regime.**

Over the last decades, the federal government has shown a growing activism with regard to adult VET, and a series of regulatory measures have been adopted, with particular attention to the most vulnerable workers. This new approach moves into the direction of a State dealing with market failures; however, it does not go so far as to call for forms of companies' co-responsibility, including on funding training, nor is it centered on strengthening individuals' capabilities, in the sense proposed by Amartya Sen, with the removal of all obstacles that may hinder a free and conscious access to training.



## EUROPEAN LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE / DIVERGENCE



In the last decades, **ENGLAND** has moved away from the "regulated market" model - established with the New Labor and taking the form of the "Individual learning Accounts" - going **towards the “competitive” regime.**

Within adult VET policies, an increasingly important role has been assigned to apprenticeships for workers' skills development and certification. Funding allocated to adult VET has been significantly reduced over the past decade, while the principle of competition between training providers and the need to respond to the professional and training needs of companies have become more strongly established.

The latest right-led governments are increasing financial resources allocated to adult VET in view of the introduction by 2025 of a Lifetime Skills Guarantee, which will support people who during their professional lives want to participate in any kind of education or training by providing them with a loan to cover the costs, for a maximum of four years of full-time learning (corresponding to £ 37,700).





## EUROPEAN LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE / DIVERGENCE



**FRANCE** might appear to adhere to the "universalist regime": the legal obligation for companies to ensure employees' employability and devolve part of the wage bill to training; the establishment of the individual training accounts (CPF) with a universal vocation; the strengthening of devices like as the professional interview in the company and consultancy for vocational training.

The great success of the CPF and their use for training, but also the growing number of fraud, have determined a deficit of 2.5 billion euros in 2021. To restore budgetary balance, the government has introduced the obligation for CPF holders to co-finance the cost of training (100 euros), whose effect has been a reduction in the use of the CPF (from 2.1 million in 2021 to 1.8 million in 2022).

The limited effectiveness of tools supporting individuals in their learning choices and the shift towards an individualisation of the subjective right to training, together with an increasing competition between training providers, have produced a **decisive shift of the French adult VET towards the "regulated market" model.**



## CONCLUSIVE REMARKS



The study of the evolutionary trajectories of adult VET in England, Germany and France does not allow us to find clear and unambiguous points of convergence; however, it is possible to identify **at least two common trends**.

The **first** concerns the confirmation – and the strengthening - of the individual dimension of training, which has as corollaries the individuals' autonomy and responsibility in their training choices. The enlargement of this "personal sphere" risks being accompanied by a reduction in the "collective sphere" and an underestimation of the role of policies for strengthening people's capabilities, in the sense proposed by Amartya Sen, and removing obstacles that can prevent the free and conscious access to learning.

The **second** trend concerns the concept of social justice and the persistence of inequalities in access to training opportunities. The previous education levels and qualifications, the job positions, with the size and sector of work, the duration of the contract, gender and age remain the main factors hindering access to learning.



ITALY shares with the other countries the second trend relating to inequalities in access to training opportunities, accentuated by the large territorial gaps, and presents as well:

- A major structural weakness in the field of adult VET, and IVET as well;
- A lack of an overall and long-term strategy;
- A more complex structure of adult VET, with a relevant number of actors operating at different levels (central administrations, regions and autonomous provinces, joint interprofessional funds, CPIA, employment centres, etc.);
- the lack of a multilevel governance mechanism, that could leverage on the State for promoting and designing a shared plan for the development of VET, facilitating the collaboration between the actors and valorisation of local experiences.



In comparison to other countries, the Italian adult VET system has grown in a fragmented way, lacking an overall and long-term strategy. The recent initiatives envisaged in the NRRP (dual training; National Fund for New Skills; GOL) seems to respond to the needs of specific groups, without designing a unitary strategy for all adults, regardless of their employment status.

A "universal" approach informs the national plan (NIP) for implementing the EU recommendation on VET adopted on 3 March 2023. However, this plan is not prescriptive, nor does it provide indications or additional funds for implementation or a timeline; so, the implementation of the envisaged measures is a choice left to willingness and capability of single Regions and Public Administrations.



In particular, it remains unmet the need to create a **unitary governance** or at least a structural connection between the actors involved in adult VET with the aim of increasing effectiveness, using financial resources in relation to shared objectives, promoting quality of the training offer and supporting services.

Building on the first finding from the mentioned study, the new one starting in 2025 will structurally include Italy and involve experts and stakeholders in debating on the positioning of the Italian adult VET in comparison to other European countries and in examining the different rationale behind the policies put in place to afford challenges relating to innovation and growth, in a context of social cohesion and social justice.





THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION  
GRAZIE PER L'ATTENZIONE

[s.dagostino@inapp.gov.it](mailto:s.dagostino@inapp.gov.it)

[s.vaccaro@inapp.gov.it](mailto:s.vaccaro@inapp.gov.it)



[www.inapp.gov.it](http://www.inapp.gov.it)