



# MODERNIZING APPRENTICESHIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE WORK OF THE FUTURE

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Within the policies to support the school-to-work transition, the apprenticeships enjoy great prestige nationally and internationally. In EU, the apprenticeships are active in 25 countries (Cedefop, 2019), with different schemes.

In Italy, the apprenticeship is an employment contract combining learning and working and traditionally devolved to support youth school-to-work transition.

Currently, three schemes are in place:

- Professionalizing a. is the most common, representing a share of 98% of all apprentices.
- Other two a. schemes (a. for vocational qualification and diploma, upper secondary education diploma and high technical specialization certificate [Type 1]; Higher education and research a. [Type 3]) are linked to school diplomas and tertiary level academic qualifications, involving only a few thousand participants overall.



Despite the efforts to modernize apprenticeship in order to better respond to companies' and young people's needs, in 2023 apprenticeship concerns 14.5% of employment activations of young people up to 24 years of age and 6.5% of those aged between 25 and 34 (MLPS 2023). Only one out of five apprentices participates in off-the-job learning activities of short length (INAPP et al., 2024).

So, apprenticeships involve only a limited share of young people entering the labour market. Looking at experiences from other European countries, it could play a greater role in supporting school-to-work transition of young people and, more in general, bolstering adults transitioning across companies, occupations, sectors over their professional careers.



# OUR STUDIES



Some recent studies carried out by INAPP with a comparative approach provide some suggestions for modernizing apprenticeship and stressing its skill development power, following directions which in other countries are proving to be successful in countering the effects induced by technological innovation and reducing skill mismatch, both for young people and adult workers.

Both studies were carried out through the secondary research method, examining several sources, looking into the sectoral scientific literature, but also consulting reports and documents available on web-portals and web-sites of international organizations and relevant apprenticeship stakeholders of the selected countries.



# TYPE 1 APPRENTICESHIP



The first study analyzed the transformations occurred in the last decades in some European countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and England) in order to understand if – in the face of the transformations underway in the economies and the labour markets because of global megatrends – the dual learning paths still are adequate to support school-to-work transition of young people, especially those from most vulnerable groups.

We analyzed the evolutionary trajectories of dual systems in countries, where apprenticeships involving upper secondary education level students are highly attractive and well established; France, whose vocational education and training system is very similar to Italy's, passed a reform in 2018<sup>1</sup>, pushing apprenticeships into the CVET sector and recognizing a prominent role to social partners and other professional organizations.

<sup>1</sup> Act nr. 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 “pour la liberté de choisir son avenir professionnel”.



In the last decades, all selected countries introduced some changes to their dual systems that, considering data on participation, succeeded in maintaining a high quality and attractiveness of the dual system. Beyond the different approaches, there are similarities in the innovations introduced:

- ❖ expansion of the dual system into the tertiary sector
- ❖ revision of curricula consistently with innovation, widening of skill-contents of qualifications
- ❖ new models for the organization of the training (modularization)
- ❖ shift towards the higher education sector; opening up of links with other educational paths to ensure vertical and horizontal permeability
- ❖ segmentation of the apprenticeship offer into different qualification levels

However, the success in attracting companies and young people has proved to be at detriment of dual systems' inclusivity capacity.

- The success of apprenticeships stimulated the participation of a rising share of young people with higher education diplomas, who "crowded-out" peers with lower qualifications and skills levels.
- Women remain a minority (usually below 40%) and they cluster into a limited number of profiles leading to occupations often characterized by lower wages and poor career opportunities.
- Young people with a migrant background show the most difficulties in terms of equal access to dual systems; after entering, they show worse results at the exams and in terms of job insertion.



For some years now, Italy has been engaged in the launching of a new apprenticeship scheme (“Type 1”) following the German model. It involves young people aged 15 to 25-yo and delivers the same qualifications awarded by leFP courses (EQF level 3 and 4).

The initiative has been confirmed in the NRRP, posing the objective of activating at least 135,000 places in dual education by 2026. However, regardless of the joint efforts by the Ministry of labour and the Regions, the number of Type 1 apprentices has decreased between 2015 and 2019 (11,929 in 2019, -11.2% since 2015) (Inapp, 2022). After 2020 the trend reversed, and in the school year 2022/23 it reached 9,586 apprentices (Inapp, 2024).

The participation is marked by a strong geographical concentration: in 2022/23 the Northern Regions involve almost 90% of Type 1 apprentices; the remaining 10% is shared between Central and Southern Regions and, instead of the increasing trend as in the upper part of the country, the number of apprentices declines from previous year (Inapp, 2024).



Fighting educational and work inequalities is a priority for Italy.

Examining the selected European countries, it seems that entrusting the dual system with the task of reducing early school leaving and the number of NEETs is an outdated choice which looks backwards and therefore might prevent decisive progress in the desired direction. Today the apprenticeship, instead of mitigating social inequalities deriving from school, seems to amplify them, adding the selection effects linked to the school with those discriminations operating in the labour market.

It is therefore necessary to introduce other measures to promote the inclusion of the most vulnerable young people.

At the same time, Italy could greatly benefit from the construction of a solid dual learning path targeting those young people who prefer an early entry combined with a part-time school path. The availability of substantial financial resources, offered by the PNRR and the EU structural funds, could be an opportunity to promote the development of dual apprenticeship and to strengthen the vocational training system throughout the national territory.



## TYPE 2 APPR.



Another opportunity to modernize apprenticeship concerns its expansion towards the adult population for supporting transitions and addressing the skill mismatch. Indeed, in many countries in Europe and in the entire world, the apprenticeships involve adults as well, in order to respond to their skills development needs for different purposes.

Italy has also been taking timid steps in the direction of extending apprenticeship to adults for a few years and Type 2 apprenticeship has been increasingly called into play to facilitate the re-insertion into the labor market of older workers of any age who have been dismissed.

With the aim of offering a contribution to establish an effective and successful adult apprenticeship in Italy, Inapp has realized in the last two years a study which has investigated schemes and practices adopted in European countries where such schemes already exist (Finland, Denmark, England, Switzerland), in order to identify the key elements which might support its development. In all these countries the share of adults has been growing in recent years compared to the total number of apprentices.



# TEMA 04



The topic of adult apprenticeships seems poorly explored in scientific literature (Cedefop, 2019; Ilo, 2022), despite existing in a lot of countries.

In 2016, Cedefop conducted a mapping of apprenticeships schemes for young people and/or adults operating in 30 European countries (EU MS, UK included, Norway and Iceland). According to the mapping, apprenticeships exist in 24 Member States as nationally recognized schemes supported by a stable regulation; sometimes, more schemes are available within the same country. In four countries out of the remaining six, a legal basis for apprenticeship has been adopted (not implemented) or pilot projects are underway; only in two countries, no form of apprenticeship has been found (Cedefop, 2018).

More recently, the ILO has launched the project ADULT-Apprenticeship Development for Universal Lifelong Learning and Training, which aims to explore new ideas to promote a renewal of apprenticeships. According to the final report, forms of adult apprenticeships exist in several countries, operate at all levels of the education system, up to the highest levels of tertiary education, and involve different target groups, from immigrants with low qualifications to graduates (Ilo, 2022, p.13).



# TEMA 04



The analysis of the 4 selected countries has allowed us to identify some **enabling factors** (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004) that – at least in the selected countries - seem to play a role in promoting the success of the measure as a skill development device and a measure to support transition.

**Enabling factors** for establishing an effective and successful scheme for adult apprenticeship:

- Existence of a **regulatory framework** allowing access to all people, regardless of age and employment condition; Making room for a broad flexibility, especially in terms of duration of learning paths, through a full valorization of individuals' experiences and previously acquired skills; Strengthening of the role of training companies and on-the-job training; Availability of adequate public funds for incentives and other financial measures, especially for promoting SMEs participation;
- Adequate level of **wages** for allowing adults to live and maintain their families;
- Widespread availability of **training opportunities** throughout the country; Setting up of modular training delivering models to facilitate conciliation of work, training and family life;
- Activation of outreach initiatives and other non-financial support services, to assist especially SMEs in accessing apprenticeships.



# TEMA 04



Risks to prevent and/or deal with:

- An excess of "flexibility" could conduct to losing its role as a skill development path to be came only a means for formalizing already acquired competencies: so called “conversion apprenticeships” (ILO, 2022)
- Possible substitution effects in the use of financial resources to the detriment of other training opportunities addressing adults as well (UK)
- Adult apprenticeship development driven by skilled workers to the detriment of low-skilled workers who are “displaced” from apprenticeships (as experienced in Denmark and England)



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