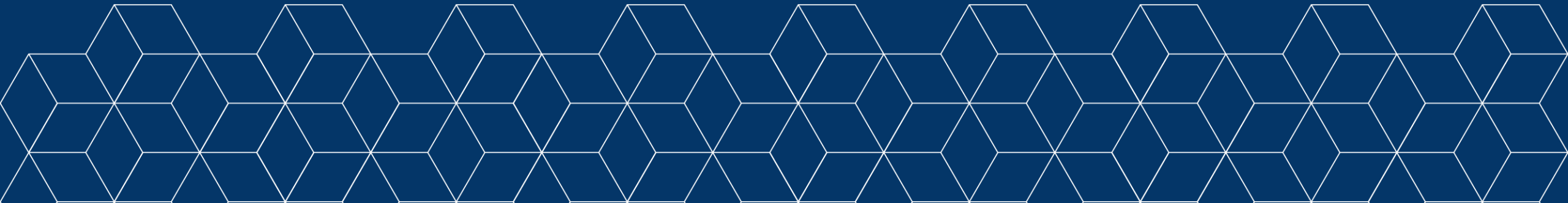


# **APPRENTICESHIPS FOR PROMOTING YOUTH SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION: DOES IT STRENGTHEN INCLUSION OR THE REPRODUCTION OF INEQUALITIES?**

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## OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENTATION

- ✓ Research questions and methodology
- ✓ Global megatrends and youth employment
- ✓ The role of apprenticeships
- ✓ Dual systems in evolution
- ✓ Suggestion for Italy from EU countries
- ✓ Conclusions



- ✓ How appropriate are the measures for building an "Italian dual system" in relation to the declared objectives, i.e. combating early school leaving and reducing the number of NEETs (young people not engaged in work or education or training)?
- ✓ Since global megatrends are transforming production, labour market and education, is apprenticeship still effective in supporting school-to-work transition of young people, especially those from most vulnerable groups?
- ✓ What can we learn from the experience of other European countries?

**Methodology:** secondary literature analysis and interviews to experts from the selected countries



So-called “global megatrends” are triggering wide-ranging renewal processes that affect everything, from economies, labour markets and welfare systems to vocational education and training (VET) and institutions. Amid these extensive transformations, young people have been identified as one of the groups who has shown the greatest vulnerability in the labour market (Esping-Andersen, 1998; Emmenegger et al., 2012; Buchholz et al., 2009). It’s not by chance that the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic in the last years affected young people the most.

Even if in most several European countries youth employment rates are higher in 2022 than pre-pandemic ones, youth unemployment remains more than two and a half times higher than the rest of the population and in 2022 more than one out ten young people across the EU is not in education or training, nor in a job (NEET).



In Italy young people experience particular critical issues in entering the labour market and some figure explain it.

The share of people aged between 18 and 24 who dropped out before reaching an upper secondary school diploma is one of the highest in Europe (11.5% in 2022 against 9.6% in the EU27).

Regardless of a long-term trend of declining youth employment, in 2022 18.0% of 15–29-year-olds couldn't find a job (overall unemployment rate for 15-74-y-o was 8.1%). Among employed, 30% of young people have a temporary job compared to 13% of total employed (Istat, 2023).

Over the last decade the number of NEETs has steadily decreased, reaching 19.0% in 2022, close to the minimum registered in 2007, but remains more than seven percentage points higher than the EU average (11.7%) (Istat, 2023).



## The role of apprenticeships

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

For some years now, and with the objective of reducing the number of dropouts and NEETs, Italy has been engaged in the launching of a new apprenticeship scheme (so called “1<sup>st</sup>-level apprenticeship”). The scheme has been reviewed 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, with the expected result of activating at least 135,000 places in dual education (apprenticeship and leFP/IFTS pathways with longer WBL modules) by 2026 .

These are full-time three- and four-years courses, governed by the Regions, which sideline the upper secondary education sector governed by the State.



## The role of apprenticeships



Since 2016, 1<sup>st</sup>-level apprenticeship hasn't been making significant progress, while the most developed apprenticeship counts for more than 500,000 participants a year.

Regardless of the joint efforts by the Ministry of labour and the Regions, the number of young people with a 1<sup>st</sup>-level apprenticeship contract has decreased between 2015 and 2019 (11,929 in 2019, -11.2% since 2015) (Inapp, 2022). Among these apprentices, the participation to the off-the-job learning activities (leFP courses) remains low, even if the number of participants has risen from 5,446 in 2016 to 8,823 in 2020.

Moreover, the participation is marked by a strong geographical concentration: in 2020 three areas in the North (province of Bolzano, Lombardy and Veneto regions) accounted for 80% of apprentices attending training, while in the South they were almost no-existent (only 8% of overall apprentices attended leFP courses in Sicily) (Inapp, 2022).

The most developed apprenticeships in Italy remains the 2<sup>nd</sup>-level one, the farthest from education as it awards qualifications which are recognised only by collective agreements





## The role of apprenticeships

The policy measures adopted so far haven't been able to promote the development of 1<sup>st</sup>-level apprenticeship. Behind these results, there are weaknesses both in the Italian production system and labour market and the VET sector.

**At system level:** prevalence of micro-enterprises using apprenticeships; high level of youth unemployment; lack of a well-functioning multi-level governance; low funding for VET; low attractiveness of leFP courses, etc

**At companies' level:** low risk propensity for a medium /long-term investment on apprentices; fewer businesses in the South; short list of profiles; poor knowledge of 1<sup>st</sup>-level apprenticeship and lack of skills on tutoring, etc.

**Related to training institutions:** poor connections with social partners/world of work; poor funding of supporting services for young people and companies; etc.

VET is formally integrated into upper secondary education but governed by the Regions

Quite new offer, available only in some areas and implemented through different regional schemes





## The role of apprenticeships

Since these weaknesses affect some areas more than others, maybe only a part of Italy could benefit from the introduction of a dual system, inspired to the traditional German model. For the remaining territories – not only located in the South –, the launch of this initiative should have been preceded (supported) at least by the strengthening of the regional VET offer, especially the leFP courses, in order to overcome its fragilities and disparities and making it more attractive.

Following these considerations, it becomes more urgent to question if dual systems – in the face of the transformations underway in the economies and the labour markets because of global megatrends - are still adequate to support school-to-work transition of young people, especially those from most vulnerable groups.



## Dual systems in evolution

For answering this question, we conducted a study on the evolutionary trajectories of some European dual systems, with the aim of analysing the transformation occurring in these dual systems and their effectiveness in supporting school-to-work transitions and drawing suggestions for Italy.

D'Agostino S., Vaccaro S. (2021), Apprenticeship in evolution: trajectories and prospects of dual systems in Europe and in Italy, Roma, Inapp. Working Paper, 76 <<https://oa.inapp.org/xmlui/handle/20.500.12916/3403>>

D'Agostino S., Vaccaro S. (2021), Apprendistato in evoluzione. Traiettorie e prospettive dei sistemi duali in Europa e in Italia, Roma, Inapp, monograph ISBN: 978-88-543-0151-1

D'Agostino S., Vaccaro S. (a cura di) (2019), I sistemi duali nelle Regioni dello Spazio Alpino. Rapporto conclusivo, monografia. <[www.alpine-space.eu/projects/dualplus/pdfs/dualsystemsalpinespace\\_it.pdf](http://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/dualplus/pdfs/dualsystemsalpinespace_it.pdf)>; [https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/dualplus/pdfs/dualsystemsalpinespace\\_screen.pdf](https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/dualplus/pdfs/dualsystemsalpinespace_screen.pdf)

D'Agostino S., Vaccaro S. (2021), "L'apprendistato in Italia: una misura di politica attiva ancora poco valorizzata", in SINAPPSI, XI, n.2, pp. 120-133; ISSN 2532-8549

D'Agostino S., Vaccaro S. (2021), "Traiettorie di evoluzione dei sistemi duali europei. Quali sfide per l'Italia?", in Scuola Democratica, n. 2, pp. 315-332



## Dual systems in evolution

We have analysed the evolutionary trajectories of dual systems in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, where apprenticeships involving upper secondary education level students are highly attractive and well established, and in France, whose vocational education and training system is very similar to Italy's.

With reference to the paradigm of *skills formation regimes* (Busemeyer, Trampusch, 2012), Germany, Austria and Switzerland are identified as “collectivist” or “corporatist” regime, with a high involvement of institutions and companies which fully cooperate in the governance and implementation of the dual systems.

France is traditionally considered as a “statist” regime. The latest French reform<sup>1</sup> (2018) takes some steps towards a "collectivist" system, pushing apprenticeships into the CVET sector and recognizing a prominent role to social partners and other professional organizations.

The reform is very successful: in 2018 apprenticeships involved only 5.3% of young people between 16 and 25-y.o. (Depp, 2019); in 2022 there were 837,000 new entries and a total of 980,000 participants (Dares, 2023).

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



In the last decades, given the transformations induced by megatrends, all the selected countries were “forced” to introduce some changes to their dual systems in order to ensure a high level of quality and attractiveness.

Beyond the different approaches, the main changes we have observed in almost all countries are the following:

- expansion of the dual system into the tertiary sector of the economy
- 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 in response to new companies' needs; opening up of connections with the other educational paths to ensure vertical and horizontal permeability
- segmentation of the apprenticeship offer into different qualification levels, following the hierarchy of occupations.

D: two-years courses introduced in 2003, next to 36-42 months standard courses;  
CH: in 2002 the two-years CFP introduced next to the AFP which lasts 3-4 years

F introduced first a link with higher education in 1987  
In A since 2008 all prentices may obtain a professional diploma and access higher education



Considering data on participation, the selected countries succeeded in maintaining a high quality and attractiveness of their dual system.

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

- 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 are the group showing 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.


D: 1,255,440 apprentices in 2021  
A: in 2021, 38,7% of 15y.o. has entered the dual system  
CH: in 2021/22, apprentices count for 58% of all students in upper secondary level  
F: in 2022, a total of 980,000 apprentices

Women share:  
D: 34.5% in 2022  
A: 32.3% in 2021  
CH: 40.7% in 21/22  
F: 44% of entrants in 2021, against 34% in 2018.




## Suggestion for Italy from EU countries

What do the results from some European countries suggest for establishing an effective dual system in Italy, capable to attract young people and companies?



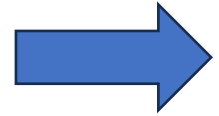
Italy should consider focusing its efforts on the development of apprenticeship pathways awarding higher education diplomas and qualifications or otherwise giving access to tertiary education, at least in the regions with a higher competitive advantage.



Such initiatives should leverage over the promotion of a closer horizontal and vertical integration of all education and training paths, in the perspective of a lifelong learning system for all.



## Suggestion for Italy from EU countries



The decision to strengthen the quality of training should pass through the restructuring of the regional VET offer and in particular of leFP courses.

Some suggestions in that direction:

- a strong action to support the development of leFP courses, in areas where they are absent or fragile, by providing also direct support to the regional bodies.
- Strengthening the image of leFP at national level through promotional campaigns, using also social media which are most popular among young people.
- Activation of a variable set of tools and support services for schools and VET centres, deployable according to the various local needs.
- Definition of a multi-year programming, based on earmarked and adequate resources especially for the Regions with more NEETs.
- Definition of national standards for teachers and trainers involved in leFP and a model of “standard costs”, capable to guarantee the same level of quality, adequacy and efficiency of the training throughout the country.

- .....





## Conclusions



Fighting educational and work inequalities is a priority for Italy.

Looking at 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 a choice that looks to an outdated past and therefore risks preventing decisive progress in the desired direction. Today apprenticeship, instead of mitigating the social inequalities deriving from school, seems to amplify them, adding the effects of school selection with those discriminations operating in the labour market.

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

At the same time, Italy could greatly benefit from the construction of solid dual training. The availability of substantial financial resources, offered by the PNRR and the new programming of 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.





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