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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: A SUPPLY SIDE ANALYSIS

EDUCATION AND/FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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INTRODUCTION



Over the last twenty years, national and regional authorities have been collaborating for restoring the image and attractiveness of VET by giving it a more uniform and strong identity based on quality. At the same time, the broader regional autonomy, gained on a regulatory level after the 2001 Constitutional reform, kicked off a season of closer cooperation, which gave impetus to a deep transformation of the VET provision.

Among the main reforms:

- the establishment of leFP paths at upper secondary level,
- the introduction of IFTS and ITS at post-secondary level,
- the setting up of inter-professional funds for CVET of workers;
- the establishment of CPIA for adult education;
- the definition of a national certification system, based on a Repertory of Qualifications;
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The process to reform VET is still on going at national and regional levels, mostly prompted by the EU strategic documents.

Among the reforms adopted to modernize VET, a large attention has been devoted to the renewal of apprenticeships, in a process which began at the end of Nineties and proceeded through several regulatory innovations aimed at best tailoring the legal framework to companies' and young people's needs.

Since 2003, three different forms of apprenticeships are in place, the first one called "dual apprenticeship", being inspired to the other dual European systems, the most renowned being the German one.



In an attempt to pave the way to an Italian dual system aimed at reducing early school leaving and the number of NEETs (16,1% as overall in 2023, but 24,7% in Southern Regions), in 2015 the government launched a new initiative.

It addresses young people who haven't achieved any upper secondary qualification, that can be involved in leFP courses, managed by the Regions, delivered as full-time or dual education:

- The former consist of three- and four-year courses, which sideline the upper secondary education managed by the State and award qualifications at EQF level 3 and 4.
- The latter concerns the development of a dual apprenticeship for young people aged from 15 to 25 y.o. (so called “1st level apprenticeship”), which awards the same qualifications as leFP courses through a dual path combining off- and on-the job learning.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS



Turning down the expectations, the dual apprenticeships is failing to achieve the expected results in terms of involved companies and young people participating, especially in the Southern Regions, as figures reveal.

- ✓ Why is dual apprenticeship a less effective measure to prevent early school leaving and reduce the number of NEETs in the Southern Regions?
- ✓ Are the policy measures adopted for building up an "Italian dual system" adequate for pursuing the declared objectives?
- ✓ What can we learn from the experience of other European countries?



The Inapp has conducted a study on the evolution of some European dual systems to draw suggestions for Italy. We analysed dual systems in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, where apprenticeships aimed at upper secondary school students are highly attractive and well established, and in France, whose vocational education and training system is very similar to Italy's.

Germany, Austria and Switzerland are identified as “collectivist” or “corporatist” *skills formation regimes*, as their dual systems rely on a large participation of companies and a high commitment of the government(-s) (at different levels) (Busemeyer, Trampusch, 2012).

France was traditionally considered as a “statist” regime. The latest reform (2018) moves towards “collectivist” systems, pushing apprenticeships towards CVET and recognizing to social partners and other professional organizations a prominent role in the management of the system.

In recent decades, all the selected countries were “forced” to introduce more or less extensive changes to their dual systems in order to maintain a high level of quality and attractiveness, given the transformations induced by megatrends.

Analyzing the innovations intervened in the selected countries, we have observed some commonalities:

- 1. a first convergence between the European dual systems is the progressive integration into the general education system, by opening up new connections with other educational paths (vertical and horizontal permeability), and the repositioning towards non-academic tertiary education** in response to new needs of businesses and young people calling for the introduction of new profiles and qualifications at higher levels;

2. A second line of convergence among EU dual systems concerns the increasing attention to improving the quality of the learning through multiple policy measures. The main changes in all analyzed dual systems observed entailed a modernization of curricula with the involvement of sectoral organizations, the widening of qualifications' skill-contents, the adoption of new and more flexible models for the organization of the training (modularization), the provision of more dual learning paths at different levels according to the hierarchy of professions, etc.

3. The third line of convergence concerns the reduction of the inclusive capacity of dual systems.

Transformations of dual systems succeeded in maintaining their high quality and attractiveness, **but at the expenses of a negative impact on their inclusive capacity**. Thus, the degree of social selectivity in the apprenticeship market has increased.

Indeed, the success of apprenticeships has stimulated the participation of an increasing share of young people with higher education, who “crowded-out” their peers with lower educational qualifications and skill levels. Women remain a minority well below 40% in all selected countries; furthermore, they cluster into a limited number of profiles leading to occupations often characterized by lower wages and poor career opportunities (Bibb, 2020). The group showing the most critical issues in terms of equal access to dual systems is that of young people with a migrant background.

Since 2016, dual apprenticeship has not made significant progress, but the measure has been confirmed in the NRRP. Indeed, the number of dual apprentices has increased from 5,446 in 2016 to 9,586 in 2022/2023.

Despite a significant growth in percentage terms, participation remains scarce, showing a strong geographical concentration: in 2020 three areas in the North (province of Bolzano, Lombardy and Veneto regions) counted for 80% of apprentices attending training, while in the South they were practically absent (only 8% of students in Sicily) (Inapp, 2022).

So far, the policy measure does not seem to have succeeded.



The structural weaknesses of the Italian economy and VET provision seems to hinder the spread of dual apprenticeship in Italy.

Weaknesses at system level: lack of a multi-level governance; low funding for training; low attractiveness of leFP courses, because of the diversity of the regional models and different availability of the courses across territories

Critical issues related to companies: low risk propensity for a medium /long-term investment on apprentices; lack of knowledge on the reform project; legal constraints and costs/burdens related to hiring minors; requirements for companies hosting apprentices; availability of qualified personnel for tutoring; short list of available profiles; lower presence of companies in the South; etc.

Critical issues related to training institutions: finding hosting companies and matching them with young people; poor connections with social partners/world of work; difficulties in combining off- and on-the-job learning paths; poor funding of supporting services for young people and companies; etc.



However, in designing the policy for the development of a dual apprenticeship in Italy, the European lessons haven't been considered.

A first convergence between the European dual systems is the progressive integration into the general education system and repositioning towards non-academic tertiary education.

Until now Italy has gone in the opposite direction. The last attempt to revitalise dual apprenticeship (2015) was implemented by favouring the regional leFP channel, which sidelines upper secondary education.

Italy should be urged to consider the opportunity to focus its efforts more on the development of apprenticeship in combination with the learning paths that lead to tertiary education diplomas, at least in the regions with a higher competitive advantage. Such initiatives could reveal useful also to promoting a closer horizontal and vertical integration of all segments of the education system in a lifelong learning perspective.

A second line of convergence among EU dual systems concerns the increasing attention to improving the quality of the learning through multiple policy measures.

For Italy, the choice to focus on quality of the training should pass through a modernization of the leFP offer that would require:

- the development of leFP where it is absent or fragile, making available a tools and support services tailored to the specific local needs;
- the definition of a multi-year programming and adequate resources to fund it;
- the establishment of a unitary model of “standard costs”, essential to guarantee everywhere the same objective criteria of training quality, adequacy and efficiency.

The third line of convergence concerns the reduction of the inclusive capacity of dual systems.

The increase in educational and labour inequalities in Italy is particularly acute, especially in the Southern regions where school dropouts and NEET respectively reach peaks of more than 17% and 24% (2023).

Combating these phenomena is a priority for Italy, however, it is unlikely that dual apprenticeship is the answer to achieving this goal as it seems destined to become a means of amplifying such inequalities, combining the effects of the selection based on school performance with those of discrimination in the labour market.

So, there is a need to introduce other targeted measures to promote the inclusion of most vulnerable young people.



Looking at the evolution of European dual systems, it seems that the decision to entrust the dual system with the task of reducing school dropping-out and the number of NEETs seems to look at a past that is now outdated. Currently, instead of mitigating the social inequalities resulting from school, the apprenticeship seems to amplify them, summing up the effects of the school selection with the discriminations occurring in the labor market.

The educational and employment inequalities are very relevant in Italy, affecting especially the Southern Regions. So, while a part of the country could be prepared to seize the opportunity of the development of a dual system, for most of the country – the South, but also several areas of the Centre-North –, the launch of the dual apprenticeship should have been based preliminarily on the strengthening of the regional IeFP, with a specific programme aimed at overcoming its fragilities and wide disparities.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

GRAZIE PER L'ATTENZIONE

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