

WP2 National Report

(final report)

ITALY

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Introduction	3
1. Labour Market Overview	3
1.1 Unemployment	3
1.2 Regional Disparities	4
1.3 Female Employment	5
2. Labour and Skills Shortages	6
2.1 Demographic Pressures	6
2.2 STEM Skills Gap	7
3. Skill Formation	7
3.1 Vocational Education and Training	7
3.2 Dual Education (Dual Apprenticeship)	8
3.3 The 4+2 Technological-Professional Pathway Strategy	9
3.4 Upskilling and Reskilling	10
4. Immigration Policy	11
4.1 Immigrants Regularization	11
4.2 Immigration and Integration Challenges	11
4.3 The Quota System	12
5. Policy Responses	12
5.1 The “Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza” (PNRR)	13
5.2 Youth Employment Initiatives	13
5.3 Gender Employment Gap	14
Conclusions	15
Analytical framework.....	16
a. Methodological note.....	16
b. Analytical Framework: Skills for Justice in Italy.....	19
1. Demand and supply of skills -matching supply to demand	21
a) Implications of Economic and Social Trends for Skills Supply and Demand	21
b) Effects of Institutional Structures on Skills Training Systems	22
c) Educational Strategies in Education Systems (HE and VET)	23
d) Implications of Job Quality on Supply and Demand Matching	24
e) Social Partners’ Strategies to Address the Mismatch between Supply and Demand	25
2. Skills Matching and Immigration	26
a) Choices between Local Human Capital and Migrants’ Recruitment.....	26
b) Impact of Employment Quality on Migration	26
c) Defending the Rights of Native and Migrant Workers	27
d) Qualifications as Criteria for the Selection of Migrant Workers	27
e) Qualification Recognition Schemes for Migrants.....	27
f) Accessibility to Training (VET, HE, CVT) for Migrants.....	28
3. Potential of the Partnerships and Cooperation on Skill Formation and Sustainable Migration	28
a) International Skills Transferability	28
b) Transparency of National Qualification Systems	28
4. Summary	29
Statistical evidence	30
1. Trends of Demand and Supply of Skills in Project Partner Countries	30
1.1. Trends in the Structure of Demand in Terms of Required Levels of Education/Qualification	30
1.2. Socio-Economic Factors influencing Changing Skills Demand	33
1.3. Trends in Human Capital Supply in Terms of Attained Education and Qualifications	34
1.4. Socio-Demographic and Institutional Factors Influencing Skills Supply	34
2. Trends of Employment in Terms of Levels of Qualifications and Education	37
3. Trends of Overqualification, Skill Underutilization among Native Workforce and Migrant Workers and Skills Shortages in the 5-10 Sectors of Economy with Highest Skill Mismatches.....	44
3.1. Overqualification: Volume/Share of Native Workforce and Migrant Workers Employed in Jobs Requiring Lower Qualification than They Possess	44

3.2. Skills Underutilization: Volume/Share of Native Workforce and Migrant Workers Employed in Part-Time Jobs, Gig Economy, Jobs Requiring Different Qualification	45
3.3. Skills Shortages by Occupation, Highlighting Required Qualifications and Level of Education (both VET and HE)	48
4. Relationship between Skill Mismatches and Migration Trends in Partner Countries.....	49
4.1. Trends of Immigration	49
4.2. Employment and Unemployment of Migrant Workforce	52
4.3. Wages and Salaries of Migrant Workers in Comparison with Local Workforce	55
4.4. Participation of Local Workforce and Migrant Workers in Industrial Relations	56
4.5. Statistical Data on Investments in Automation and Robotization of Work Processes in Enterprises, International Subcontracting, Return of Subcontracted Manufacturing and Services to Destination Countries.....	57
4.6 Accessibility of Initial Education (VET and HE) for Migrants and Natives	59
4.7 Investment in CVT of native and migrant workers in sectors	61
Findings by sector/occupation	65
1. Companies	65
1.1 Profession shortages.....	66
1.2 Training providers and skills mismatch.....	71
1.3 Resume	81
2. Intermediaries (Employers' organizations, trade unions, labour market intermediaries and NGOs) and HE	83
2.1 Construction, manufacturing and care sectors with VET, employer organisation and companies.....	85
2.2 Integration and migration with employment agencies, NGOs, VET providers and employers' organisations in all economic sectors.....	91
2.3 'Foreign talent': challenges and future perspectives with HE providers in manufacturing, industry, economics accounting, governance and sustainability.....	103
3. Policy Makers.....	112
Executive summary.....	117
Services (people care and companies) sector	117
Restaurant, tourism sector and food production	117
Manufacturing sector.....	117
Industry sector	118
Cross-Sectoral Challenges	118
Policy Recommendations.....	118
Vocational Training and Skills Matching	118
Recognition of Qualifications and Visa Reforms	118
Addressing Workplace Segregation and Discrimination	118
Labor Market Integration and Employment Protections	118
Wrap-up.....	119
Conclusions.....	120
Highlights	120
Wrap-up	122
Future Research Paths	123
Research questions for S4J next WPs.....	124
References.....	126
Figures.....	130
Tables	130
Appendix 1	131

Introduction

1. Labour Market Overview

Italy's labour market has unique structural features shaped by various social, economic, and demographic factors. In recent years, Italy has experienced modest economic growth (EC, 2024)¹. However, several challenges persist, including high youth unemployment, a low female participation rate, and regional disparities (with the South, or so-called “Mezzogiorno”, facing much higher unemployment rates).

1.1 Unemployment

While in 2002-2014, Italy showed better trends than the 15 countries of the Eurozone, this trend has been reversed in the last decade, a sign of a structural weakness in the economic system. In recent years, despite the economic crisis and the pandemic, alongside continuous employment growth, there has been a low female employment rate, still high youth unemployment, substantial territorial differences, and a low rate of graduates and high school graduates. This picture can be explained starting from the particularity of the Italian economic model characterized by the prevalence of tiny enterprises and greater industrial sector productivity, unlike that of services (Eurostat, 2023). The relative increase in open-ended employment contracts reveals a marked concern for companies in attracting their employees, as recruitment difficulties are added to retention to reduce turnover, especially, but not only, of the youth group. In 2022, when the unemployment rate in Italy stood at around 8.1%, the youth unemployment rate (15-24 years old) was 23.7%. Among the latter, women have an unemployment rate of 25.8% compared to 22.3% of men, with a difference of 3.5 percentage points. Although these indicators are down compared to previous years, they remain high, especially with other EU countries (Fig. 1).

¹ https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-surveillance-eu-economies/italy/economic-forecast-italy_en

Figure 1 Unemployment rate in Italy and the euro area (2020-2022)



Source: DIPE elaboration on Eurostat data (2023).

In 2023², the unemployment rate is still falling while the number of employed people is increasing, although the differences between the North and South remain strong. These are some of the findings that emerged from the report on work in Italy published in 2024 by Istat³. The unemployment rate fell to 7.7% (-0.4% compared to 2022), while on average, in 2023, the growth – already recorded in the previous two years – in the number of employed people continues (+481 thousand, +2.1% in one year), whose estimate stands at 23,580,000. The employment rate of the 15-64 age group rose to 61.5% (+1.3% in one year).

1.2 Regional Disparities

Italy's labour market shows significant regional differences. The North tends to have more substantial employment figures, while the South suffers from chronic underemployment and fewer industrial opportunities. In fact, from a socio-spatial point of view, the data show a country at two – if not three – speeds. Northern Italy has lower unemployment rates, followed by Central Italy, which is slightly above. On the contrary, Southern Italy's unemployment rate is much higher than the national average. At the territorial level, Southern Italy shows the most significant increase in the employment rate (+1.6 points compared to +1.3 points in the North and +1.1 points in the

² <https://finanza.lastampa.it/News/2024/03/13/lavoro-istat-nel-2023-tasso-di-disoccupazione-cala-al-7-7percento/MzdfMjAyNC0wMy0xM19UTEI>. Retrieved 01.10.2024

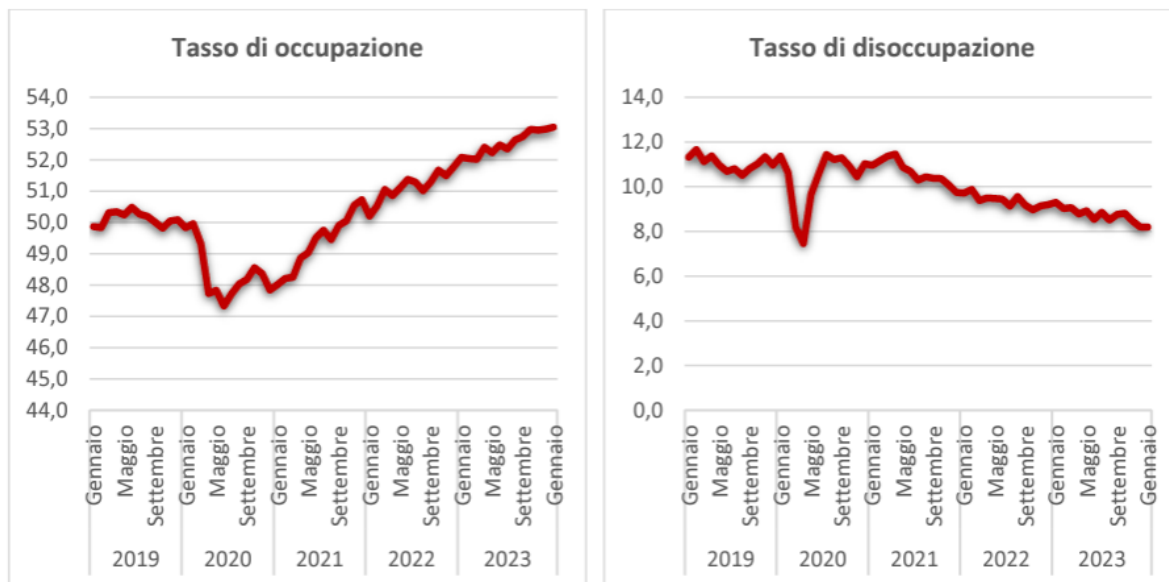
³ <https://www.istat.it/comunicato-stampa/occupati-e-disoccupati-dati-provvvisori-dicembre-2023/> Retrieved 10.10.2024

Centre) and the most marked reduction in the inactivity rate 15-64 years old (-1.6 points in the Southern regions compared to -1.0% in the North and -0.6% in the Centre). On the other hand, the unemployment rate decreased to a greater extent in the Centre (-0.7% compared to -0.5% in the North and -0.3% in the South). However, territorial gaps remain very high: the employment rate in the North (69.4%) is 21 percentage points higher than in the South (48.2%), and the unemployment rate in the Southern regions (14.0%) is about three times that of the North (4.6%)⁴.

1.3 Female Employment

After the slowdown in the last months of 2022, female employment rose again in 2023 (Fig. 2, Adapt, 2024)⁵.

Figure 2 Female occupation in Italy (2019-2023)



Fonte: elaborazione Fondazione Studi Consulenti del Lavoro su dati Istat

⁴ <https://finanza.lastampa.it/News/2024/03/13/lavoro-istat-nel-2023-tasso-di-disoccupazione-cala-al-7-7percento/MzdfMjAyNC0wMy0xM19UTEI> Retrieved 10.10.2024.

⁵ https://www.bollettinoadapt.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/tendenze_occupazione_femminile.pdf Retrieved 15.01.2024

The increase in labour demand was particularly pronounced in the central-northern regions, where over 80 percent of the jobs created occurred in the first two months of 2023. Meanwhile, the southern regions have moved past the significant stagnation experienced in the latter half of 2022, registering a modest expansion in employment dynamics (Nizza et al., 2023).

2. Labour and Skills Shortages

Italy is facing critical shortages of skilled labour in specific sectors. This is mainly due to a mismatch between education/training and labour market needs. In addition, for at least 20 years, having a higher educational qualification has offered more job opportunities than average. For this reason, Italy is investing in targeted policies to increase the number of graduates, with particular attention to the tertiary level of the *Istituti Tecnici Superiori* (ITS) (trans. Higher Technical Institutes), together with the creation of a unitary technological-professional supply chain to overcome the historical fragmentation of the Italian VET sector (Gavosto, 2022).

2.1 Demographic Pressures

Italy's ageing population is also contributing to labour shortages. Many industries, particularly healthcare and eldercare, face increased service demand but insufficient labour supply to meet that demand. According to the ISTAT database (2024)⁶, the population in Italy as of 1 January 2024 is estimated at 58,99 million, a substantially stable figure (there is only a decrease of 7,000 units) compared to the previous year. Considering the annual decline of 33,000 units recorded in 2022, a progressive slowdown in the population decrease emerges according to a trend that has been proceeding since 2014. This quasi-stationarity depends on two opposing phenomena:

- a) the decline in the original population of Italy.
- b) the increase in the population of foreign origin.

⁶ http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCIS_POPRES1 Retrieved 10.10.2024

2.2 STEM Skills Gap

Italy continues to lag in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, resulting in a shortage of professionals in these high-demand areas⁷. Research and development (R&D) investment is relatively low, further hampering innovation and competitiveness.

3. Skill Formation

The Italian education and training system has traditionally been more focused on academic education than vocational training, though efforts have been made to reform this. In Italy, compulsory education and training is governed by the **principle of the right duty** to education and training until the age of 18, as established by Law 53/2003 and subsequent regulations (Legislative Decree 76/2005)⁸. Key aspects include the completion of a five-year diploma, typically attained by the age of 19, with a limited number of experimental four-year programs available. Alternatively, obtaining a three-year vocational qualification (IeFP) at EQF Level 3 satisfies the educational requirements. The formative obligation up to age 16 does not result in a formal qualification; however, it lays the groundwork for essential transversal competencies that are common across the first two years of various educational pathways. While this framework promotes a cohesive and inclusive educational journey that balances general, vocational, and technical skills in accordance with national and European educational standards, it unfortunately falls short in effectiveness.

3.1 Vocational Education and Training

There is increasing recognition of the need to strengthen Italy's vocational education and training (VET) system (Angotti, 2019; CEDEFOP, 2021). In Italy, vocational education and training (VET) operate under multilevel governance involving national, regional, and local stakeholders. Ministries of Education and Labour set general rules, while regions and autonomous provinces

⁷ <https://www.openpolis.it/in-italia-ampi-divari-di-genere-nellapprendimento-delle-stem/> Retrieved 07.02.2025
https://www.openpolis.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/report_stem.pdf Retrieved 07.02.2025

⁸ <https://www.mim.gov.it/web/guest/sistema-educativo-di-istruzione-e-formazione> Retrieved 14.01.2025

oversee VET programmes and apprenticeships. Social partners help shape employment policies relevant to VET and lifelong learning. At age 14, learners choose between general education, VET school pathways (EQF 3 or 4), and regional VET. Education is compulsory until 16, with a right/duty to continue until 18. VET options at the upper secondary level include 5-year technical and vocational school programmes (EQF 4) and 3- or 4-year VET pathways. Permeability allows progression across VET and general education. Post-secondary VET includes 1-year higher technical education courses (IFTS, EQF 4) and 2- to 3-year higher technical institute programmes (ITS, EQF 5). Public and private providers offer adult VET, and the ESF and regional funding support continuing vocational training (CVT). VET governance is shared between the State and regions, with Article 117 of the Constitution defining their respective roles. Apprenticeships are available at all levels, with different types leading to various qualifications, including higher education degrees (Cedefop, 2021). Institutes like “*Istituti Tecnici Superiori*” (ITS) offer post-secondary vocational training but are underutilized compared to other European countries. ITSs are key in Italy’s dual education model, combining academic learning with work-based training. These two-year programs are designed in collaboration with industries to meet labour market needs, with students spending significant time in internships or apprenticeships in sectors such as mechatronics, renewable energy, fashion, ICT, and automotive (INDIRE, 2024)⁹.

3.2 Dual Education (Dual Apprenticeship)

Italy’s dual education system, inspired by the German apprenticeship model, is still in its early development stages. However, it has recently introduced the “Apprendistato Duale” through the “Jobs Act” (Carollo, 2015). This system allows students aged 15 to 25 to combine part-time work with formal education, providing them with practical skills alongside classroom learning. Beginning at the age of 15, students can choose dual training, which includes two main modalities:

⁹ <https://www.indire.it/progetto/its-istituti-tecnologici-superiori/> Retrieved 01.10.2024.

a. *Apprendistato* (trans. *Apprenticeship*): This is a mixed-purpose employment contract that blends work and education. It involves remuneration and requires students to participate in both workplace training and formal instruction at a vocational training centre (CFP). More than half of the total 990 annual training hours must be completed at the CFP, while the remaining hours are spent at the enterprise.

b. *Alternanza lunga* (trans. *Extended Alternance*): In this model, students enrol in a vocational training centre (CFP) and undergo a non-remunerated training period with a partner enterprise. The time spent at the enterprise constitutes less than half of the total 990 annual training hours. Students can work and earn a salary while attending school or vocational education and training (VET) courses. This system is commonly utilized in the manufacturing, construction, and engineering sectors. There are two types of apprenticeships: one for students aged 15-25, which combines work with obtaining a diploma or professional qualification, and another for university or post-secondary technical students (ITS), allowing for work-study arrangements aimed at higher qualifications.

3.3 The 4+2 Technological-Professional Pathway Strategy

The 4+2 technological-professional pathway is an innovative, unified educational program supplementing traditional curricula. Established under Law No. 121 of August 8, 2024¹⁰ and implemented through Ministerial Decree No. 256 of December 16, 2024¹¹, this six-year pathway consists of:

- **4 years** in a technical or vocational institute or a vocational training centre (CFP);
- **2 years** in a Higher Technical Institute (ITS).

The program aims to:

¹⁰ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2024/08/22/196/sg/pdf> Retrieved 14.01.2025

¹¹ https://www.flcgil.it/scuola/filiera-formativa-tecnologico-professionale-pubblicato-il-decreto-ministeriale-sulla-sperimentazione-per-l-anno-scolastico-2025-26.flc?utm_source=chatgpt.com Retrieved 14.01.2025

1. Equip students with an integrated, engaging curriculum that blends theoretical and practical knowledge.
2. Provide businesses with candidates trained in cutting-edge, innovative skills aligned with current labour market demands.

Currently, in its first year of experimentation, the initiative involves 300 training pathways nationwide, marking a significant step towards modernizing education and fostering technological development.

3.4 Upskilling and Reskilling

Italy focuses on expanding lifelong learning, upskilling, and reskilling programs to address labour shortages and digital transformation. However, progress has been slow, with ineffective coordination between industries, educational institutions, and government agencies. Lifelong learning is critical due to labour market changes, mobility, and technological advancements. In 2020, only 7.2% of Italian adults participated in recent learning experiences, lower than the EU average (9.2%) and countries like France (13%) and Spain (11%). COVID-19 restrictions contributed to a slight decline in participation, but Italy's decrease (0.9%) was smaller than the EU average (-1.6%).

In Italy, employed individuals are more likely to participate in lifelong learning than the unemployed (7.6% vs. 4.4%), which contrasts with the EU, where unemployed individuals have higher participation rates. Lifelong learning among the inactive population is also crucial for social inclusion, with Italy's rate slightly below the EU average. Women are more likely to engage in training than men, especially among the employed and unemployed, though this trend reverses among inactive individuals. Participation is higher in Northern and Central Italy than in the South

due to educational differences. If the comparison is made with the same level of education, the differences are significantly reduced (ISTAT, 2022)¹².

4. Immigration Policy

A combination of national legislation and European Union directives shapes Italy's immigration policy system. It regulates foreign nationals' entry, stays, and integration, balancing security concerns with humanitarian and labour market needs.

4.1 Immigrants Regularization

Italy has undergone various phases of immigrant regularization, granting residence permits to undocumented immigrants based on labour market needs. The *Testo Unico sull'Immigrazione* (TUI) (Legislative Decree No. 286/1998) is the main legislation governing immigration. It outlines the rules for managing immigration, integration, and regularizing undocumented migrants. Significant amendments, like the "Bossi-Fini" law (Law 189/2002), have modified the framework but not its overall structure. The TUI addresses two key areas: immigration law, which includes rules for entry, residence, and control, and integration law, which grants migrants certain rights. The TUI does not address asylum, which is governed by EU legislation¹³.

4.2 Immigration and Integration Challenges

Italy's immigration policies have sparked debates on balancing foreign workers' needs with border control. Integration faces challenges like bureaucratic barriers, difficulties recognizing foreign qualifications, and discrimination. Recent laws, such as the "*Decreto Sicurezza*" (2018) under Matteo Salvini, abolished humanitarian protection and restricted access to integration programs,

¹² <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2024/04/Formazione-adulti-Anno2022.pdf> Retrieved 01.10.2024.

¹³ https://temi.camera.it/leg19/post/19_p118_le_principali_misure_della_xvii_legislatura.html Retrieved 01.10.2024.

complicating regularization (UNHCR Italy, 2019)¹⁴. In contrast, the “*Decreto Cutro*” (2023)¹⁵ introduced new rules for sea rescues, reintroduced humanitarian corridors, and tightened deportation measures. It reinforced some security measures and introduced changes to Italy’s immigration policy, increased deportations, reintroduced humanitarian corridors, regulated sea rescues, and introduced new rules for NGOs conducting sea rescue operations, requiring them to follow specific routes and report rescues more rigorously to Italian authorities.

4.3 The Quota System

Italy regulates non-EU immigration through a quota system based on labour market needs. Every three years, the government issues a planning document (**policy document on immigration policy**), and annually, a decree (called “*Decreto Flussi*”) sets the number of foreign workers allowed entry. The latest three-year plan (DL 20/2023) 2023-2025 deviated from the usual annual system, setting quotas of 136,000 for 2023, 151,000 for 2024, and 165,000 for 2025. This decree also introduced criteria based on labour market analysis.

5. Policy Responses

In response to labour market challenges, Italy introduced measures like the “*Decreto Rilancio*” following the COVID-19 pandemic. A key aspect of this decree was a regularization program addressing labour shortages in agriculture and domestic care sectors. Undocumented migrants working in agriculture, domestic care, and personal assistance could apply for a six-month temporary residence permit (“*permesso di soggiorno temporaneo*”). This allowed them to seek formal employment, potentially leading to a long-term work permit. Employers could also

¹⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/it/risorse/carta-di-roma/fact-checking/2019-gennaio-cambiamenti-del-decreto-sicurezza-immigrazione/> Retrieved 01.10.2024.

¹⁵ Named after the tragic shipwreck near Cutro in Calabria. See Wallis (2023): <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/47554/death-toll-rises-following-italian-shipwreck-as-criticism-mounts> Retrieved 01.10.2024.

regularize informally employed workers, aiming to reduce the exploitation of undocumented labour, especially in agriculture (Galli, Musso & Tucci, 2021)¹⁶.

5.1 The “Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza” (PNRR)

Funded by the EU’s Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the PNRR aims to address Italy’s labour market challenges and promote skill development in high-demand sectors. It is Italy’s strategic document for utilizing NextGenerationEU (NGEU) funds to drive post-pandemic recovery. The PNRR focuses on resilience, sustainability, and digitalization, structured around six key missions: digitalization and innovation, green revolution, sustainable mobility, education and research, inclusion and cohesion, and health (Italian Parliament, 2024). The plan manages €194.4 billion in EU funding, supplemented by €30 billion in national resources, for over €220 billion (Italian Parliament, 2024)¹⁷. It extends through 2026, with projects and reforms requiring collaboration between the national government, regional and local authorities, and the private sector. Additionally, the PNRR emphasizes gender equality, youth inclusion, judicial reforms, bureaucratic simplification, and increased competitiveness, aiming to modernize Italy and foster sustainable growth for future generations¹⁸.

5.2 Youth Employment Initiatives

Italy is focusing on reducing youth unemployment through apprenticeships, internships, and other job placement programs. The European Social Fund (ESF)¹⁹ has also supported projects to increase employment opportunities for young Italians. The ESF+ is the main instrument for investing in people and building a more socially conscious and inclusive Europe. It helps Member States tackle the pandemic crisis, achieve higher employment levels, especially for young people and women,

¹⁶ <https://osservatoriocpi.unicatt.it/cpi-archivio-studi-e-analisi-emersione-del-lavoro-irregolare-in-italia-la-sanatoria-del-decreto-rilancio> Retrieved 01.10.2024.

¹⁷ <https://temi.camera.it/leg19/pnrr.html> Retrieved 01.10.2024.

¹⁸ <https://temi.camera.it/leg19/pnrr/obiettivitraguardi.html> Retrieved 02.10.2024.

¹⁹ <https://european-social-fund-plus.ec.europa.eu/en/what-esf> Retrieved 02.10.2024.

provide fairer social protection, and create a workforce ready for transitions, particularly those of the green and digital economy. In Italy, ANPAL²⁰ is the European Social Fund Plus Lead Partner. ESF+ resources are programmed in specific national and regional programs.

5.3 Gender Employment Gap

Efforts are being made to address the gender gap in the labour market, focusing on improving work-life balance through measures such as more flexible work arrangements, better childcare services, and enhanced parental leave policies. Italy's labour policies aim to promote gender equality by supporting women's employment with initiatives that encourage work-life balance, provide hiring incentives, and combat discrimination. The Law 120/2011 (commonly known as the Pink Quotas) established gender quotas for the boards of listed and state-controlled companies, requiring that at least 30% of board members be women to ensure a more significant presence of women in leadership roles. Additionally, the Law 92/2012, known as the "Fornero Reform", introduced incentives to promote female employment in disadvantaged areas, including financial incentives for companies that hire women who have been unemployed for at least six months. Further adjustments have been made through the "*Decreto Rilancio*" (2020), annual Budget Laws (e.g., those of 2021), the PNRR, the Equal Opportunities Code (Legislative Decree 198/2006), and the provisions for parental leave and work flexibility (Legislative Decree 151/2001). Notably, the "freedom income" for women who are victims of violence was included in the Budget Law of 2020. These measures reflect a legislative and governmental commitment to reducing the gender gap in the labour market by supporting women's employment through incentives, flexibility, and the protection of workers' rights.

²⁰ <https://www.anpal.gov.it/fondo-sociale-europeo-plus> Retrieved 02.10.2024.

Conclusions

Italy's labour market is marked by high unemployment rates, especially among young people and women, along with significant skills shortages in key sectors. The country faces the challenge of aligning its education and training systems with the demands of a modern economy while also addressing demographic pressures. Immigration plays a vital role in filling labour gaps; however, policies need to be more flexible and targeted to ensure better integration of immigrant workers. Moreover, investing in skills development—particularly in STEM and VET—is essential for Italy to remain competitive in the global economy.

Analytical framework

a. Methodological note

First of all, to seek publication regarding Italy between 2010-2024, we adopted the search engine of the University of Verona (UNIVERSE) using the search strings provided by WP2-WP3 methodological guidelines, leaving all filters unchanged, i.e. “any field” it contains (Title, Author, Subject, ISSN), excluding all languages, except English and Italian and, as bibliographic products, everything that was not Journal Articles, Papers in Conference Proceedings, working papers, books and book chapters keeping as a reference all the primary databases, i.e. Web of Science, SCOPUS, JSTOR, IEEE Xplore, PubMed, ScienceDirect..

We suddenly, develop a search strategy using relevant keywords and phrases as follows:

- “Italy skills demand and supply” = 100 results
- “Italy skill mismatch immigration” = 3 results
- “Italy partnerships skill formation sustainable migration” = 0 results

We began by removing duplicates and excluding contributions for which we did not have complete texts, news articles, etc. This process left us with 78 entries from the original Excel file. We then further refined our selection by skimming through the titles and conducting an initial review of the abstracts to identify those that were off track. Despite containing some relevant terms related to our research question, these entries did not align with our focus, reducing our total to 66. After this selection based on titles and abstracts, we have undertaken additional steps to further evaluate these 66 entries.

1. **Reading title & abstract**
2. **Reading abstracts and eliminating those articles that were not relevant** or unrelated to Italy. The refined database now contains **59** papers.
3. **Reading articles:** after this initial screening, **55 contributions** remain.

We then followed a logical order for further review:

- Reading the **4** (Initially were 6, then, we excluded 1 that was completely out of focus) Italian contributions deemed “highly relevant” based on the abstract review + (**1** founded through Google Scholar Search Engine)
- Reading the **36** English contributions deemed “highly relevant” based on the abstract review
- Reading the remaining **14** English contributions deemed to have “probable/partial relevance” based on the abstract review

We could then systematize the articles we have thoroughly reviewed into macro-categories, labels, topics, and main findings, following the framework established by the research group. This information would be organized in an Excel dataset, including: Document Type (state document/publication or scientific publication), Author(s) and Year, Topic/Research Objective, the Country where the research was conducted, Method (if a survey or interview was conducted, please include sample size and respondent type), Main Findings (summarized in no more than 50 words), and Citation (in Harvard or APA referencing style), including a DOI or hyperlink to the document. Upon completion of this task, we quantified the articles by macro-themes and categories as follows:

Table 1 Results of the literature review

Macro-categories	Categories (Topic)	Freq.	Citation
Education / Formation / Labour Market Policies Reform	“3+2” Higher Education Reform /expansion	3	(De Paoli, 2011; Bosio & Leonardi, 2010; Oppedisano, 2014)
	Jobs Act and Italian Labour Market	3	(Carollo, 2015 ²¹ ; Destefanis et al., 2015; Pigini & Staffolani, 2022)
	Labour market policies reform impact	1	(Cappellari et al., 2012)
	Labour policies in Trentino	1	(Barr et al., 2012)
Returns to education	(Investment) Returns to education and the quality of labour demand (across Italian regions)	2	(Colonna, 2017; Naticchioni & Ricci, 2011)
Adult Education	Participation in adult education	1	(Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013)
	Postgraduate education and job mismatch	1	(Aronica et al., 2023)
	Work-based learning, on-the-job formation	1	(Battistelli et al., 2019)
	Workplace training programs	1	(Brunetti & Corsini, 2017)
Innovation and Labour Market Transformation	The impact of automation and the introduction of industrial robots on employment in Italy.	1	(Dottori, 2021)
	Active ageing	2	(Frerichs et al., 2012; Cohen et al, 2012)

²¹ This article was found after the literature review through Google Scholar.

	Changes in the labour market and institutions influence the employment of migrant workers in Italy	1	(Fellini & Fullin, 2018)
	Digital transformation efficiency	1	(Inel, 2019)
	Economic strategies (downsizing) in the Great Recession	1	(Van Dalen & Henkens, 2013)
	Emerging industry and innovation policy	1	(Turner et al., 2020)
	Endogenous productivity	1	(Palumbo, 2013)
	Labour market integration for people with low levels of education	1	(Köllo, 2015)
	Labour market structure and wage inequality	1	(Giangregorio & Fana, 2023)
Economic trends	Supply and demand shocks on productivity and unemployment growth	1	(Travaglini & Bellocchi, 2018)
	Temporary hires and firms' innovation	1	(Malgarini et al., 2013)
	The effect of employment incentives on the Italian economy	1	(Zotti et al., 2020)
	Productivity trend	1	(Deleidi & Paternesi-Meloni, 2019)
	The Evolution of the Occupational Structure	1	(Basso, 2020)
	Trend of stone sector	1	(Careddu et al., 2017)
	Economic trends	1	(OECD, 2018)
	Vacancy chains	1	(Giannelle & Tattara, 2014)
	Physical attractiveness on working time	1	(Gehrsitz, 2014)
Skill-mismatch, over-education	Open Government Data in Educational Programs Curriculum	1	(Papageorgiou et al., 2023)
	Job design and Labour Contracts	1	(Cattani et al., 2023)
	Labour market and graduates	1	(Green & Henseke, 2021)
	Labour productivity and skill mismatch	1	(Fanti et al., 2021)
	Long-run Asymmetries in Labour Demand	1	(Kölling, 2020)
	Matching' and 'sorting' in the labour market	1	(Lacava, 2023)
	Mismatch and overeducation	1	(Ordine & Rose, 2017)
	Over-education, Return to Education	2	(Ghignoni, 2011; Ghosh & Grassi, 2020)
	Skill upgrading and exports	1	(Accettaro et al, 2013)
	Skills (educational) mismatch	3	(Esposito & Scicchitano, 2022; Ghignoni & Verashchagina, 2013; Capsada-Munsech & Valiente, 2020)
	Skills competitiveness	2	(Froy et al., 2012; Destefanis, 2012)
Migrants' employment	Migrant (extra EU) in manufacturing firms	1	(Bettin et al., 2014)
	Migration governance in the care sector	1	(Salis, 2014)
Young people	Social economy and youth employment	1	(Boffo et al., 2015)
	Young People in The Labour Market	1	(Nițescu, 2019)
	Youth unemployment	1	(Brunetti & Corsini, 2019)
COVID-19 pandemic	Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young individuals	1	(Fiaschi & Tealdi, 2022)
	Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for businesses, the finance industry, and policymakers	1	(Billo & Varotto, 2020)
N=55			

As shown in the organized **Tab. 1**, the labels identified from the articles have been grouped into **9 macro-categories** per **43 categories** (different topics):

- Education / Formation / Labour Market Policies Reform (**7 contributions**)
- Returns to education (**2 contributions**)
- Adult Education (**4 contributions**)
- Innovation and Labour Market Transformation (**10 contributions**)
- Economic trends (**9 contributions**)
- Skill-mismatch, over-education (**15 contributions**)
- Migrants' employment (**2 contributions**)
- Young people (**2 contributions**)
- COVID-19 pandemic (**2 contributions**)

We can see that the main results fall within the macro-areas of innovation, labour market transformation and economic trends between labour supply and demand. From this literature review, which we cannot label as “systematic” per se but which has nevertheless taken into account a rigorous process of selection and analysis of the contributions identified from the indexed databases – as well detailed above – it emerges that in the last 14 years, the contributions have paid little or no specific attention to the issue of mismatch about migration and how to make incoming flows more “sustainable” to EU countries (and in particular to Italy). If, on the one hand, there is literature in our country that has analysed labour policies and adult training policies (higher and professional), on the other hand, little has been addressed, especially in Italy, concerning the central focus of the S4J project. This element further corroborates the project proposal and highlights the urgency of addressing such a crucial issue, often told and exploited for propaganda.

b. Analytical Framework: Skills for Justice in Italy

The theoretical framework suggested by the WP2 coordinator provides a theoretical-analytical basis for searching for skill matching and skill mismatch solutions in Italy. It consists of three primary levels:

- 1) The level of matching the demand for skills in the labour market and supply in the education and training system, resulting in various outcomes of skill mismatches.
- 2) The level of the policies tackling skill mismatches by referring to the policies targeting demand and supply of skills - education and labour market policy, education and training policy, and migration policy. These policies influence the trends of skill matching and create specific contextual conditions for handling skill matching at the level of sectoral and corporate strategies.
- 3) The strategic approaches of sectoral and corporate stakeholders in dealing with skill mismatches by seeking to reduce the demand for skilled workforce (investment in automation and robotisation), to adjust the available skills to the demand by investing in training, by relying on employment of the immigrant labour, as well as by combining these and other possible solutions.

Skill matching on the above-mentioned levels defines the potential of the destination country to engage in skills partnerships with the countries of origin. This potential can be disclosed by exploring the systemic institutional preconditions for beneficial cooperation with the origin countries, especially concerning transparency and comparability of the national qualifications system instruments and measures, referencing the EU transparency and comparability instruments and measures (EQF and ESCO). The readiness of different stakeholders and interested parties of the destination country (sectoral employers' bodies and enterprises, governmental bodies and institutions, social partners bodies, NGOs and civil society institutions, education and training providers) is another crucial factor defining the potential of the country to engage in such skills partnerships. However, analysing these issues in the Italian context requires a greater focus on territorial and regional contexts (North-South divide), not only the national and sectoral perspective, which is not explicitly present in the framework.

1. **Demand and Supply of Skills**
 - **Economic and Social Trends:**
 - Economic shifts (e.g., digitalization) require advanced technical skills, but Italy's education system struggles to keep pace (e.g., Palumbo, 2013; Inel, 2019).
 - Policy reforms like the Jobs Act have impacted flexibility, increasing demand for tech skills (Destefanis et al., 2015).
 - **Institutional Influence on Skill Training:**
 - Limited collaboration between educational institutions and the labour market leads to skill mismatches (Ghignoni & Verashchagina, 2013).
 - Regional differences in skills alignment and migrant integration highlight areas for policy improvements (Fellini & Fullin, 2018).
 - **Educational Strategies:**
 - Bologna Process standardization created alignment challenges with market needs (Bosio & Leonardi, 2010).
 - Calls for improved VET and continued education strategies to meet labour market demands (Frerichs et al., 2012).
2. **Skills Matching and Immigration**
 - **Local vs. Migrant Workforce:**
 - Italian firms rely on migrant workers to fill technical roles, compensating for local skill shortages (Colonna, 2017).
 - High recruitment costs for skilled locals suggest potential policy needs for balancing local and migrant labour (Bettin et al., 2014).
 - **Employment Quality and Migration Trends:**
 - Poor working conditions drive "brain drain" and increase migrant reliance in lower-skilled roles (Ghosh & Grassi, 2020).
 - Migrant labour's segregation in specific sectors indicates a need for improved employment conditions and career paths (Salis, 2014).
 - **Worker Rights and Skill Recognition:**
 - Recognition schemes like EQF improve transparency but remain bureaucratically complex (Elken, 2016).
 - Improving vocational access for migrants can enhance labour market integration (Destefanis, 2012).
3. **Partnerships and Sustainable Migration**
 - **Skill Transferability:**
 - Italy's fragmented policy framework limits adult education and skill transfer (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013).
 - Need for coordinated public policies tailored to regional needs and adult learners.
 - **Qualification Transparency:**
 - Tools such as EQF and Europass aid comparability, yet inconsistencies in application hinder mobility (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013).

1. Demand and supply of skills -matching supply to demand

a) Implications of Economic and Social Trends for Skills Supply and Demand

Several studies explore how economic and social evolution affects the skills required by the labour market. **Deleidi & Paternesi-Meloni (2019)** show that for the period 1970-2016, the growth of aggregate demand played a significant role in determining productivity dynamics, especially in the manufacturing sector. The main implication of economic policy to address stagnation concerns the implementation of expansionary policies, which would stimulate productivity and, at the same

time, help to support employment recovery. Labour policies have significantly impacted the balance between demand and supply of skills. **Destefanis et al.** (2015) analyse the impact of the Italian Jobs Act, which has made the labour market more flexible, reducing firing costs (**Pigini & Staffolani**, 2022) and increasing the demand for technological skills. **Palumbo** (2013) highlights how productivity depends directly on the availability of advanced technical skills. **Inel** (2019) delved into how digitalisation creates new job opportunities but also requires advanced technical skills that the education system has yet to provide fully. However, as **Fanti et al.** (2021) highlight, skills mismatches continue to pose a challenge, with skills supply often not aligned with new market demands. The choices related to the automation and digitisation of work processes have been limited compared to other European countries. **Bettin et al.** (2014) discuss how globalisation and the fragmentation of value chains have led to the relocation of some production activities and the return of some production processes to Italy. In this sense, migration policies should be considered from an economic development perspective, recognising the positive role that non-EU workers can play in the Italian economy. Policies that facilitate the integration and employment of these workers can improve the performance of manufacturing firms.

b) Effects of Institutional Structures on Skills Training Systems

Institutional structures can hinder the effectiveness of vocational training. Ghignoni and Verashchagina (2013) examine the educational mismatch in Europe, indicating that the qualifications offered do not fully align with market needs. In Italy, the lack of collaboration between educational institutions and companies is particularly evident, limiting the training of market-relevant skills. **Capsada-Munsech and Valiente** (2020) find significant regional differences in the extent and nature of skill mismatches influenced by local education systems, labour market structures, and economic contexts. Regions with more flexible education systems and strong links between education providers and employers tend to experience lower levels of

skill mismatch. **Fellini and Fullin** (2018) found that the institutional context and dynamics of the Italian labour market limit employment opportunities, especially for migrant workers, contributing to their persistent marginalization. To improve the integration of migrants into the Italian labour market, the authors suggest greater coherence between labour and migration policies, as well as the implementation of training and integration programs that foster migrants' occupational mobility. **Fanti et al.** (2021) argue that addressing skill mismatches through targeted education and training policies is essential for improving productivity and competitiveness in the Italian economy. **Naticchioni and Ricci** (2011) highlight that the education system in Italy, while improving in terms of educational performance, is not perfectly aligned with the demand for skills in the labour market, causing a significant mismatch between the supply and demand of skills and with significant differences between the various Italian regions and between different age groups, favouring the competitive advantage achieved by work experience over professional training. **Frerichs et al.** (2012) describe how the ageing workforce and active ageing policies have required skills adaptation. However, the response of the education and vocational training system is still insufficient to ensure a proper alignment between supply and demand.

c) Educational Strategies in Education Systems (HE and VET)

Bosio & Leonardi (2010) suggest that while the Bologna Process aimed to standardize and improve educational outcomes, it also created challenges in aligning graduate qualifications with labour market needs, highlighting the need for better coordination between educational institutions and employers. **Froy et al.** (2012) OECD report underlines that collaboration between universities, VET institutions and companies is essential to align educational programmes with the needs of the labour market. **Destefanis** (2012) highlights the underutilization of high-skilled workers and the shortage of technical skills crucial for competitiveness. The study recommends enhancing VET, improving the alignment between education and labour market demands, and fostering stronger

partnerships between educational institutions and industries. These steps are essential for boosting Italy's productivity and long-term economic growth. **Frerichs et al. (2012)** further explore the role of continuing education as a tool to improve the skills of workers already in the labour market, with a particular focus on ageing policies. Emphasizes the importance of active ageing in organizations, offering evidence that such policies not only improve the working lives of older employees but can also contribute to the competitiveness and sustainability of companies. Recommendations include promoting cultural change that embraces the ageing workforce and integrating age management policies at all levels of the organization. **Destefanis et al. (2015)** examine how the Jobs Act has reshaped the demand and supply of skills, revealing a persistent mismatch between the qualifications of job seekers and the requirements of employers. It also addresses the effectiveness of the Jobs Act in promoting employment, especially in areas with structural economic weaknesses. The authors discuss potential policy measures to align skills more closely with labour market needs and improve Mezzogiorno's employment prospects. **Palumbo's (2013)** work explores how vocational training policies influence endogenous productivity. However, his research points out that the lack of strategic investment in education and training has made it difficult for Italy to close the skills gap with other European countries. **De Paoli (2010)** explores how the significant change of the "3+2" reform has significantly increased the number of graduates. However, this has not translated into an improvement in wage and employment conditions nor a partial resolution of the structural mismatch. The author hopes that future reforms can better meet the changes in employment expectations for graduates and the labour market.

d) Implications of Job Quality on Supply and Demand Matching

The quality of employment is a key factor in attracting and retaining skills. In **Deleidi & Paternesi Meloni (2019)**, it is highlighted that the quality of employment, characterised by precariousness and low wages, has contributed to the stagnation of the demand for high skills, limiting the

alignment between demand and supply of skills and that economic policies to support aggregate demand for labour that would incentivise employment growth. According to **Colonna** (2017), the quality of employment, especially in terms of contractual stability, is closely linked to the productivity and competitiveness of firms. Job instability and the absence of investment in advanced skills have contributed to the stagnation of the demand for skilled workers. **Cappellari et al.** (2012) point out that high-quality job opportunities attract local and international talent, while precarious employment can discourage skilled workers. A lack of adequate working conditions often leads to a skills gap. The quality of employment has a substantial impact on skills mismatch. They suggest balancing flexibility with job security is key to achieving positive productivity outcomes. **Malgarini et al. (2013)** argue that the spread of temporary contracts and long-term uncertainty hinder the development of specialised skills in workers, creating a vicious circle that perpetuates the mismatch between supply and demand, as also pointed out by **Cappellari et al.** (2012). **Malgarini et al. (2013)** argue that a more stable and skilled workforce is necessary for firms to realise innovation's benefits fully. This suggests excessive reliance on temporary hires may undermine long-term productivity and competitiveness.

e) Social Partners' Strategies to Address the Mismatch between Supply and Demand

Salis (2014) shows that labour market governance in the healthcare sector highlights a poor collaboration between government and social partners in promoting training strategies that respond to market needs. Coherently, **Oppedisano** (2014) highlights the need for targeted policies to address the challenges unskilled workers face in a labour market increasingly dominated by college graduates. These policies could include retraining programs, incentives for hiring unskilled workers, and measures to improve labour market flexibility. In addition, it is important to promote inclusive economic growth that creates opportunities for all workers, regardless of their level of education.

2. Skills Matching and Immigration

a) Choices between Local Human Capital and Migrants' Recruitment

Businesses rely on and recruit migrant workers to compensate for local skills shortages, especially in highly skilled sectors. Many Italian companies prefer to recruit migrants for technical jobs, as local talent is not always available. **Colonna (2017)** explores the possibility that Italian firms are discouraged from using skill-intensive technologies because the relative scarcity of educated workers significantly impacts their recruitment costs. The results suggest local human capital's significant and positive impact on firms' demand for high-skill occupations. In the model, this elasticity is exogenous but could reflect policies or other institutions that influence the mechanism of matching labour supply and demand. **Bettin et al. (2014)** explore how firms in the Italian manufacturing sector prefer the recruitment of migrant workers. The employment of these workers can help improve the performance of manufacturing firms.

b) Impact of Employment Quality on Migration

Better working conditions, competitive wages and growth opportunities attract skilled migrant workers, thus affecting migration decisions and flow patterns. Conversely, precarious working conditions can lead to the emigration of local talent to countries with more stable labour markets and higher wages. Employment with low growth opportunities and insufficient wages fosters brain drain to countries with better working conditions, while stable and well-paid working conditions can attract skilled migrants. To improve the integration of migrants into the Italian labour market, the authors suggest greater coherence between labour and migration policies, as well as the implementation of training and integration programs that foster migrants' occupational mobility (**Fellini & Fullin, 2018**). Precarious working conditions and low wages are among the main reasons why highly skilled workers emigrate from countries like Italy, this is the case for many PhDs and highly trained people such as doctors and nurses who leave the country to find their

fortune elsewhere (**Ghosh & Grassi, 2020; Aronica et al., 2023**). Lastly, Dottori (2021) provides a detailed and nuanced analysis of the impact of automation on employment in Italy, highlighting how the introduction of industrial robots is transforming the labour market. While there have been negative effects for some groups of (low skilled) workers, there are also significant opportunities for those (high skilled) who can adapt to new market demands. Also, in **Salis (2014)**, it is pointed out that poor working conditions and low wages in positions reserved for migrants have favoured the segregation of this category in certain sectors such as care and manufacturing (**Bettin et al., 2014**). This has also led to a greater reliance on migration to compensate for the lack of local labour in less attractive sectors. On the other hand, the absence of career opportunities and competitive salaries often leads to a brain drain (Ghosh & Grassi, 2020) even at the doctoral level (Aronica et al., 2023) as it is increasingly competitive (Green & Henseke, 2021), while migrant employment is generally confined to less skilled jobs.

c) Defending the Rights of Native and Migrant Workers

Fellini and Fullin (2018) offer a detailed and critical analysis of the challenges migrant workers face in the Italian labour market, highlighting the crucial role of institutions and policies in determining their employment opportunities and suggesting possible reforms to improve their integration.

d) Qualifications as Criteria for the Selection of Migrant Workers

As highlighted by **Oppedisano (2014)**, although the expansion of higher education has brought significant benefits for college graduates and contributed to economic growth, it has also had negative effects on unskilled workers.

e) Qualification Recognition Schemes for Migrants

Qualification recognition schemes for migrants are often opaque and difficult to navigate, creating barriers to entry for foreign skilled workers. The introduction of tools such as EQF has improved transparency (**Elken, 2016**), but bureaucratic challenges remain.

f) Accessibility to Training (VET, HE, CVT) for Migrants

There are efforts to make vocational training programs accessible to migrants, but language and institutional barriers limit access. Specific programmes for migrants, such as language courses and recognition of previous skills, can facilitate labour integration (**Destefanis, 2012**). Migrants have limited access to continuing and vocational training programmes. The on-the-job formation can be a solution but not the panacea (Battistelli et al., 2019; Brunetti & Corsini, 2017).

3. Potential of the Partnerships and Cooperation on Skill Formation and Sustainable Migration

a) International Skills Transferability

The Italian educational system is often characterized by a rigid separation between formal and nonformal education, with little synergy between the different actors (schools, universities, training providers, etc.). This can create coordination problems that make it difficult for adults to access learning opportunities that are flexible and tailored to their needs. To improve adult participation in education in Italy, **Desjardins and Rubenson** (2013) suggest that a more coordinated, public policy-based approach is needed that considers regional specificities and individual needs. Emphasis should be placed on program flexibility, recognition of acquired qualifications and equitable access for all categories of adults. They point out that, in Italy, low participation in adult education is partly due to coordination problems between institutions and a fragmented policy framework (state-region competencies).

b) Transparency of National Qualification Systems

Tools such as Europass and EQF have improved the transparency of national qualification systems. However, implementing these tools is still fragmented, limiting cross-country comparability and hampering the mobility of migrant workers. While there are tools to compare qualifications, such as ECTS, Europass and EQF, their adoption is not always uniform across Member States. However, accessibility remains an issue, especially for migrant workers.

4. Summary

The issue of skills mismatch is intricately connected to economic trends, technological advancements, and demographic shifts. Industries that demand specialized skills, particularly in engineering and technology, are increasingly creating a higher demand for skilled workers. However, education and training systems, especially in project countries, are finding it challenging to keep pace with this demand. Educational strategies promoting collaboration between companies and training institutions have effectively reduced this gap, but large-scale implementation remains challenging. At the same time, the quality of employment plays a crucial role in retaining local talent and attracting skilled migrants. Regarding migration, migrant workers are a key resource for covering skills shortages in many countries. However, they face significant barriers, such as the recognition of qualifications and the defence of their rights in the workplace. While tools such as the EQF have improved transparency, gaps remain in qualifications recognition schemes. Finally, international partnerships and cooperation in training and skills mobility are essential to address future challenges. However, the implementation of these instruments varies significantly between countries, and their effectiveness depends on political will and coordination capacity at the regional and international levels.

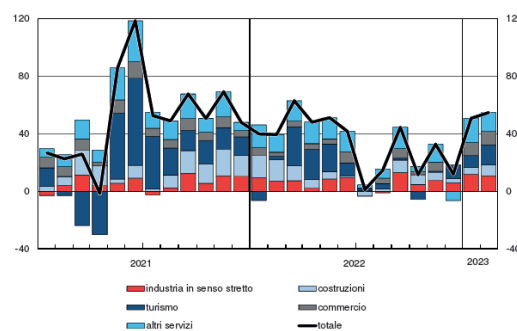
Statistical evidence

1. Trends of Demand and Supply of Skills in Project Partner Countries

1.1. Trends in the Structure of Demand in Terms of Required Levels of Education/Qualification

Following a significant slowdown in the latter half of 2022, demand for labour in the non-agricultural private sector rebounded strongly in the first two months of 2023. Between January and February, over 100,000 new jobs were created, net of terminations—more than double the number added during the preceding two months and approximately one-third higher than the figures recorded in the same months of 2019, prior to the pandemic²². Labour demand was primarily driven by the services sector, which experienced overall low growth rates in the latter part of 2022 (Fig. 3). During the first two months of 2023, 22,000 new jobs were created in tourism, representing one-fifth of the total positions added. In the industrial sector, after a slowdown last summer, employment dynamics continued to improve, aided by the recovery of the most energy-intensive industries. These sectors benefited from a decrease in energy prices during the latter part of 2022. Meanwhile, the construction sector showed relatively stable trends.

Figure 3 *Net activations in macro-sectors*



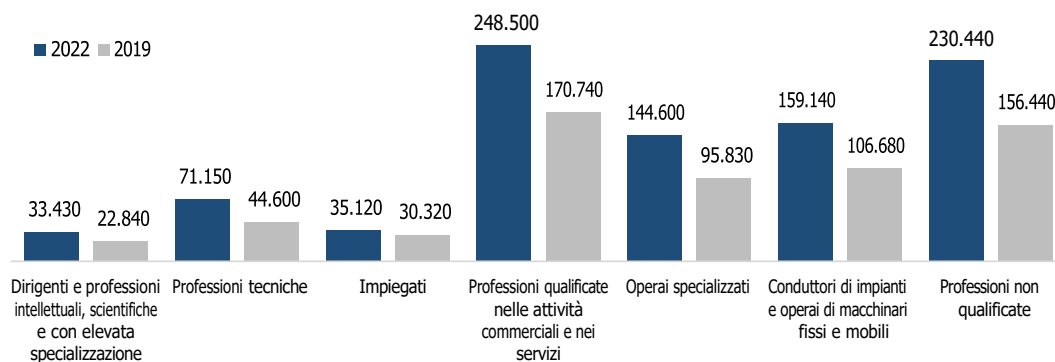
Source: Nizza et al. (2023)

22

<https://www.lavoro.gov.it/documenti-e-norme/studi-e-statistiche/Documents/Il%20mercato%20del%20lavoro%20dati%20e%20analisi%20-%20marzo%202023/MLPS-Bankitalia-Anpal-marzo-2023.pdf>

The economic distance that separates Italy from the average of the leading countries is mainly attributable to the inability of the economic system to meet the demand for goods and services that the market demands. Italy has shortages in **healthcare** (doctors, nurses, and healthcare assistants), **IT** (software developers, data scientists, cybersecurity experts), **engineering**, and **technical fields** (mechanics, electricians). The **hospitality** and **agricultural** sectors also often struggle to find workers, especially for seasonal roles. Surveys in recent years on the planned income of immigrant personnel reveal a picture of stable needs over time and constantly growing (Fig. 3).

Figure 4 Planned entries of immigrant personnel by professional macro-group (absolute values*, 2022 and 2019)



Source: Unioncamere – ANPAL, Excelsior Information System, 2019-2022. * Absolute values rounded to tens.

The increase in planned recruitment of migrant staff (Fig. 4) is widespread at all professional levels. Between 2019 and 2022, there was a high of almost +60% for technical professions (+27,000 units in absolute values, for a total of about 71,000 hires in 2022), thanks to the growing demand from the nursing and health professions (a total of about 23,000 entries) and those related to digital transformation (15,000 entries in total), to a minimum of +15.8% for white-collar workers (35,000 scheduled contracts), a professional field in which the demand for foreigners is traditionally limited. On the other hand, there is an increase of about 50% for the figures of specialized workers and plant operators (equal to +101,000 entries, reaching a total of almost 304,000 entries), with much higher growth peaks for bricklayers, electricians, workers in charge of packaging machines of industrial products and workers of automatic/semi-automatic industrial machine tools

(respectively, 39,000 requests, 12,000, 13,000 and 16,000 entries). Qualified professions in commerce and services are those in which the demand of companies for immigrant workers is concentrated, with a total of more than 248,000 entries, with a sustained growth compared to 2019, equal to +45.5%, which corresponds to +78,000 hires, the most significant increase in absolute value. Among the professional figures that contribute most to this dynamic are those in the tourism-catering supply chain, such as cooks (almost 36,000 hires, +50.1%) and waiters (about 62,000, +55.9%). Even for unskilled professions, which follow the order of planned hires' consistency (over 230,000), the increase was significant, equal to +47.3% (+74,000 requests in absolute value). The most significant impact on this evolution came from some profiles employed in the **hubs of the logistics** and goods **delivery** system, such as unqualified personnel in charge of packaging and warehousing (over 45,000 requests, +141.8% compared to 2019), and from unqualified personnel in the cleaning services of offices and commercial establishments (almost 120,000 hires, +42,5%)²³.

1.1.1. STEM Skills Shortage

Italy lags in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, resulting in a shortage of professionals in these high-demand areas²⁴. Research and development (R&D) investment is relatively low, further hampering innovation and competitiveness. In 2023²⁵, 25.0% of young people (25-34 years old) with a tertiary degree have a degree in the subject areas of science and technology, the so-called STEM degrees (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). The share rises to 37.0% among men (+2.5 % compared to 2022) and drops to 16.8% among women (stable share compared to 2022), highlighting a marked gender gap. The territorial

²³ Source: Unioncamere – ANPAL, Excelsior Information System, 2019-2022.

²⁴ <https://www.openpolis.it/in-italia-ampi-divari-di-genere-nellapprendimento-delle-stem/> Retrieved 07.02.2025
https://www.openpolis.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/report_stem.pdf Retrieved 07.02.2025

²⁵ <https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/REPORT-livelli-istruzione.pdf> Retrieved: 01.10.2024.

differences for graduates in STEM disciplines are evident for the male component: the share varies from 27.5% in the South to 41.4% in the North. The university course of study determines important differences in the employment rates of graduates. In 2023, the employment rate among 25-64-year-olds with degrees in the Humanities and Services area is 79.5%, rises to 84.2% for graduates in the Socio-economic and Legal area, stands at 86.6% for STEM and reaches the highest value (88.6%) among graduates in the Medical-health and pharmaceutical area (ISTAT, 2024).

1.2. Socio-Economic Factors influencing Changing Skills Demand

The skills demand in Italy is changing due to various socio-economic factors, primarily influenced by both domestic and global dynamics (ISTAT, 2024; Eures, 2023), such as:

- **Digital and Green Transitions:** Italy and the broader EU are experiencing a growing need for digital and green skills. This shift is driven by the European Skills Agenda, which emphasizes preparing workers with skills for emerging sectors like digital technologies, green energy, and sustainability. Italy is also pushing for upskilling and reskilling programs to meet the demand for expertise in these areas, especially as part of its recovery from the pandemic.

- **Economic Policies and Investments:** The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) aims to support Italy's recovery through significant public investment, directly influencing labour market needs. These investments emphasize infrastructure, technology, and healthcare sectors, requiring a workforce skilled in these fields. Additionally, Italy's efforts to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through EU initiatives have further heightened the demand for technical and managerial skills.

- **Geographical Disparities:** Regional demand for skills across Italy has variations. The northern regions, with more substantial industrial bases, are seeing greater demand for specialized skills in sectors like manufacturing and automation. Meanwhile, southern Italy, which faces higher

unemployment, requires more general employment initiatives focused on reskilling and labour market integration.

These socio-economic factors reflect the broader trends in the Italian labour market, where technological innovation, sustainability, and regional disparities shape new skill requirements.

1.3. Trends in Human Capital Supply in Terms of Attained Education and Qualifications

The share of the population aged 25-64 with at least an upper secondary education qualification is the leading indicator of a country's level of education. The secondary school diploma is considered, in fact, the indispensable level of training for participation in the labour market with individual growth potential. In Italy, in 2020, this share was 62.9% (+0.7% compared to 2019), a value significantly lower than the European average (79.0% in the EU27) and that of some of the largest countries in the Union (ISTAT, 2021). Moreover, the share of 25–64-year-olds with a tertiary qualification in Italy is also very low, equal to 20.1% against 32.8% in the EU27 average. 2020 confirms that the growth of the graduate population in Italy is slower than in other EU countries: the increase is only 0.5% in the last year, less than half of the EU27 average (+1.2%) and much lower than what was recorded in France (+1.7), Spain (+1.1) and Germany (+1.4) (ISTAT, 2021).

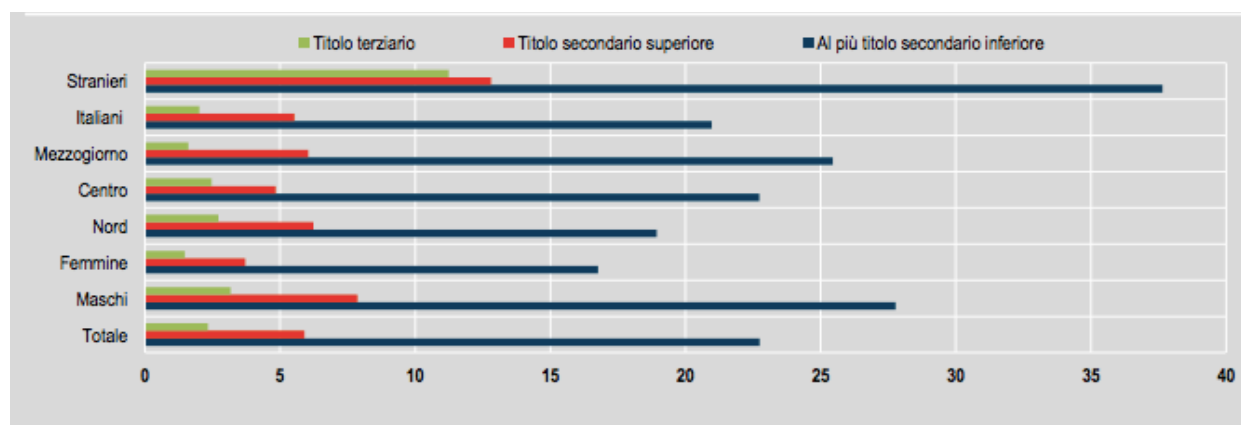
1.4. Socio-Demographic and Institutional Factors Influencing Skills Supply

The share of young people who drop out of school in Italy is always high. In Europe, the phenomenon is measured by the share of 18–24-year-olds who, with at most a lower secondary qualification, are outside the education and training system (*Early Leavers from Education and Training*, ELET). This indicator was one of the benchmarks of the Europe 2020 Strategy, which set the European target value at 10%, reduced to 9% by 2030²⁶. In Italy, in 2020, the share of young people who left school early was 13.1%, for a total of about 543,000 young people, slightly down compared to the previous year. Although Italy has made significant progress in early school

²⁶ 'Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030' - 2021/C 66/01)

leaving, the share of ELET remains among the highest in the EU. In fact, in the closing year of the Union's ten-year strategy, the percentage fell to 9.9% on average in the EU27 (a value even slightly lower than the target set) since France has already reached the target value for several years and Germany has practically reached it during 2020. School dropout characterizes boys (15.6%) more than girls (10.4%), and for the latter, there is also a decrease in the last year (-1.1%). The socio-economic characteristics of the family of origin strongly influence early school leaving. Very high incidences of early leavers are therefore found where the parent's level of education and/or professional education is low (Fig. 5). Dropping out of school before graduation concerns 22.7% of young people whose parents have – at most – a middle school diploma, 5.9% of those whose parents have an upper secondary qualification and 2.3% of young people with parents with a university degree. Similarly, if the parents are unskilled or do not work, school dropouts are more frequent (around 22%) and are lower if the father's or mother's profession is highly skilled or white-collar (3% and 9%, respectively). The disadvantage of the family environment seems to condition the early school dropout of young people residing more in the southern regions. The dropout rates among young people with parents with medium and high levels of education are, in fact, somewhat similar in the North and the South. At the same time, there are vast differences in the case of parents with, at most, a middle school diploma (25.5% in the South against 18.9% in the North). Conversely, the higher socio-economic family context appears less effective in protecting young foreigners from dropping out of school. In Italian families with a high level of education, the incidence of young people who have dropped out of school early is ten times lower than that recorded in Italian families with low levels of education; in foreign families, this gap is just three times.

Figure 5 Young people aged 18-24 ELET by parental qualification, gender, geographical distribution % citizenship. Year 2020, %



Source: Istat (2021)

The territorial gaps are vast and persistent. In 2020, 16.3% of young people in the South, 11.0% in the North and 11.5% in the Centre left school before completing the upper secondary system or vocational training. The territorial gap between the North and the South narrowed to 5.3 points in 2020, thanks to the decline recorded in the South after the substantial stability that characterized the previous five-year period (7.7 points in 2019). Among young people with non-Italian citizenship, the rate of early school dropout is more than three times higher than that of Italians: 35.4% against 11.0%. Moreover, between 2008 and 2014, there was a significant drop in early dropouts among foreigners; in the last six years, the reduction involved only Italian citizens. The incidence of early abandonment among foreigners born abroad varies greatly depending on the age of arrival in Italy. Among those who arrived within the age of 9, the share is 19.7%, rises to 33.4% among those between 10 and 15 years of age and reaches 57.3% for those who entered Italy between 16 and 24 (ISTAT, 2021).

1.4.1. The Gender Gap

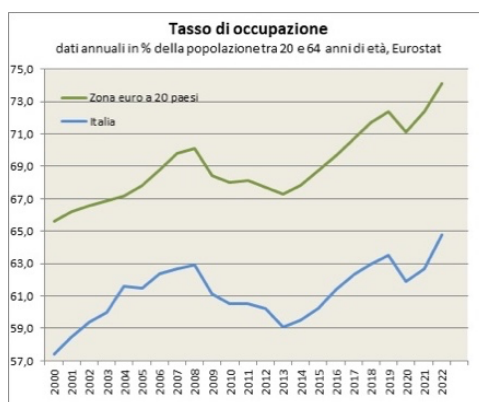
In 2020, the growth in women's education levels is like that of men: +0.6 against +0.7 points for the share of the population with at least a diploma; +0.6 against +0.4 points for the graduate population. Therefore, the dynamic of more significant growth that had characterized women's

education in previous years is interrupted. Women's education level remains significantly higher than men's: women with at least a high school diploma are 65.1% and men 60.5%, a much higher difference than that observed in the EU27 average, equal to about one percentage point. Women with university degrees are 23.0% and men 17.2%; the female advantage, once again more marked than the EU average, does not translate into a similar advantage in the workplace. Foreign women also have a higher level of education than men: five out of ten foreigners have at least a diploma compared to four out of ten men, 14.3% of whom have a university degree compared to 8.3% of men (ISTAT, 2021).

2. Trends of Employment in Terms of Levels of Qualifications and Education

The following graph presents the employment rate in Italy and the euro-member area. The data are the annual average calculated by Eurostat. The age group considered aligns with the corresponding indicator in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Figure 6 Employment rate in Italy and the Euro Zone (2020-2022)



Source: DIPE elaboration on Eurostat data

Figure 6 shows that in Italy²⁷, a historical trend of increasing employment levels emerges, according to a dynamic in phases: from 2000 to 2008, with a constant growth from 57% to 63%

²⁷ <https://finanza.lastampa.it/News/2024/03/13/lavoro-istat-nel-2023-tasso-di-disoccupazione-cala-al-7-7percento/MzdfMjAyNC0wMy0xM19UTEI>. Retrieved 01.10.2024

followed by a decline of up to 59% that affected the period from 2008 to 2013, the period affected by the economic crisis between the first and second decade of the century. Hence, new growth from 2013 to 2019 made the employment rate exceed the previous maximum level by three-tenths. In the following two years, affected by the pandemic crisis and the consequent lockdown, there was a small drop of one point, followed by a recovery, which is still ongoing, which exceeded 64% in 2022. Despite very similar fluctuations, the unemployment rate in Italy maintains a constant distance from the average of the 19-member euro area, which stands between 7-9%. The employment rate of women increased slightly more than men's (+1.4% compared to +1.2%) and was associated with the sharpest decrease in the unemployment rate (-0.6% and -0.3% respectively). The gap against women stands at about an 18% differential for employment and inactivity rates (15-64 years) and 2% for the unemployment rate. Among 50–64-year-olds, the increase in the employment rate is more marked than among younger age groups (+1.9% compared to +1.2% for 15–34-year-olds and +1.1% for 35–49-year-olds), as is the decrease in the inactivity rate (-1.8% compared to -0.8% and -1.1%). The unemployment rate, on the other hand, decreased more among young people (-1.1%) compared to 35–49-year-olds (-0.1%) and over-50s (-0.3%). Finally, as far as foreign workers are concerned, on an annual average, the data show a growth in the employment rate (+1.0%) lower than that of Italians (+1.4%), a more pronounced drop in the unemployment rate (-0.7% compared to -0.4% for Italians) and a minor reduction in the inactivity rate for 15–64-year-olds (-0.7% and -1.2% respectively).

The employment growth, compared to 2022, mainly affects permanent employees (+491 thousand, +3.3%) and – to a lesser extent – the self-employed (+62 thousand, +1.3); on the other hand, there was a decrease in employees with fixed-term contracts (-73 thousand, -2.4%). The increase in full-time work observed in the previous two years continued (+446 thousand, +2.4%), and part-time work also grew faster than in the previous year (+35 thousand, +0.8%). In 2023, the decrease in

the number of jobseekers continued, albeit attenuated compared to 2022 (-81 thousand, -4.0%), falling to 1 million 947 thousand; those who have been looking for work for less than a year have increased slightly and – consequently – the incidence of long-term unemployed (for at least 12 months) has decreased to 54.8% (-2.5 points in one year).

The use of informal channels in the search for employment remains the most widespread practice: the share of those who turn to relatives, friends and acquaintances increases and reaches 76.6% (+1.2%); the incidence of those who have looked for work by turning to the Public Employment Centres has also grown markedly, amounting to 25.8% (+3.5%), while the shares of those who carry out other formal search actions are more stable, such as sending applications/CVs (corresponding to 64.9%), consulting job offers equal to 47.6% (+0.6 points), responding to ads or posting ads for 30.0%, (+0.4%) or having contacted a temporary employment agency, unchanged at 20.0%.

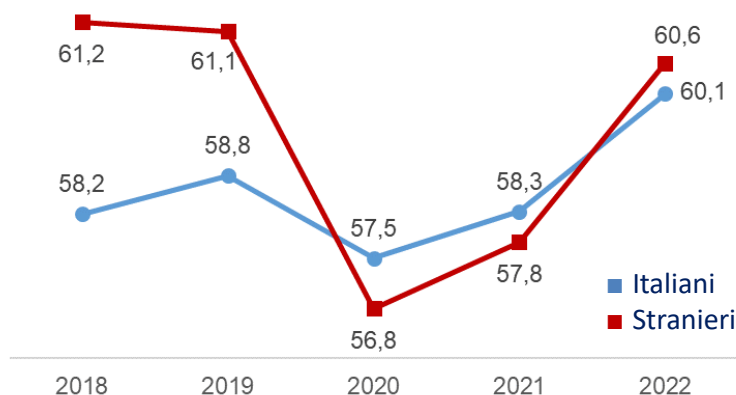
2.1. Foreigners in Italy – Employment Rate

In Italy, foreigners make up over 8% of the population. They constitute about 10% of the workforce, with even higher percentages in specific sectors like agriculture and construction. Italy primarily attracts unskilled labour, and many skilled foreign workers end up in low-level positions.²⁸ Fig. 7 shows the trend in the employment rate based on citizenship concerning the period 2018-2022. It includes the pandemic crisis, which has affected foreign workers more markedly than those of Italian origin. The former lost as much as 4.4 percentage points from 2018 to 2020, while in the same period, the contraction of the native component was 0.7 percentage points. However, the recovery in employment between 2020 and 2022 recorded a recovery of 3.8

²⁸ Leone Moressa Foundation (2023). *2023 Annual Report on the Economics of Immigration*, Rome. <https://www.fondazioneleonemoressa.org/2023/10/19/rapporto-2023-sulleconomia-dellimmigrazione/> Retrieved: 27.04.2024.

percentage points for the former, while for the latter, it was limited to 2.6%, as we will see, a factor strongly influenced by the demographic component.

Figure 7 Time series employment rate (15-64 years) by citizenship



Source: Leone Moressa Foundation calculations based on Istat data

The growth in the employment rate can be explained entirely by following demographic dynamics, since there was no increase in non-EU employment in the period under review (Tab. 2).

Table 2 Population changes by occupational status, citizenship and gender (a.v. and %). II trim. 2022 – Q2 2023

CONDIZIONE OCCUPAZIONALE	Maschi		Femmine	
	V.a.	V.%	V.a.	V.%
Occupati tot. stranieri 15 anni e oltre	-21.229	-1,5	-15.990	-1,6
UE	-2.934	-0,8	-12.995	-3,5
Non UE	-18.296	-1,8	-2.994	-0,5
Persone in cerca tot. stranieri 15 anni e oltre	-2.237	-1,5	-15.892	-9,1
UE	-4.144	-14,4	-5.044	-7,6
Non UE	1.908	1,6	-10.848	-9,9
Inattivi tot. stranieri 15-64 anni	-5.170	-1,7	-35.821	-4,0
UE	10.507	16,5	3.693	1,6
Non UE	-15.677	-6,5	-39.514	-6,0

Source: Data Science Applications - ADS elaborations by Anpal Services on microdata RCFL – ISTAT

On the other hand, as far as EU foreigners are concerned, the drop in employment (-18 thousand; -2.6%) was accompanied by a reduction in the reference population (-12 thousand; -1.1%). From a gender point of view (Fig. 8), foreign employment shows the most marked reductions among

men with non-EU citizenship (-18 thousand; -1.8%) and women with EU citizenship (-13 thousand; -3.5%). The decline in unemployment is more pronounced among men with EU citizenship (-4 thousand; -14.4%) and non-EU women (-11 thousand; -9.9%). Finally, between the second quarter of 2022 and the second quarter of 2023, the pool of inactive people with EU citizenship expanded, both among men (+11 thousand; +16.5%) and among women (+4 thousand; +1.6%); conversely, inactivity decreased for non-EU citizens of both sexes (males: -16 thousand, -6.5%; females: -40 thousand, -6.0%). Looking at the employment of the resident population in Italy by age group (Tab. 3), we note that among 15–24-year-olds and in the age group >55 years, there is the most significant increase in foreign employment (respectively: +4.3%; +2.4%). Conversely, the number of employed foreigners decreased among 25–34-year-olds (-1.3%) and 35–44-year-olds (-5.5%). Among EU citizens, there was a more marked contraction in employment in the 25–24 age group (-19.0%), while for non-EU citizens, the intensity of the decline was more significant among 35–44-year-olds (-7.6%). Unemployment is particularly significant among 15–24-year-olds, both EU (-37.2%) and non-EU (-9.9%); again, concerning unemployment, the most significant increases, on the contrary, are noted among 25–34-year-olds in the EU (+17.2%) and non-EU foreigners aged 55 and over (+5.8%). The trend in inactivity reveals a more pronounced growth among 35–44-year-olds with EU citizenship (+22.5%). Among non-EU citizens, in a context marked by the downward trend in inactivity (-6.1%), the most significant reduction is noted among 25–34-year-olds (-13.6%).

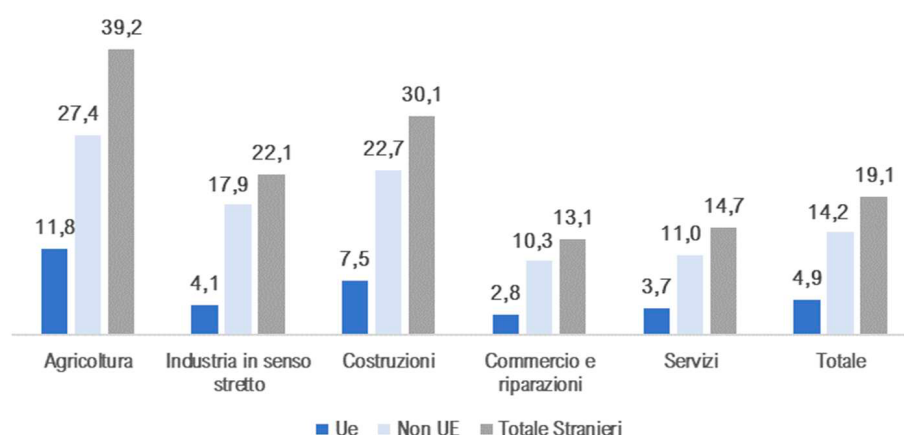
Table 3 Employed, jobseekers and inactive persons by age group and nationality (a.v. and % compared with the same quarter of the previous year). Q2 2023

CONDIZIONE OCCUPAZIONALE E CLASSE D'ETA'	UE	Non UE	Totale	UE	Non UE	Totale	UE	Non UE	Totale
	V.a.			Var. ass. II '23/II '22			Var. % II '23/II '22		
Occupati 15 anni e oltre	702.881	1.642.339	2.345.220	-15.929	-21.290	-37.219	-2,2	-1,3	-1,6
15-24	27.232	95.773	123.005	3.210	1.914	5.124	13,4	2,0	4,3
25-34	121.815	388.177	509.992	-28.552	21.602	-6.950	-19,0	5,9	-1,3
35-44	223.061	516.641	739.702	-459	-42.486	-42.945	-0,2	-7,6	-5,5
45-54	224.867	415.479	640.346	5.918	-6.170	-252	2,7	-1,5	0,0
55 e oltre	105.906	226.269	332.174	3.954	3.850	7.804	3,9	1,7	2,4
Persone in cerca 15 anni e oltre	85.726	216.682	302.408	-9.189	-8.940	-18.129	-9,7	-4,0	-5,7
15-24	7.242	30.955	38.197	-4.286	-3.401	-7.687	-37,2	-9,9	-16,8
25-34	19.934	46.689	66.623	2.924	-3.356	-432	17,2	-6,7	-0,6
35-44	23.916	59.611	83.526	-2.913	-3.476	-6.389	-10,9	-5,5	-7,1
45-54	25.330	50.831	76.160	-396	-277	-673	-1,5	-0,5	-0,9
55 e oltre	9.304	28.597	37.901	-4.517	1.570	-2.948	-32,7	5,8	-7,2
Inattivi 15-64 anni	312.937	850.972	1.163.909	14.200	-55.191	-40.991	4,8	-6,1	-3,4
15-24	87.499	232.553	320.052	7.920	-6.315	1.606	10,0	-2,6	0,5
25-34	54.271	191.250	245.521	-10.187	-30.037	-40.224	-15,8	-13,6	-14,1
35-44	73.885	184.236	258.121	13.564	-12.939	625	22,5	-6,6	0,2
45-54	63.031	141.955	204.987	1.821	8.169	9.990	3,0	6,1	5,1
55-64	34.250	100.977	135.228	1.083	-14.069	-12.987	3,3	-12,2	-8,8

Source: Data Science Applications - ADS elaborations by Anpal Services on microdata RCFL – ISTAT

The sector in which the highest concentration of activations involving foreign workers is recorded is Agriculture (39.2%), followed by Construction (30.1%), Industry in the strict sense (22.1%), Other activities in Services (14.7%) and Trade and Repairs (13.1% of the total; Fig. 8).

Figure 8 Percentage incidence of the number of employment relationships activated involving foreign workers on the total employment relationships activated by sector of economic activity. Year 2022



Source: Data Science Applications - Studies and Research Department of Anpal Servizi on data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies - Statistical Information System of Compulsory Communications

Between 2021 and 2022, except Agriculture, all economic sectors show an evident growth in labour demand; the number of hires of non-EU citizens increased in all sectors of economic activity, in particular in Construction (+29.9%) and in Other activities in Services (+18.5%), while for EU citizens there was a decrease in Agriculture (-4.7%) and an increase in the other sectors, more marked in Construction (+18%). Concerning gender distribution, the percentage composition shows how the share of male and female workers' hires changes according to the economic activity considered. The Construction sector, for example, absorbs almost exclusively the male workforce (98.0% of the relationships activated), as well as Agriculture (78.8%) and Industry in the strict sense (76.8%). In comparison, the presence of the female component is conspicuous in other activities in Services (53.5%) and in Trade and Repairs (36.4%). It should be noted that in the case of the EU component, in other activities in the Services, out of 100 activations intended for EU citizens, 70 involved female workers (Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, 2023b). Finally, for 2025, through the last decree (DL. DL 145/24), key sectors allowed to apply for migrant worker's visas were logistics and public transport, tourism and hospitality, mechanics, telecommunications, food industry, shipbuilding, fishing, and trades like hairdressing, plumbing, and electrical work. Specific quotas are highlighted for family and social-health assistance, with 9,500 annual entries allocated for roles like caregivers. Employers in this sector must meet specific income requirements unless hiring for personal assistance due to specific conditions. Additionally, there is an experimental quota of 10,000 entries for caregivers assisting individuals over 80 years old or those with disabilities²⁹.

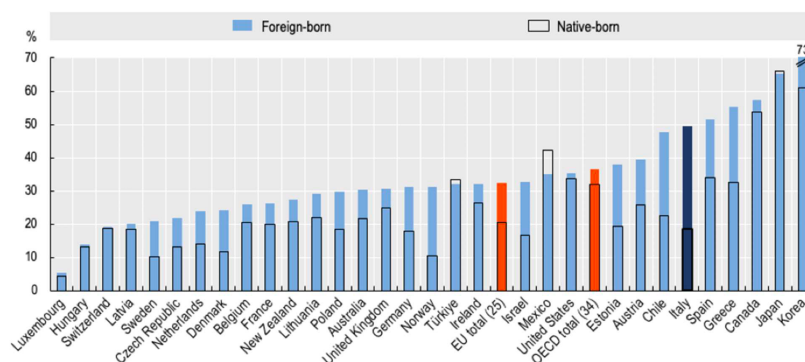
²⁹ <https://integrazionemigranti.gov.it/it-it/Altre-info/e/2/o/62///id/150/Flussi-2025-I-settori-produttivi> Retrieved 28.01.2025.

3. Trends of Overqualification, Skill Underutilization among Native Workforce and Migrant Workers and Skills Shortages in the 5-10 Sectors of Economy with Highest Skill Mismatches

3.1. Overqualification: Volume/Share of Native Workforce and Migrant Workers Employed in Jobs Requiring Lower Qualification than They Possess

A key measure of labour market outcomes for highly educated immigrants is the rate of overqualification, which occurs when individuals with advanced education are employed in positions that do not require their level of formal training. In several OECD countries (Fig. 9), including Canada, Japan, and the United States, this issue affects both foreign-born and native-born workers similarly. However, immigrants face a much more significant challenge in Europe—particularly in the Nordic and southern European nations. For instance, in 2021, nearly half (49%) of tertiary-educated immigrants in Italy were working in roles beneath their qualifications, compared to just 19% of native-born Italians. Only a few OECD countries, such as Norway, exhibit a disparity between native and immigrant workers as pronounced as Italy's.

Figure 9 Overqualification rates. Highly educated people employed in jobs requiring a lower level of education, 15-64 years old, 2021 (Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, 2023b).



Source: OECD/European Commission (2023), Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2023

Italy, alongside the UK and Spain, stands out as one of the few countries where the overqualification rate for immigrants has improved. At the same time, that of native workers has

worsened, thereby narrowing the gap between the two groups. In Italy, the overqualification rate among immigrants in 2021 was slightly lower than in 2011, with a reduction of 3%. Meanwhile, overqualification among natives increased by 3%. This reduction in immigrants reflects progress compared to the situation a decade ago. The underlying causes of high overqualification rates are multifaceted. Immigrants with tertiary education may lack key skills required for highly skilled jobs, such as knowledge of the local labour market, advanced language proficiency, and professional networks. One of the most effective solutions is fostering local education initiatives to attract and retain international students.

3.2. Skills Underutilization: Volume/Share of Native Workforce and Migrant Workers Employed in Part-Time Jobs, Gig Economy, Jobs Requiring Different Qualification

Just over 87% of foreign employees (2mln) in 2022 have an employment contract; the remaining 12.9% (307k) have a self-employment contract. Considering the nature of employment, between 2021 and 2022, dependent employment among non-EU foreigners grew in the permanent component (+5.9%) and the temporary component (+15.1%). Among citizens with EU citizenship, in the same period, dependent employment decreased in the permanent component (-2.0%), while it increased slightly for temporary contracts (+0.3%). The number of self-employed, on the other hand, increased both among EU foreigners (+10.6%) and among non-EU citizens (+7.0%; Tab. 4).

Table 4 Employed persons aged 15 and over by type of employment and citizenship (a.v. & var. %). Year 2022

CARATTERE DELL'OCCUPAZIONE	Valori assoluti					Var.% 2022/2021				
	Italiani	Stranieri			Totale	Italiani	Stranieri			Totale
		Totale	UE	Non UE			Totale	UE	Non UE	
Dipendente	16.055.756	2.067.673	636.745	1.430.929	18.123.429	2,5	4,8	-1,5	7,9	2,8
Tempo determinato	2.579.659	465.208	135.211	329.997	3.044.866	4,2	10,4	0,3	15,1	5,1
Tempo indeterminato	13.476.097	1.602.465	501.533	1.100.932	15.078.563	2,2	3,3	-2,0	5,9	2,4
Indipendente	4.669.162	306.798	81.209	225.589	4.975.960	0,6	8,0	10,6	7,0	1,1
Totale	20.724.918	2.374.471	717.953	1.656.517	23.099.389	2,1	5,2	-0,3	7,8	2,4

Fonte: elaborazioni Applicazioni Data Science - Direzione Studi e Ricerche di Anpal Servizi su microdati RCFL – ISTAT

However, what work do foreign people residing in Italy do? There is mostly an intense concentration of foreign labour in purely executive profiles (Tab. 5); there is little presence in managerial and similar roles: just 1% of employees have a managerial or middle manager qualification compared to 7.4% of the Italian counterpart, and just over 75% are employed with the qualification of blue-collar workers (in the case of native employees it is 31.6% of the total considered). The share of self-employed foreign workers is more substantial (9.1%), and on the other hand, the presence of entrepreneurs (1.7%) and freelancers (1.4%) is small.

Table 5 Employed persons aged 15 and over by occupational status and citizenship (v. %). Year 2022

POSIZIONE NELLA PROFESSIONE	Italiani	Stranieri			Totale
		Totale	di cui:		
			UE	Non UE	
Dipendente	77,5%	87,1%	88,7%	86,4%	78,5%
Dirigente	1,6%	0,2%	0,4%	0,1%	1,5%
Impiegato	38,5%	10,9%	13,8%	9,6%	35,7%
Operaio	31,6%	75,2%	73,0%	76,1%	36,1%
Quadro	5,8%	0,8%	1,5%	0,6%	5,3%
Indipendente	22,5%	12,9%	11,3%	13,6%	21,5%
Coadiuvante nell'azienda di un familiare	0,9%	0,7%	0,4%	0,8%	0,9%
Collaborazione coordinata e continuativa	0,5%	0,4%	0,5%	0,4%	0,5%
Imprenditore	1,7%	0,6%	0,6%	0,6%	1,6%
Lavoratore in proprio	12,5%	9,1%	7,4%	9,9%	12,1%
Libero professionista	6,3%	1,4%	1,8%	1,2%	5,8%
Prestazione d'opera occasionale	0,6%	0,7%	0,6%	0,8%	0,6%
Totale	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Elaborations of Data Science Applications – Studies and Research Department of Anpal Services on microdata RCFL –

ISTAT (Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, 2023b)

About 75% of foreigners are workers (“operaio”). Only 1% of foreign employees qualify as managers (“dirigente”). The presence of entrepreneurs is also somewhat limited (1.6%), while the share of self-employed workers (“lavoratore in proprio”) is more substantial (12.1%). 60.2% of non-EU employees possess formal skills superior to those required to perform the task for which they are paid. The negative results for the *overqualification* of migrants in Italy represent an improvement compared to the situation ten years earlier. The reasons for such high levels of *overqualification* are complex. Foreign workers with tertiary education may lack skills critical to highly skilled jobs, such as local labour market knowledge, advanced language skills, and

professional networks. One of the most effective ways to address this problem is through local education, attracting and retaining international students. The share of foreign graduate workers employed in a *low-medium skill profession* is considerable and equal to 60.2% in the case of non-EU foreigners and 42.5% in the case of the EU compared to 19.3% estimated for Italians, i.e. out of 100 non-EU foreign workers with third-level education, 60 have formal skills higher than those that would be needed to carry out the task for which they are paid, as well as for about 42 out of 100 EU citizens; Italians in the same condition are just over 19 out of 100. The phenomenon seems to take on significantly greater dimensions in the case of the female component of the workforce: overqualified non-EU foreign women *are* as much as 66.5% compared to 44.7% of EU foreigners and 22.5% of Italian workers. Looking at the phenomenon from the point of view of the age of workers, if the *mismatch* between skills and tasks in the case of Italians seems to be reducing as age increases (the *overqualification* rate goes from 24.5% of *under-34s* to 10.9% of *over-55s*), in the case of foreign citizens this is not the case. For example, among EU foreigners, there is a peak for the 35–44-year-old fund (more than half of graduates have *low-medium skill jobs*) and among EU citizens, the overqualification rate increases with age up to 71.1% in the case of 45–54-year-olds and then decreases to 64.4% in the case of workers over 55 years old. Regarding the characteristics of the work performed, it is also observed that *overqualification* affects full-time jobs more than part-time jobs and more employees than self-employed and/or collaborative jobs. However, the differences between the different citizenships are apparent. Compared to an *overqualification* rate of non-EU part-time workers of 68.9%, there is a value of 30.1% in the case of Italians. Overqualified foreign employees *comprise* 66.6% of the total population, against 22.2% of natives and 47.0% of EU citizens.

Finally, looking at the various sectors of economic activity, the small number of non-EU graduates employed in the agricultural sector is nevertheless *overqualified*, therefore, more than EU citizens

(whose *overqualification* rate in the sector is equal to 91.5%) and native citizens (for whom a value of 74.2% is recorded). Very high percentages of *overqualified* employees are recorded, in the case of non-EU foreign workers, in hotels and restaurants, transport and logistics (warehousing), other collective and personal services, trade and construction. In the same sectors, the *overqualification* rate of Italian citizens is significantly lower: for example, in the construction sector, *overqualified* natives are 28.0% compared to 74.3% of non-EU citizens, as well as in collective and personal services, 30% compared to 77% of non-EU workers (Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, 2023b).

3.3. Skills Shortages by Occupation, Highlighting Required Qualifications and Level of Education (both VET and HE)

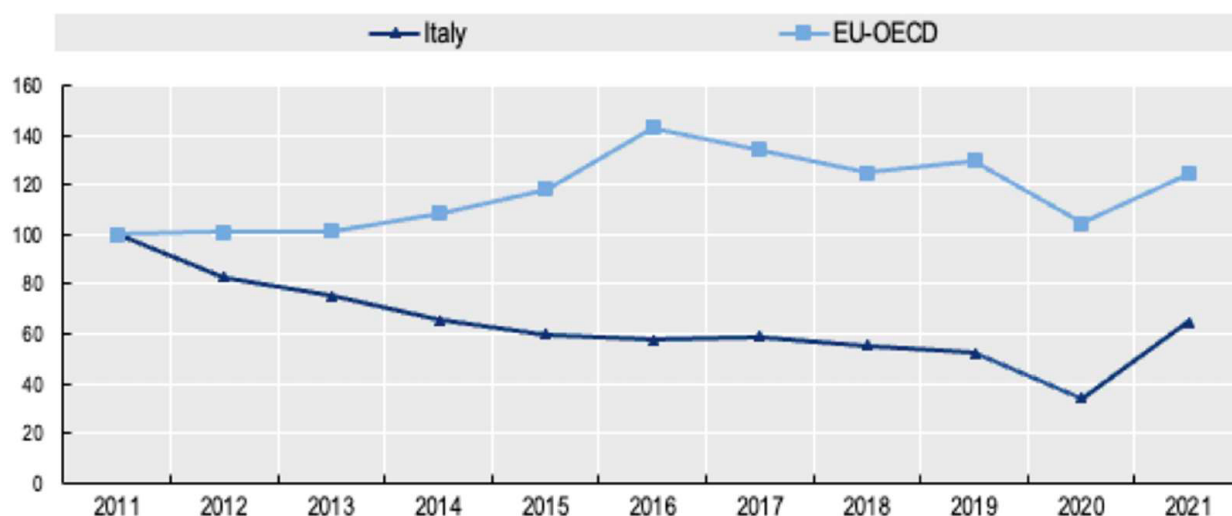
In 2020, adult participation in a recent learning experience in Italy was lower than the EU27 average (7.2% vs. 9.2%) and that of France (13%), Spain (11%) and Germany (7.7%). After a stationary period of several years, the share has also been down by 0.9 points due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the related containment measures that have imposed closures and restrictions on movement and activities. However, the decline was relatively small compared to that recorded in the EU27 (-1.6%) and some countries, including France (-6.5%). One factor that most influences adult participation in continuing education is their level of education. In 2020, the incidence of lifelong learning was 16.9% among those with a tertiary qualification; it fell to 7.6% among high school graduates and was only 1.4% among those with a low level of education. The latter value is lower than the European average, while the others are in line. Nevertheless, broad participation in training activities, updating skills, and professional retraining would be necessary for the most vulnerable individuals, who find it more challenging to keep up with technological innovation and its transformations. In addition, continuing education would make up for the poor formal education received, allowing personal growth and greater participation in social life (ISTAT, 2021).

4. Relationship between Skill Mismatches and Migration Trends in Partner Countries

4.1. Trends of Immigration

In the 2010s, the arrival of people in EU and OECD countries increased (Fig. 10), peaking in 2016 due to the exceptional influx of migrants for humanitarian reasons, mainly from Syria. Arrivals remained significantly above the levels of the early years of the decade to 2019. In 2021, permanent migration to the OECD and the EU partly recovered from the sharp decrease in 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis. For the OECD area, the inflow of 4.8 mln new permanent migrants was 22% higher than in 2020, but still half a million less than in 2019. In the EU, the increase in permanent migration, at +15%, was lower than in other OECD regions.

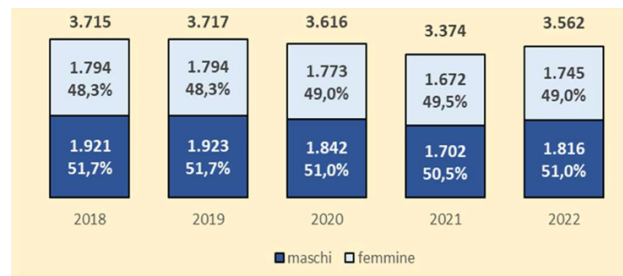
Figure 10 Permanent migration in Italy and the EU-OECD area, from 2011 to 2021. Annual admissions relative to the level observed in 2011 (2011=100)



Source: OECD/EC Commission (2022)

There were 3.6 mln non-EU citizens legally residing in Italy as of January 1 (Fig. 11), 2022³⁰. After the reduction in the period 2019-2021 (-344k; -9.2%), between 2021-2022 there was an increase in the presence of non-EU foreigners (+188k; +5.6%; Fig. 10).

Figure 11 non-EU citizens residing by gender as of 1 January (a.v. in thousands (k) and inc. % by gender). Years 2018-2022



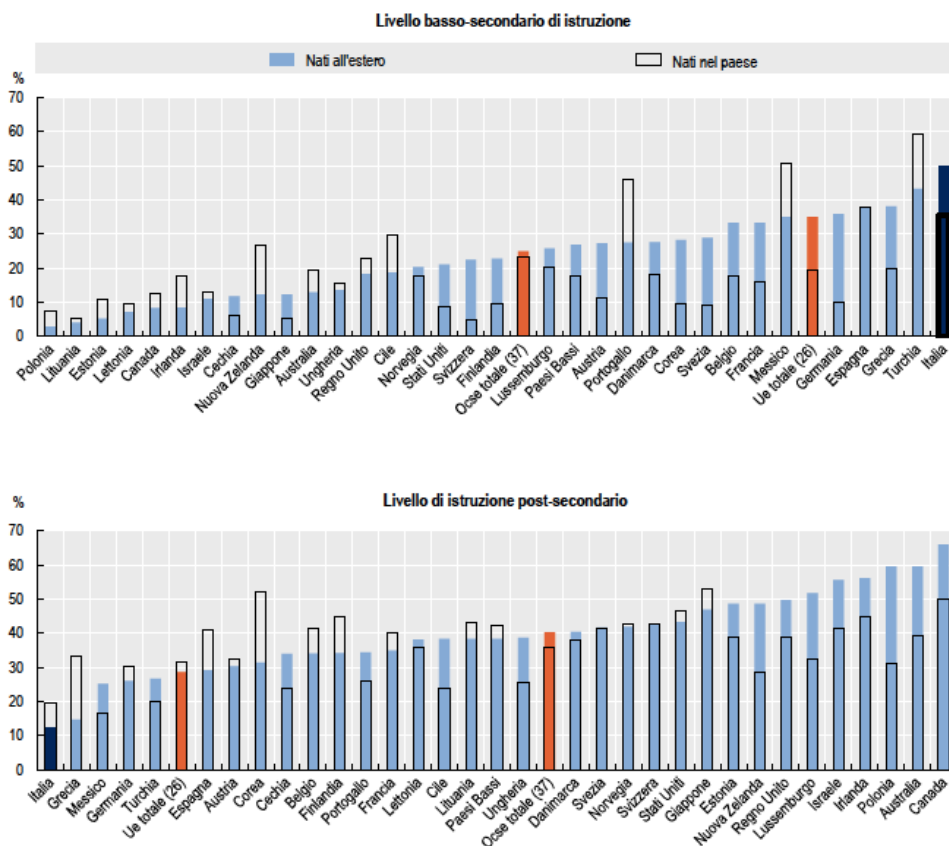
Source: Data Science Applications - Studies and Research Department of Anpal Servizi on ISTAT data (non-EU citizens legally resident)

Considering the geographical macro-areas of origin, it is possible to note that 31.1% of non-EU citizens (1.1mln) come from an Asian country; 30.5% (1mln) hold citizenship of an African country, while 27.7% (987k) come from a non-EU European country. The presence of citizens from America (northern: 1.1%, 38k; central and southern: 9.5%, 572k) and Oceania (0.1%, 2.000) is decidedly smaller. The migrant population in Italy is characterized by a relatively long presence in the country and by European origin. In 2020, almost four out of five working-age immigrants (15-64 years old) had been resident in Italy for at least a decade. In addition, only 7.5% had arrived in the previous five years, one of the lowest percentages in the OECD area and half of the EU total (15.5%). This reflects the sharp decrease in arrivals during the 2010s after the high flows of the 2000s. More than half of the immigrant population in Italy comes from Europe, including EU member states (Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, 2023b).

³⁰ Source: ISTAT survey of non-EU citizens legally residing on data from the Ministry of the Interior. These data are also from ISTAT sources, but of a different origin (Ministry of the Interior) from that of the Demographic Balance examined above. However, in the number of each citizenry there is a substantial consistency between the figures of the two sources. As a result of regulatory changes, starting from the stock data as of 1 January 2014 and the 2013 inflows, the data relating to the geographical area 'Other non-EU countries' (Andorra, Vatican City, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland) are no longer available.

The first key feature relevant for integration into the labour market is the level of formal education of immigrants. More than a third of immigrants in the EU (35%) have a **low level of education**, meaning they have completed lower secondary school at most. This percentage is only 20% for natives. At the same time, immigrants in the EU are almost as likely as natives to have a university degree (29% compared to 32%). In many non-European OECD countries, immigrants have a higher level of education than natives (Fig. 12).

Figure 12 People aged 15-64, with low (a) and high (b) level of education, not engaged in education in 2020.



Source: OECD/EC Commission (2022)

Italy stands out from other OECD countries in various aspects. First, half of Italy's immigrant population has only a low level of formal education, the second-highest percentage in the OECD. In contrast, among natives, only a third have attended lower secondary school in Italy. At the opposite end of the educational spectrum, Italy has the lowest percentage of immigrant graduates

in the OECD area. Only 12% of immigrants in Italy have a university degree, compared to 20% of natives.

4.2 Employment and Unemployment of Migrant Workforce

In 2022, the number of employed people exceeded 23 mln again (Fig. 13; 14). There are 2.4 mln foreign employees, 10.3% of the total (1.7 mln with non-EU citizenship). The growth concerned both Italian employment (+2.1%) and the non-EU component (+7.8%).

Figure 13 non-EU foreign workers employed in 2022 (all genders)³¹

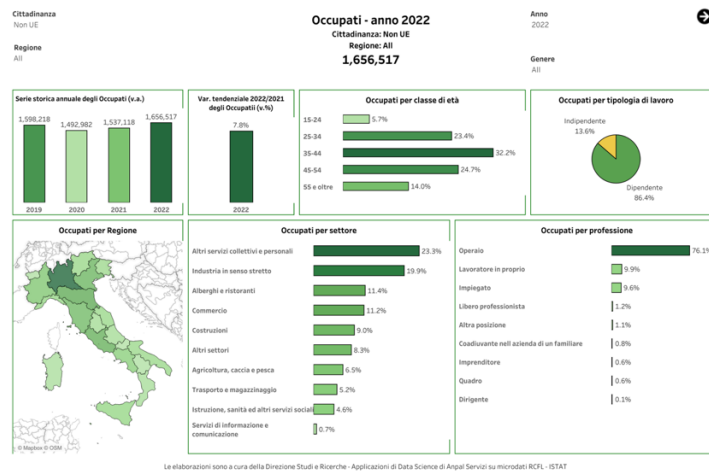
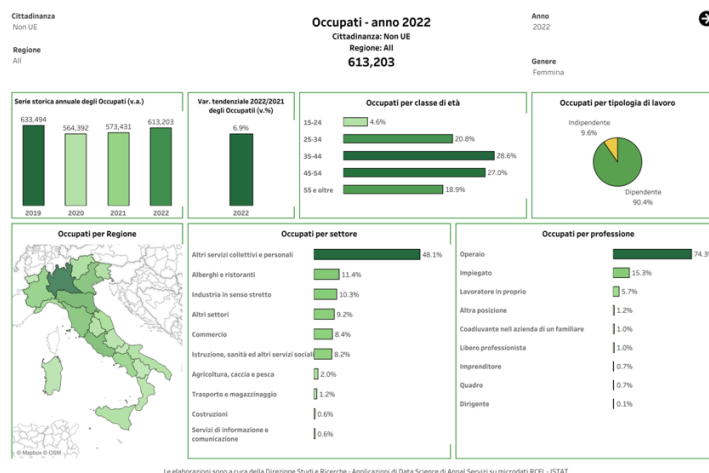


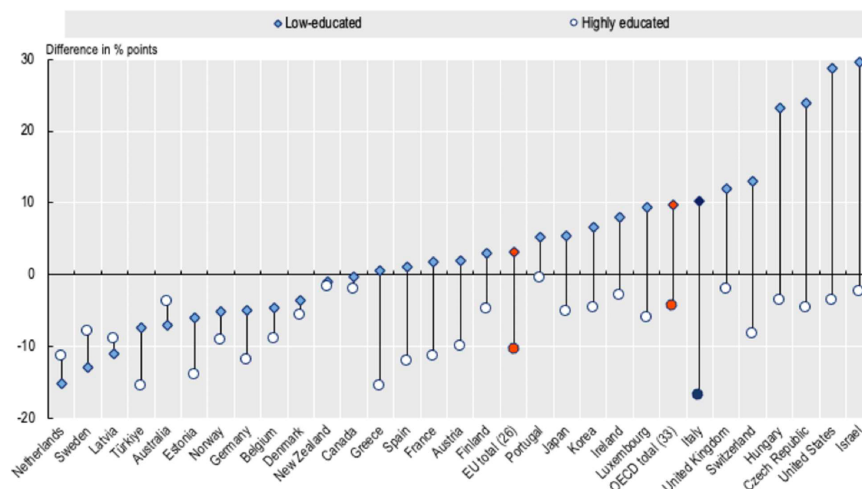
Figure 14 non-EU foreign workers employed in 2022 (women)



³¹ <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/anpalservizi/viz/Glistranierinelmercato dellavoroinItalia/Home> Retrieved 10.10.2024

The analysis of the employment rate by level of education provides further information. In OECD countries (Fig. 15), immigrants with tertiary education are less likely to work than their highly educated native peers. By contrast, what happens to poorly educated migrants is different: in more than two-thirds of countries, they are more likely to work than poorly educated natives. However, this does not mean less education helps integration into the labour market. In fact, in all OECD countries, for both immigrants and natives, higher levels of formal education are associated with higher employment rates. However, education improves labour market outcomes to a lesser extent for immigrants than natives: immigrants benefit less from employment. In the EU, the employment rate of immigrants with low formal education is only 57%, compared to 78% for those with tertiary education. In Italy, the employment rate of poorly educated immigrants is 58%, like the EU average (57%). However, tertiary education graduates are less likely to be employed in Italy than in other EU countries. In 2021, the employment rate of tertiary-educated immigrants was only 69%, a difference of as much as 17 percentage points compared to their native peers, the most significant difference in the OECD.

Figure 15 Employment rate of foreigners by level of education. Differences in percentage points compared to native citizens, people between 15 and 64 years old who are not in education or training. Year 2021



Source: OECD/European Commission (2023), Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2023:

In the same context, an average result emerges for poorly educated immigrants in Italy. However, a comparatively poor result is found for foreigners with tertiary education when unemployment rates are considered. In 2021, the unemployment rate for poorly educated immigrants in Italy was 14% for both foreign-born and Italian-born. Immigrants with a low level of education, therefore, have a slightly lower unemployment rate in Italy than in the EU, where it is 15%. The unemployment rate for highly educated immigrants in the EU is 8%, double that of highly educated Italian citizens (4%). In Italy, the unemployment rate for highly educated migrants is 11%, among the highest in the OECD area and surpassed only by Greece, Spain and Turkey. Foreigners with tertiary education in Italy are almost three times more likely to be unemployed than their Italian-born counterparts. From a sectoral point of view (Tab. 6), foreign employment grew the most in **information and communication services** (+3.000; +18.0%) and **catering and tourism** (+7.5%). In these same sectors, the most significant increases were recorded for the Community component (respectively: +31.3% and +17.0%). The most pronounced changes among non-EU foreigners are found in the **agricultural sector** (+14.5%) and in the **information and communication services** sector (+8.7%).

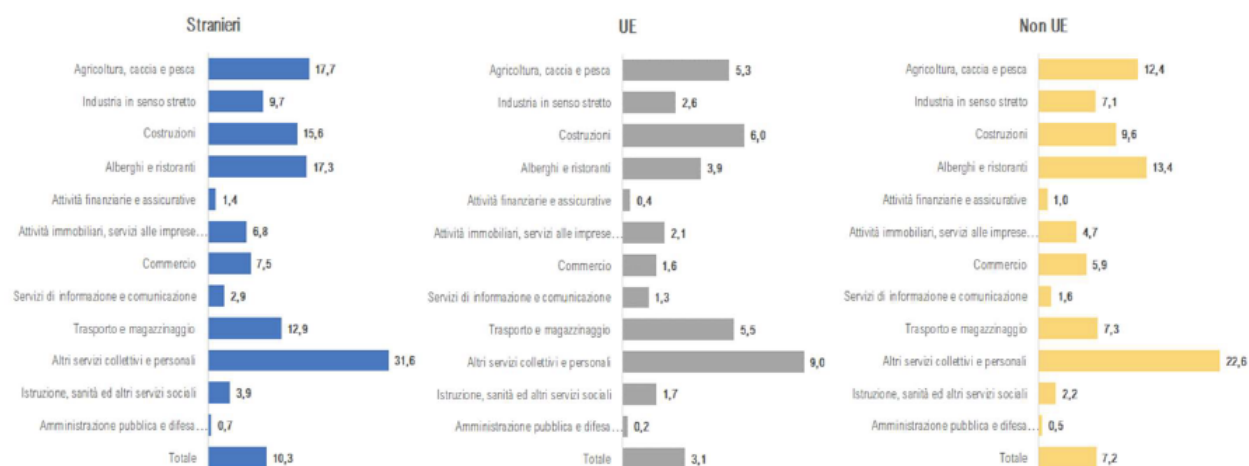
Table 6 Change in the number of employed persons aged 15 and over by nationality and sector of economic activity (a.v. & %). II Quarter 2022/ II Quarter 2023

SETTORE DI ATTIVITA' ECONOMICA	UE	Non UE	Totale stranieri	UE	Non UE	Totale stranieri
	Var. ass. II '23/II '22			Var. % II '23/II '22		
Agricoltura, caccia e pesca	-4.494	14.949	10.455	-9,3	14,5	6,9
Industria in senso stretto	10.778	-3.622	7.156	8,8	-1,1	1,6
Costruzioni	-2.145	9.204	7.059	-2,0	6,6	2,9
Commercio	-5.467	13.977	8.509	-10,4	8,0	3,7
Altre attività dei servizi	-14.601	-55.797	-70.398	-3,7	-6,1	-5,4
Alberghi e ristoranti	8.527	10.431	18.958	17,0	5,2	7,5
Altri servizi collettivi e personali	-7.679	-33.902	-41.581	-5,1	-8,7	-7,7
Amministrazione pubblica e difesa assicurazione sociale obbligatoria	-1.861	-6.921	-8.782	-57,6	-74,7	-70,3
Attività finanziarie e assicurative	-1.942	-2.526	-4.468	-50,1	-35,2	-40,4
Attività immobiliari, servizi alle imprese e altre attività professionali e imprenditoriali	6.958	-3.191	3.768	12,8	-2,5	2,1
Istruzione, sanità ed altri servizi sociali	-13.782	-9.165	-22.947	-23,5	-11,3	-16,4
Servizi di informazione e comunicazione	1.954	785	2.739	31,3	8,7	18,0
Trasporto e magazzinaggio	-6.775	-11.309	-18.085	-10,9	-12,6	-11,9

Source: Data Science Applications - ADS elaborations by Anpal Services on microdata RCFL – ISTAT

In 2022, 31.6% of employees in personal and collective services were foreigners; in agriculture, 17.7% of employees are foreigners; in catering and tourism and in construction, the incidence of foreign employment is, respectively, 17.3% and 15.6% (Fig. 16).

Figure 16 Percentage incidence of foreign workers aged 15 and over on the total number of employed persons by sector of economic activity. Year 2022



Source: Data Science Applications - ADS elaborations by Anpal Services on microdata RCFL – ISTAT

In the sectors with the highest incidence of foreign employees, most foreigners have non-EU citizenship: non-EU employees account for more than 10% in the tourism and catering sector (13.4%) and agriculture (12.4%), while in collective and personal services the incidence rises to 22.6%.

4.3. Wages and Salaries of Migrant Workers in Comparison with Local Workforce

Formal education influences the type of work immigrants do. In 2021, 28% of employed immigrants in Italy worked in low-skilled jobs, compared to only 8.5% of the country's natives. Only 13% of foreigners in Italy in 2021 had occupations classified as requiring higher skills, while 39% of employed natives had jobs of this type. These jobs often present other challenges, such as low incomes and poor job security. The median income of immigrant households accounts for more than 90% of that of natives in the EU and OECD. However, in countries with a high proportion of non-EU migrants and with a low level of education, migrants' incomes are less than 80% of those

of natives. Italy falls into this group along with other comparable destinations, such as Greece, and other European destinations with a high percentage of non-EU migrants, such as Sweden and Austria. Immigrants in Italy have on average, only three-quarters of the median income of natives. One in five immigrant workers in Italy had a temporary contract in 2021. While this percentage is not much different from the EU average of 17%, it has increased by almost five percentage points in Italy over the past decade, while it has decreased for immigrants across the EU. Despite having lower levels of education and temporary contracts, immigrants in Italy are more likely to have jobs than the Italian population. However, these rates are low in absolute terms by international standards and reflect the overall difficulty of the labour market in Italy, as well as the fact that immigrants in Italy are primarily young compared to the native working-age population (Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, 2023b).

4.4. Participation of Local Workforce and Migrant Workers in Industrial Relations

In 2021, 835k employed people in Italy (3.7% of the total) said they felt discriminated against in the workplace (Tab. 7), of which 722k were Italians, 74k EU foreigners and 40k non-EU foreigners. The highest percentage of those who feel discriminated against in the workplace is recorded among EU citizens (5.4%), followed by non-EU citizens (4.8%) and, finally, Italians (3.6%).

Table 7 Employed people (15-74 years old) discriminated against in their current job by superiors, colleagues, customers or others

(a.v. & %). Year 2021

	Italiani	UE	Non UE	Totale	Italiani	UE	Non UE	Totale
	V.a.				V.%			
Si	722.510	73.793	39.251	835.555	3,6	5,4	4,8	3,7
No	19.346.507	1.442.349	680.366	21.469.223	95,7	93,4	94,4	95,5
Non sa	154.507	12.335	8.455	175.297	0,8	1,2	0,8	0,8
Totale	20.223.524	1.528.478	728.072	22.480.074	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Fonte: elaborazioni Applicazioni Data Science - Direzione Studi e Ricerche di Anpal Servizi su microdati RCFL – ISTAT

Among the different national components, the reasons for discrimination differ significantly: age discrimination affects 11% of Italians, compared to 3.7% of EU foreigners and 1.3% of non-EU

citizens. Gender is also a more prevalent reason for discrimination among Italians (33.9%) than EU foreigners (3.3%) and non-EU nationals (3.8%). In comparison, discrimination of foreign origin and religious beliefs involves 91.2% of non-EU foreigners, 87% of EU foreigners and 5.6% of Italians. Non-EU foreigners identify the lack of knowledge of the Italian language as the main obstacle to finding work (30.9% of the total). For EU foreigners, the most significant difficulty is represented by the lack of jobs suitable for the skills possessed (23.4% of the total) (Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, 2023b).

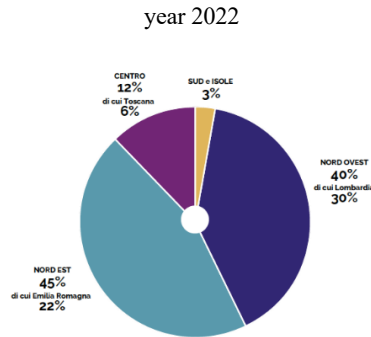
4.5. Statistical Data on Investments in Automation and Robotization of Work Processes in Enterprises, International Subcontracting, Return of Subcontracted Manufacturing and Services to Destination Countries

The year 2021 set a record for the Italian robotics industry, showcasing a production increase of 6.6% compared to 2020. In Italy, the number of robot installations surged by 65%, reaching a total of 14,083 units in 2021, marking the most successful year in the country's history. Italy solidified its position as the sixth largest robotics market globally and the second largest in Europe, following Germany (Brunelli, 2023; Crisantemi, 2022). In 2022, investments continued to drive Italian growth (+9.4%), albeit with almost half the momentum compared to 2021 (+18.6%). Investments in construction continued to grow, especially in the first part of the year (+4.4% in the first quarter, +1.0% in the 2nd) and, after a pause in the 3rd quarter (-2.2%), they returned to rise in the last quarter (+1.7%). The race for the “Superbonus”, which was due to expire at the end of 2022 to the extent of 110%, had an influence. The components relating to plant, machinery and means of transport also attracted a high number of investments (+8.5% per year). 2022 was a decidedly positive year for the Industrial, Manufacturing and Process Automation sector (Fig. 17). Turnover recorded an annual growth of 23% across product segments, bringing market values to almost 7 billion euros, well above pre-Covid levels (Candiano, 2024)³². A significant role in supporting

³² <https://www.econopoly.ilsole24ore.com/2024/01/09/automazione-industriale-sei-tendenze/> Retrieved 10.10.2024.

growth can be traced back to **Transition Plan 4.0**, albeit framed in an economic scenario made difficult by the continuing tensions in the supply markets.

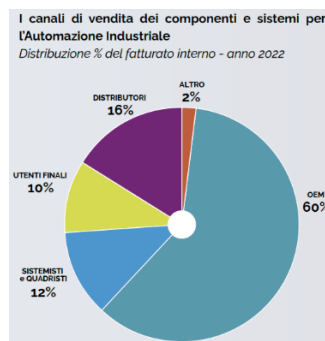
Figure 17 Industrial manufacturing and process automation in Italy by geographical area. Distribution % of internal turnover -



Source: ANIE Automazione (2023)

In more detail, the North-East area absorbs almost half of national sales (45%), followed by the North-West (40%), where Lombardy is the destination market for about 30% of national sales. Looking at the main sales channels in Italy for Automation components and systems, 60% of turnover (stable at the previous year's levels) is achieved in the machine manufacturers (OEMs) channel. This destination sector sees Italy at the top of the world rankings regarding production value and export volumes (Fig. 18).

Figure 18 The sales channels of components and systems for industrial automation. % distribution of internal turnover - year 2022



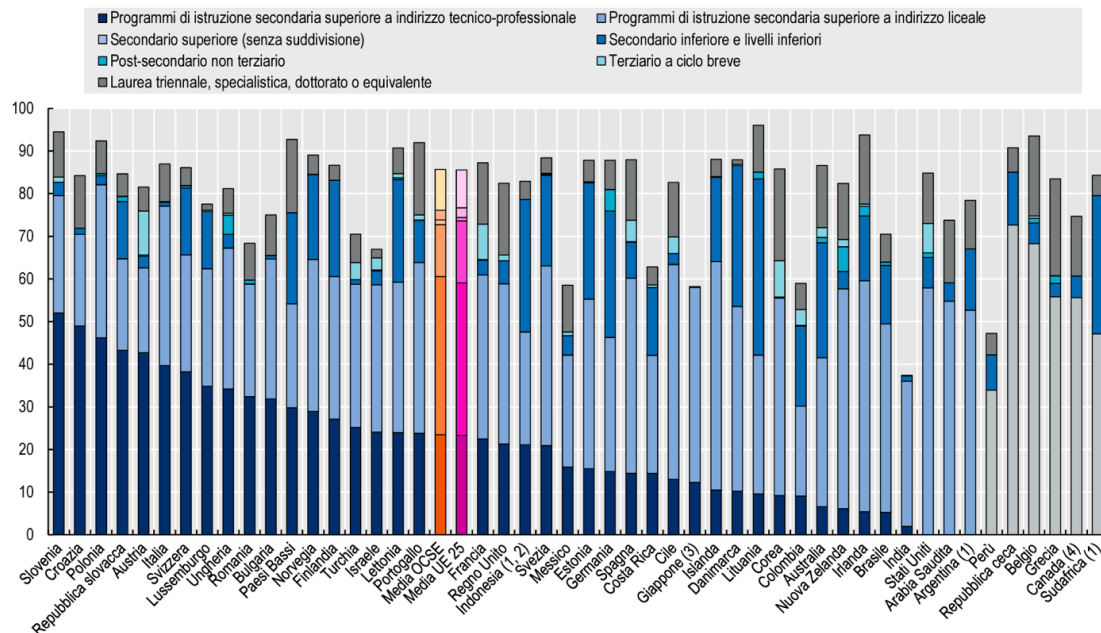
Source: ANIE Automazione (2023)

In ranking the main target sectors of components and systems for Industrial Automation, Mechanics, Packaging, and Food occupy the first three positions in 2022, with percentages substantially unchanged compared to the previous year. These are sectors of industrial transformation with a high content of advanced automation, where the machinery used is among the most advanced on the market, looking at technology and levels of innovation.

4.6 Accessibility of Initial Education (VET and HE) for Migrants and Natives

In Italy, 40% of 15-19-year-olds are enrolled in vocational and technical education, significantly higher than the 23% average in OECD countries. However, the outcomes for students are concerning, with only 55% of graduates finding employment within two years, marking the lowest rate in the OECD. Among 15-34-year-olds with vocational diplomas, the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rate stands at 28.1%, compared to 12.0% for peers with a general or post-secondary non-tertiary education, and an OECD average of 15.2%. Additionally, VET graduates aged 25-34 earn only 4% more than their counterparts without this qualification, the lowest increase in the OECD, although the wage gap widens to 40% for those aged 45-54. Italy allocates 4.2% of its GDP to education, which is below the OECD average of 5.1% (OECD, 2023). Participation in high-quality early childhood education plays a crucial role in supporting children's well-being and development. In Italy, 13% of two-year-olds are enrolled in early education, which increases to 87% for three-year-olds, 92% for four-year-olds, and 87% for five-year-olds. Compulsory education begins at age six and extends until age 16. Most students complete their upper secondary education between the ages of 18 and 19, whether through traditional high schools or technical-vocational programs. According to OECD trends (OECD, 2023), in Italy, 37% of 15- to 19-year-olds are enrolled in high school programs, 40% in technical-vocational courses, 1% in lower secondary education, and 9% in tertiary programs (Fig. 19).

Figure 19 Enrolment rates of 15- to 19-year-olds, by education level (2021)³³



This data compares to the OECD average, which is 37% for students in upper secondary education, 23% for those in vocational and technical upper secondary education, 12% for lower secondary education, and 12% for tertiary education (Fig. 19). Generally, higher education, particularly technical training, appears to be a privilege primarily for Italian students. Several factors limit access to these educational opportunities. First, the placement tests are conducted in Italian, which can be a barrier for non-native speakers. Secondly, it is challenging to find information about Level V courses (EQF) abroad, as it is uncertain whether the ITS diploma is recognized as equivalent to similar courses in other countries. Enrolment is not a straightforward process for foreign students, as they must first obtain the necessary residency documents and demonstrate that they have completed at least 12 years of education prior to enrolling. Additionally, applicants must navigate

³³ The reference year is different from 2021: 2020 for Argentina and South Africa, 2018 for Indonesia. 2. It does not consider students enrolled at tertiary education levels. 3. Age breakdown is not available after the age of 15. 4. Does not include the non-tertiary post-secondary level. The countries are ranked in descending order according to the percentage of students enrolled in upper secondary education with a technical-vocational focus. Source: Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2023), Table B1.2. For more information, see Sources and Education at Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes (OECD, 2023).

regional regulations in conjunction with national legislation, which adds complexity to the application process. Ultimately, acceptance into a program at a Higher Technological Institute is at the discretion of that institution. Only after being accepted by the ITS will the student need to apply for a study visa to attend their training course. If an admission test is required for enrolment in the Italian ITS, a temporary visa will be necessary to take the selection exam (Annovi, 2022)³⁴. A recent publication by Talents Venture (2024) regarding the state of higher education in Italy for 2022 reveals that the country's system is still largely unprepared to accommodate foreign students. Only 18% of the 5,600 available courses (across universities and ITS) are offered in languages other than Italian. While this is a positive trend as the figure continues to grow, significant disparities exist within the system. The availability of courses in multiple languages is primarily concentrated in master's degree programs, while the situation for undergraduate programs is markedly less promising—the percentage of courses offered in languages other than Italian drops to just 6%. Furthermore, it is concerning that 16 out of 92 Italian universities provide an educational offering that is exclusively in Italian, a factor that inevitably discourages and discriminates against prospective students from other continents³⁵.

4.7 Investment in CVT of native and migrant workers in sectors

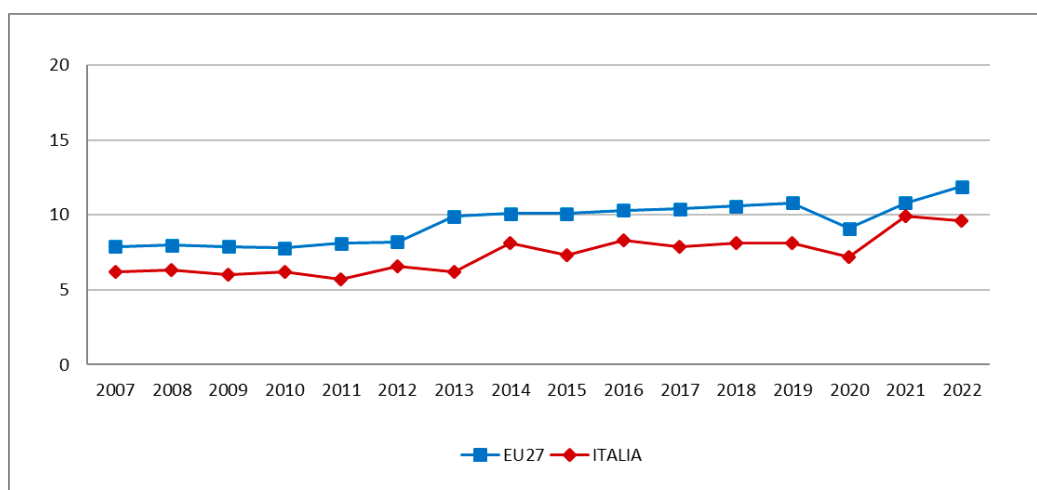
The low level of participation in educational and training processes by the Italian adult population has always been one of the key issues that, together with the insufficient propensity of companies to invest in human capital, influence the growth of entire sectors of the national economy and slow down the civil progress of the country. Therefore, raising the levels of adult participation in learning activities is one of the main challenges facing educational policies today. After years of stagnation, the participation rate of adults aged 25-64 in education and training activities has

³⁴ <https://tuttoits.it/its-studenti-stranieri/> Retrieved 06 November 2024.

³⁵ <https://www.talentsventure.com/discovery/internazionalizzazione-atenei/> Retrieved 06 November 2024.

fluctuated over the last three years, first collapsing in the year of Covid, then a strong recovery and finally an adjustment in the last year. In fact, in 2022, the rate reached 9.6%, with a slight negative change compared to the previous year (-0.3%) and a sharp increase compared to 2020 (+2.4%) (ANPAL, 2023). Despite this growth, the gap from Europe remains significant and has expanded further over the past year, now exceeding two percentage points (-2.3%) compared to the European average of 11.9%. This widening gap is primarily due to a sluggish growth dynamic, which has only increased by +3.4 percentage points over the last fifteen years. Consequently, Italy's ranking in the European context dropped from sixteenth to eighteenth place in 2022, marking a decline compared to the progress made in the previous year (Fig. 20).

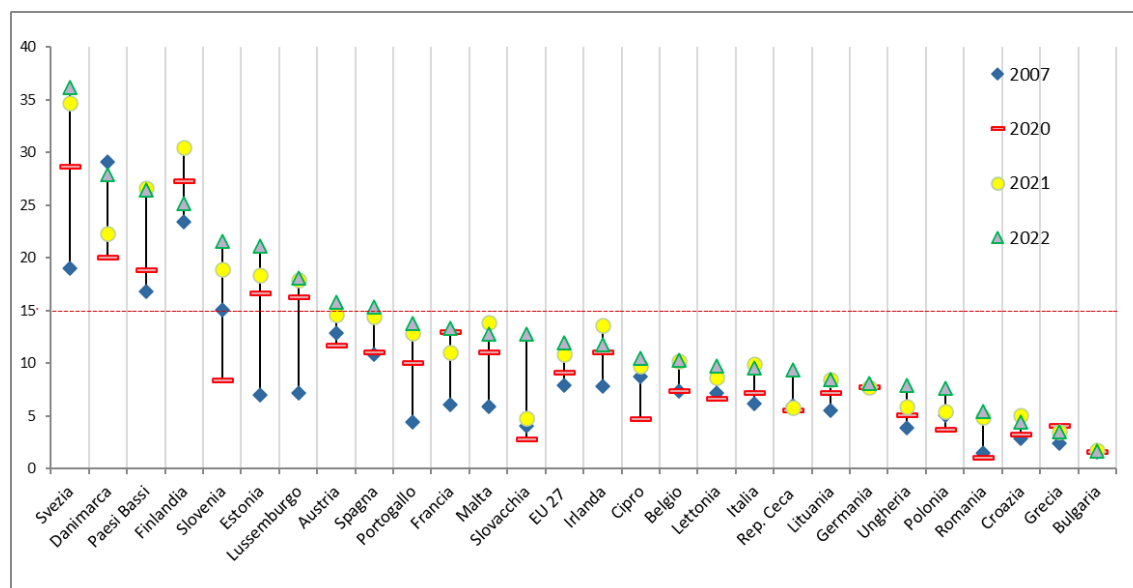
Figure 20 Participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and training, Years 2007-2022, Italy, EU27 (%)



Note: The indicator is constructed based on the Labour Force Survey which uses the four weeks prior to the interview as a reference period. Source: INAPP elaboration on Eurostat data, Labour Force Survey (LFS)

Italy, along with six other countries, falls into the fourth group, which is characterized by participation rates of less than 10%. These rates range from 9.7% in Latvia to 7.6% in Poland. Italy's unfavourable position is shared with Germany; however, Germany's standing is mitigated by significant investment in continuing education by its companies, which elevates the country to ninth place in the CVTS ranking, while Italy ranks sixteenth (Fig. 21).

Figure 21 Participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and training activities in the countries of the European Union. Years 2007, 2021-2022, EU27 (%)

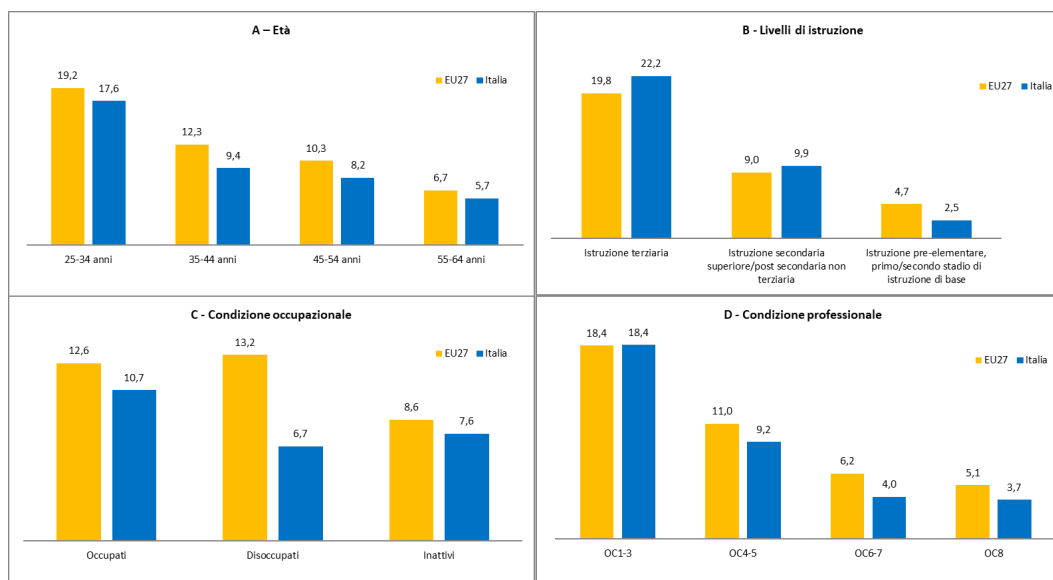


Note: break in the reconstruction of the 2021 figure Source: INAPP processing of Eurostat data, Labour Force Survey (LFS)

Several reasons explain our country's delay and determine the long-term trend, punctually recorded by the trend of the training participation indicator over the last fifteen years and confirmed in 2022 (ANPAL, 2023). However, the data clearly shows that the primary motivation lies in the low rates of access to training opportunities by vulnerable groups, by adults with a low level of education or professional qualification, who still have a gap that is too wide compared to those who have a high level of education or occupy a medium-high level professional position. Also, in 2022, the main factors of inequality are education and professional status: more than 12% separate the participation rate of graduates (22.2%) from that of high school graduates (9.9%), a gap that reaches 19 points compared to those with lower levels of education (2.5%). There is a 16% difference between high-skilled (18.4%) and low-skilled (2.5%) professional groups, a gap that grows by as much as 5%.

Figure 22 Participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and training according to some socio-demographic factors -

EU27 and Italy, Year 2022 (% value)



Source: INAPP elaboration on Eurostat data, Labour Force Survey (LFS)

In comparison to the previous year, the gap in training participation among employed individuals in Italy is widening relative to Europe, now standing at 10.7% versus the EU-27 average of 12.6%. The disparity in participation among the unemployed remains significant, with Italy at 6.7% compared to 13.2% across Europe. This trend also persists across different age groups; the slight advantage Italy had in the over-54 demographic in 2021 has diminished in the following year. Additionally, demographic factors continue to highlight inequalities, particularly when examining the differences between younger individuals and other age groups (Fig. 22).

Findings by sector/occupation

1. Companies

According to the statistical data reported by ANPAL (2023), the sectors experiencing the highest skills shortages and greatest demand for the workforce (specifically immigrant employment) are as follows:

1. **Services** (including care for individuals and businesses)
2. **Restaurants, hospitality, and tourism**
3. **Manufacturing**
4. **Industry** (including marble, wood, and construction)³⁶

While **agriculture** remains a key sector for migrant employment, particularly among men, all the above sectors have been investigated for their labour needs. After the approval of the Research Design by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Human Sciences³⁷, 19 online questionnaires were collected via Google Form between June & October 2024. We opted to utilize the online tool to enhance our efficiency and provide HR Managers the flexibility to complete the questionnaire outlined in the WP2 Methodological Guidance at their convenience.

As of October 24, 2024, we have received 19 completed questionnaires from a diverse range of companies: 5 in **Services** (including care for individuals and businesses); 6 in the **Restaurants** (catering), **hospitality**, and **tourism sectors**; 4 in **Manufacturing**; 4 in **Industry** (including marble, wood, and construction sectors). Reflecting the structure of the prevailing Italian economy, characterized by a predominance of SMEs, 12 out of the 19 companies surveyed employ fewer than 100 staff members, 5 employ up to 500, and only 2 have over 1000 employees. Notably, 17 out of 19 of these companies have been established in their respective sectors for at least 10 years.

³⁶ Manufacturing refers to a variety of sub-sectors including steel-metallurgical-mechanical, electrical-electronic, chemical and plastics. For industry, on the other hand, woodworking, stone, quarrying, construction and plant engineering.

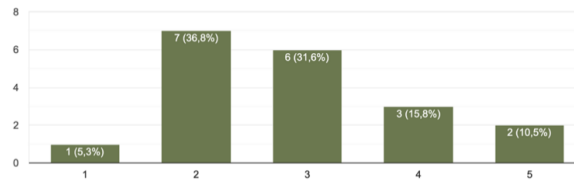
³⁷ Which met on 19.06.2024, the first request was rejected on 22.05.2024.

They are geographically located as follows:

- Northern Italy (15/19)
- Central Italy (3/19)
- the entire national territory (1/19)

Half of the respondents – across all considered sectors – indicate that they operate strategically at a national level within their sector (10 out of 18 respondents). This strategic positioning may be attributed to factors such as the company's historical background (COMP_10 and COMP_11), the uniqueness of their territorial area (COMP_14), or the international scope that their brand has adopted (COMP_9 and COMP_17). We subsequently requested them to rate (on a scale from 1 to 5) the availability of adequately qualified personnel within their organization. A total of 19 companies provided responses, revealing a significant tendency toward lower ratings regarding the adequacy of manpower.

Figure 23 Rating availability of adequately qualified manpower



1.1 Profession shortages

Then we ask them to list up to 5 **professions/qualifications** most wanted for their company, and we reported their answers in the following table.

Table 8 Profession shortage

ID	ECONOMIC SECTORS	PROFESSIONS SHORTAGE
COMP_16	1. Services (companies)	Young organizational consultants / human resources who, in addition to soft skills, have a minimum negotiation and administrative skills / staff administration
COMP_03	1. Services (people care)	Nurse, professional socio-health educator, professional socio-pedagogical educator, social and health worker, coordinator.
COMP_04	1. Services (people care)	Social and Health worker, medical doctors, nurses
COMP_08	1. Services (people care)	Professional social and health educator; professional nurse
COMP_12	1. Services (people care)	Social and health worker, nurses, doctors, receptionists
COMP_06	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Bartenders, waiters, cooks
COMP_07	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Staff at restaurants
COMP_09	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Restaurant Managers, Dining Room Managers, Kitchen Managers, etc.)

COMP_13	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Barman, bartender
COMP_14	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Cook, pizza-maker, bartenders
COMP_15	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Multi-service operator.
COMP_02	3. Manufacturing	Designers, project and product managers, carpenters
COMP_17	3. Manufacturing	Turners - welders - fitters - technical draftsmen and CNC operators
COMP_18	3. Manufacturing	CNC operator (full figure, programming and machine setup)
COMP_19	3. Manufacturing	CNC operator
COMP_01	4. Industry (Constructions)	Skilled and qualified workers, technical employees (4 th –6 th level)
COMP_10	4. Industry (Marble)	CNC Machine Operator, Finishing Operator
COMP_11	4. Industry (Marble)	CNC Machine Operator, Finishing Operator
COMP_05	4. Industry (Wood)	Technician specialized in the use of CNC Machine Operator, project manager and CAD/CAM designers

The professions that are in short supply in the four economic sector which we have investigated are as follows:

Services (people care): Nurse, professional socio-health operator & socio-pedagogical educator, young organizational consultants, staff administration.

Restaurant, hospitality and tourism: barman/bartenders, pizza makers, cooks, Restaurant Managers, Dining Room Managers, Kitchen Managers, etc.

Manufacturing CNC Machine Operators, CAD-CAM designers, project and product managers, Turners - welders - fitters - technical draftsmen

Industry: CNC Machine Operators, Finishing Operator, Skilled and qualified workers, technical employees (4th–6th level), CAD-CAM designers, project managers.

Nevertheless, when we asked why some significant explanations emerged for profession shortages such as:

Services (people care):

- difficulty in adapting to flexible hours; national labour contracts with poorly recognised wages. COMP_08;
- widespread difficulties in the sector (people care) to which they belong, the economic recognition, shift work (health care) COMP_3
- Regarding the people-care sector, the workforce has been absorbed by the public health sector. COMP_12

Services (companies):

- Working as consultants for manufacturing companies (mechanics and construction) we detect a total disconnect between demand and demand attributable to demographic decline, lack of appeal of the sector compared to the digital world and decrease in students by sector. On the other hand, it is equally difficult to find young organizational consultants / human resources who, in addition to soft skills, have a minimum negotiation and administrative skills / staff administration. COMP_16

Restaurants, hospitality and tourism:

- mismatch between school education and the world of work that we fill with internal training. COMP_09;
- lack of desire and spirit of sacrifice COMP_06
- The phenomenon is generalized to the whole sector (restaurants and hospitality) and at a national level. I believe that the shortage is due to many factors including the fact that sometimes they are not

adequately paid jobs, they constrain daily life a bit by hours and the need to work on weekends and holidays. They are also occupations whose training and professionalization is long. COMP_14

- The figure we are looking for the most and on which we have the most critical issues is the multi-service operator. We are looking for more than 3,000 operators every year, so it is difficult to find people who are willing and aligned with our needs. COMP_15

Manufacturing

- It concerns the whole sector; the new generations are not inclined to manual work. COMP_19

Industry

- Companies have not reported particular reasons for the difficulty of finding manpower.

Therefore, we asked, among the most sought-after, which **qualifications** were the easiest to find on the labour market and which were the most complex. We have therefore summarised the data that emerged broken down by sector in the following table:

Table 9 Qualifications: most suitable/complex to seek

ID	ECONOMIC SECTORS	QUALIFICATIONS (most suitable to seek)	QUALIFICATIONS (most complex to seek)
COMP_16	1. Services (companies)	General line operators	Maintenance technicians, CNC operators and welders
COMP_03	1. Services (people care)	Assistant school educator for disabled pupils	Nurse
COMP_04	1. Services (people care)	None	None
COMP_08	1. Services (people care)	///	///
COMP_12	1. Services (people care)	Educators, general services workers	ASA/OSS, nurses, medical doctors
COMP_06	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Dishwasher	Bartender
COMP_07	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Manager	///
COMP_09	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	There are currently no easier qualifications to find	There are currently no easier qualifications to find
COMP_13	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Commis in the bar	Bartender
COMP_14	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Dining room operators, waiters, dishwashers	Cooks, foremen, bartenders
COMP_15	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	///	Barman/bartender
COMP_02	3. Manufacturing	Administrative and logistics positions	Skilled labour (carpentry) and technicians
COMP_17	3. Manufacturing	Mechanical Operators	technicians with skills in 3D design
COMP_18	3. Manufacturing	///	Soldering iron
COMP_19	3. Manufacturing	Operators for the loading and unloading of the pieces from the machine tools	Toolmakers, CNC Machine operator
COMP_01	4. Industry (Constructions)	///	Complexity is directly proportional to ability/professionalism
COMP_10	4. Industry (Marble)	To date, it is not easy to find the figures we need	CNC Machine Operator, Finishing Operator
COMP_11	4. Industry (Marble)	Material loading and unloading workers	Finishing operators and CNC Machine operators
COMP_05	4. Industry (Wood)	Young people without educational qualifications or with low qualifications	Traditional carpenters with excellent manual skills

We then asked whether there were any new **qualifications and professions** in demand in the company or in the economic sector. We have therefore summarised the data that emerged broken down by sector in the following table:

Table 10 Emerging qualifications

ID	ECONOMIC SECTORS	NEW QUALIFICATION REQUIRED (for their company or economic sector)
COMP_16	1. Services (companies)	Mechatronic maintenance technicians who have both mechanical and electrical-IT automation skills.
COMP_03	1. Services (people care)	Fund raiser, controller.
COMP_04	1. Services (people care)	Educators
COMP_08	1. Services (people care)	///
COMP_12	1. Services (people care)	None
COMP_06	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	None
COMP_07	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	None
COMP_09	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Project Manager
COMP_13	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Bartender
COMP_14	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	None
COMP_15	2. Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	None
COMP_02	3. Manufacturing	CNC machine operators (wood sector)
COMP_17	3. Manufacturing	Electro-mechanical or mechatronic technicians
COMP_18	3. Manufacturing	/
COMP_19	3. Manufacturing	/
COMP_01	4. Industry (Constructions)	Security Management with dedicated IT tools, Social Media Management
COMP_10	4. Industry (Marble)	Specialized operator in automation / product finishing
COMP_11	4. Industry (Marble)	Automation and robotics technician
COMP_05	4. Industry (Wood)	CNC machines operators

Then we asked them to explain the main reason of such emerging qualifications. Thus, we resumed the insights per considered economic sector as follows:

Services (companies)

- This last nuance (Mechatronic maintenance technicians) is the most complex. Because if it was once difficult to combine mechanics and electricians, today the digital and IT component is not negligible. This leads to an elevation of technical skills and continuous updating that often goes badly with obsolete school curricula and companies that pay little attention to the continuous training of staff. COMP_16

Services (people care)

- reduction of public resources, need to integrate economic resources from fees, need to have greater budget planning capacity and related spending control COMP_3
- Educators for whom a three-year degree has been required in the last years COMP_4

Restaurants, hospitality and tourism

- Bartenders, an increasingly specialized request, due to an increasingly demanding and beverage-conscious customer COMP_13
- None (emerging qualifications). However, people with hotel (hospitality) diplomas (secondary level) are preferable COMP_7

- The figure and role of Project Manager over all departments. It is increasingly important to have project coordinators. COMP_9

Manufacturing

- Education is important because it lays the foundations. Young people must understand that the training path in the world of work will still be long COMP_19

Industry

- Because the 85% of production is focused on using CNC machines and understanding complex technical drawings/projects COMP_5

Collaboration between companies and the third sector (VET and training centres) to overcome the problem of lack of professionals

Our objective was to examine how companies collaborate with third bodies (training centres, VET providers and secondary schools) to bridge the gap between the companies' needs and available training offerings. During our interviews with companies several support and collaboration strategies which we resume per economic sectors as follows:

Services (for companies)

- Hosting curricular and extracurricular internships (COMP_3)
- Implementing training courses (COMP_3)

Services (people care)

- Support VET providers hosting curricular internships (COMP_4, 8, 12)
- Implementing training courses (COMP_8)

Restaurants, hospitality and touristic sectors

- Implementing training courses (COMP_13; 15; 9)
- Hosting workers through the so-called “apprenticeships contract” (COMP_14, 15, 7, 9)

Manufacturing

- Hosting stages/curricular internships (COMP_19; 2)
- Hosting workers through the so-called “apprenticeships contract” (COMP_17, 18, 19, 2)

- Direct donations to training centres and foundations that facilitate these initiatives (COMP_2)

Industry

- Hosting extracurricular internships (COMP_1)
- Hosting stages/curricular internships (COMP_5)
- Hosting workers through the so-called “apprenticeships contract” (COMP_1)
- Establishing “Dual apprenticeship” contract (COMP_1, 10; 11, 5)

The collaborative approach spans all the economic sectors we considered. Most companies from the restaurants, hospitality and tourism, as well as manufacturing and industry sectors are hosting workers through the so-called “apprenticeships contract” and “dual apprenticeships” recently established under the “Jobs Act” (Carollo, 2015), alongside internships and training opportunities, notably in the manufacturing and industrial sectors, as noted by VET providers and secondary schools. Furthermore, some companies forge partnerships with universities, research institutions, and VET providers, especially in fields related to international competitiveness in manufacturing and services sectors.

1.2 Training providers and skills mismatch

In Italy, reference data pertaining to the education system—particularly concerning primary, secondary, and vocational training, as well as the labor market—are primarily concentrated in two official institutions: ISTAT, the country's official statistical agency, and Unioncamere, which employs the Excelsior method (annual forecast surveys of labor needs, albeit limited to the industrial sector). Alongside this framework, for the focus of our research—namely, skill mismatches, training, and sustainable employment for foreigners in the workforce—there is only the annual ISTAT report on continuing education. Additionally, various self-generated reports from organizations associated with trade unions and business entities exist. However, much of this

data is not directly comparable, and there is a lack of opportunities for cross-referencing or methodologically validating the information. As part of the Italian working group, we have addressed these challenges to fulfil the survey criteria outlined in the first section of this report. The economic and labor sectors we included largely stem from separate and self-referential surveys conducted by individual institutions, which necessarily informed our literature review.

In particular, in Italy, VET providers are divided in three main categories (Forma Center, 2023)³⁸:

1. *-Centri di formazione professionale (Vocational training centres – IeFP),*
 2. *Centri Provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti (Provincial Adult Education Centres – CPIA), -*
 3. *Enti per la formazione continua (Continuing education institutions which also includes vocational training institutions).*
1. There are about 200 **Centri di Formazione Professionale (IeFP - Vocational training centres)** distributed throughout the country, with greater density in Northern Italy. They deal with *initial training, training for vulnerable groups, adult training and employment services*. Foreigners are mainly present in employment services, given that the great distance between demand and supply of personnel puts them in a favourable position, especially for operational figures³⁹. They are also part of the training for migrant minors, in some cases unaccompanied, for whom a special agreement with the national government is envisaged. To the adults are normally former offered supplementary training modules (group and individual, face-to-face distance and blended), according to a personalized approach. This is preceded by interviews and skills assessments. The modules, of varying

³⁸ <https://360formacenter.it/formazione-professionale-italia-dati-istat/> Retrieved 29.03.2025.

³⁹ "Operational" does not necessarily mean low culture, given that these figures, as a result of technological and organizational innovation, as well as the expansion of areas of responsibility in various areas (safety, health, ecology, privacy, inclusion...), are affected by a progressive growth of knowledge and skills.

duration depending on the content, conclude with skills tests. To the minors are usually offered three-year and four-year vocational education and training (IeFP) courses, with a more intense training area aimed at learning the Italian language for migrants.

2. **Centri Provinciali per la formazione degli adulti (CPIA- Provincial Adult Education Centres)** differ from schools and have several locations in all Italian provinces. They mainly offer *adult education courses* to obtain qualifications and certifications and initiatives to expand the training offer aimed at integrating and enriching adult education paths and/or promoting the connection with other types of education and training paths. In the area aimed at obtaining the lower secondary school license, the presence of foreigners is increasingly significant. However, a significant component is attending evening courses to earn diplomas in the various economic and technological sectors, particularly relevant to the technical and professional areas. Like the CFPs, the CPIAs detect the training needs of the participants through interviews and competency assessments; based on the needs identified, they offer both structured courses and ad hoc modules or adopt mild solutions that provide for both.
3. There are about 360 **Enti per la formazione continua (Continuing education institutions)** distributed throughout the country. They deal with the development of the skills of *the employed*, among which the component of foreigners is constantly increasing. The most important training component, with 35.5% of the total courses, concerns operational skills. Depending on the sector, this area sees between 7 and 25% of foreign workers. The Forma Centers operate according to companies' requests and use interprofessional funds financed by the mandatory contribution of 0.30% of employees' pay-checks to INPS and loans related to European Social Funds and resources from

companies. The individual Training Plan indicates that the training needs to be linked to deficiencies/skill discrepancies (ISTAT, 2022).

Curricula in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Curricula in VET are designed in close alignment with labor market needs, a fundamental aspect in ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of training programs. In Italy, the **State-Regions Conference** plays a central role in this process, serving as the forum for coordinating training policies between local and central institutions, where all stakeholders involved in the VET system, including businesses and professional organizations, actively participate in direct dialogue with the labor market (Ministry of Education, 2019)⁴⁰. This collaborative model enables continuous updates to train programs, ensuring they remain aligned with emerging demands across various economic sectors. The use of data from **institutional reports**, such as those from **Unioncamere**, is crucial in guiding vocational training policies. These reports provide detailed analyses of labor market needs and the skills required by different sectors, serving as essential tools for monitoring the effectiveness of the training offer and its impact on youth employment, as well as its adaptability to the increasing digitalization and new labour challenges (Unioncamere, 2022; 2024).

In Italy, VET is regionally regulated, and VET institutions calibrate their curricula to labour market demand through a multi-level governance system that involves State-Region agreements, sectoral stakeholders, and continuous updating of training offers. The State-Regions Agreement (in Italian ‘Accordo Stato-Regioni’) ensures minimum national standards for qualifications and curricula, alignment of training profiles with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and European Qualification Framework (EQF), approval of shared training standards (in Italian *standard minimi*

⁴⁰ <https://www.mim.gov.it/-/linee-guida-per-favorire-e-sostenere-l-adozione-del-nuovo-assetto-didattico-e-organizzativo-dei-percorsi-di-istruzione-professionale> Retrieved 29.03.2025.

formativi) to be implemented across regions. Regions are responsible for implementing and adapting VET curricula to local labour market needs using:

- labour market observatories (in Italian *Osservatori del mercato del lavoro*) to monitor trends;
- collaboration with employers' associations, chambers of commerce, and sectoral councils;
- periodic review and adjustment of training profiles, especially in high-demand sectors (e.g., green jobs, digital skills, tourism, mechatronics).

Some regions, such as **Tuscany**, promote a “**dual system**” (Jobs Act, 2015), inspired by the German model which integrates **apprenticeships** and **internships** with local companies. This approach ensures real-time calibration of curricula with the evolving demand for skills. According to the data collected from the interviews, this is what happens in the example of the regions of Lombardy and Lazio in the **technological and digital** and **tourism and catering** sectors respectively in order to improve the employability of students. In order to maintain quality and relevance, Regions and institutions offer ad hoc training programmes for trainers on new technologies, sector-specific innovations and teaching methodologies.

There are national guidelines for competence profiles of trainers, but **regions often customise upskilling programmes**. VET institutions also offer monitoring and feedback systems to improve curriculum design and planning. This continuous improvement is driven by a graduate tracking system (to collect data on employment rates and continuous training), employer feedback surveys and performance indicators (e.g., dropout rates, certification rates). VET in Italy does not face challenges in specific sectors, but critical issues arise from its own structure: its regional nature leads to major challenges related to human and financial resources. The financial gap between the North and the South in Italy is also reflected on the VET providers (and the related regional funds

available to them): in particular, **Campania** and **Sicily** region report difficulties in accessing sufficient funds to update training programs and train qualified teachers.

How VET system works per considered economic sectors

The IeFP and CPF training bodies cater to **all economic sectors**, including the 5 we are analysing. According to Forma Center (2023), the sectors with the highest percentage of training provided include: Finance and Insurance (96.4%); Electricity, Gas, Water, and Waste Management Supply (83.7%); Mechanical, Electrical, and Electronic Appliances (83.7%); ICT Services (82.0%); and Construction (82.1%). We resume the main training approaches adopted in Italy per considered economic sector as follows:

Table 11 Training approaches per considered economic sectors

Economic sectors	Specific training approach	Features
Services (people care)	Modules on care, empathy, stress management + OSS certification	Great attention to relational and cultural skills. Often integrated with language courses.
Servizi (for companies)	Modular training for industrial cleaning, facility management, surveillance, call centers	High incidence of migrants in low-skilled sectors. Focus on language for work context, safety rules, rights/duties, time management. In some cases, the possession of specific certifications (e.g. HACCP, safety) is required.
Restaurants, hospitality and tourism	Hands-on training + language for customer relations	Short and professionalizing paths. Often required an update on HACCP, hygiene and health regulations.
Manufacturing	Machinery training + quality management	Chain and team work, so linguistic and cultural accompaniment is also important.
Industry	Technical courses + safety certifications (e.g. PES/PAV, scaffolding), Technical training + forklift license + soft skills	Strong emphasis on safety regulations and teamwork. In Italy it often involves bilateral bodies (e.g. Construction Funds, Construction Schools – in Italian, Cassa Edile e Scuola Edile), Basic digital skills, precision, language to read documentation/logistics required

Source: Authors elaboration on data and analysis taken from: Unioncamere-ANPAL (2023), ETF (2021), ILO (2016; 2018), CEDEFOP (2017), INAPP/ISFOL (2024), ISMU Foundation (2024) CENSIS (2020).

Training system and changes in the labour market

The underlying reasons for skills shortages – specified in the introduction, in the analytical framework and in the statistical evidence of the report – are significant and reflect a shifting perspective among today’s qualified workers for all economic sectors which we considered. These factors include economic considerations, the management of work-life balance, a transformation in the understanding of work compared to previous generations, the distance between home and workplace, and the competitive pressures that smaller firms face from larger companies. Notably, 11 out of 18 companies – from all economic sector which we considered – reported difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified employees with professional or higher education qualifications.

That’s why immigration, for 18/19 companies from all economic sectors which we investigated, could be a potential solution to attract and retain qualified workers in the company to face current and future challenges: on the one hand, the demographic crisis; on the other hand, the difficulty in finding labour for Italians who, due to a high level of education or lack of availability to perform specific tasks, make it practically necessary to draw on a foreign workforce.

With respect to changes in the labour market, some critical elements of the training system emerge.

We resume that per economic sectors where some critical issues have been highlighted.

Services (for companies)

- Structural, perhaps understandable, difference in speed between the labour market and training (COMP_16)

COMP_16, a consultancy company working in the service for companies' sector, serving specially manufactures, collaborates closely with universities and institutions to co-design academics and experimental projects with client companies.

Education and companies have different speeds by their nature, it is not possible to have the same speed, and it would not make sense to have it. Nevertheless, today the two systems are not even able to travel in the same train, we notice a strong disconnection between market needs and training proposal. In my opinion, the challenge is to make the ITS and IFTS systems real as well as the university in dialogue with industry and on the business side, to elevate companies to training partners. Effective and not just formal. COMP_16

This partnership facilitates meaningful two-way knowledge exchange in fields such as AI, VR, and automation, making many customers rely exclusively on their expertise for these collaborations.

Service (people care)

- The education system is lagging the needs of the labour market, especially in the training of new resources with consolidated basic skills (COMP_12)
- Recruiting is challenging (COMP_3)
- Lack of people-care personnel and their motivation/vocation (COMP_4)
- Lifelong learning is important to deepen and update the essential skills (COMP_8)

Restaurants, hospitality and tourism

- This sector has not been seen as an area in which it is necessary to be trained (COMP_14)
- The challenge is to bring the world of training closer to the labour market (COMP_9)

Manufacturing

- Failing into adapting the speed of changing of the labour market and VET / training system (COMP_2)
- several companies are actively working to enhance workplace conditions to promote a healthier environment

- some companies engaging in dialogue with training institutions, such as the CNOS-FAP Vet centres, to help ensure that the experience of young student-workers is as sustainable as possible (COMP_17; COMP_2)

Industry

- Lack of consistent skills; lack of problem-solving skills (COMP_1; 11)
- Lack of pupils in the specialized sector VET (e.g. marble school “CFP Salesiani San Zeno sede di Sant'Ambrogio”) (COMP_10; 11)

As a result, organizations are prompted to experiment with adaptive strategies aimed at attracting, retaining, and potentially training employees. We then asked how they were addressing the shortage of skilled workers with basic vocational training (VET) and higher education (HE) qualifications, and summarising the central answers, this picture emerges:

- 18/19 companies are improving working conditions and salaries (all economic sectors);
- 15/19 companies work for the skill development of the workforce (all economic sectors);
- 14/19 companies establish greater collaboration with VET and HE institutions (all economic sectors).

However, we found companies unprepared for the possibility of losing qualified labour due to emigration of native workforce, 14 out of 18 companies from all considered economic sectors do not have a defined strategy to counter this possibility especially in the industry sector (4 out of 4); while the remaining four companies from the services (people-care), restaurants and manufacturing sectors have described their strategy as follows:

The company aims to continuously improve the psychophysical well-being of its staff in the workplace, constantly activating welfare policies or improving existing ones. COMP_12 (services-people care)

Increase wages and working conditions. COMP_13 (restaurants)

Keeping working conditions aligned with opportunities that arise in other countries. COMP_2 (manufacturing)

Strengthen relationships with educational institutions at all professional levels. COMP_17 (manufacturing)

We inquired whether companies from all economic sectors considered were considering hiring migrant workers. For those who currently employ such individuals, particularly in the service, restaurant, and manufacturing sectors, there seems to be little concern regarding the workers' origins amidst a workforce shortage. Specifically, 10 out of 18 companies from all economic sectors we considered have already engaged or are thinking about hiring foreign staff.

We are not interested in the origin (workers), but in commitment and collaboration. COMP_2 (manufacturing)

On the other hand, those who do not hire point out problems such as the difficulty in hiring qualified migrant personnel who can work in specific contexts, such as services (people care retirement homes, RSA in Italian), restaurants, and industry (wood production):

Why do you need a qualification recognized by the region to be able to operate in RSAs. COMP_4 (services – people care)

Last year we evaluated some countries but stopped for bureaucratic reasons. COMP_15 (restaurants)

Migrants often have problems integrating. Poor knowledge of the language is one of the predominant reasons COMP_5 (industry – wood production)

After that, we asked them, if they were hired, how they plan to retain migrant workers. Here are some shared strategies:

- increasing workplace security (10 out of 12) all economic sectors
- better wage conditions (8 out of 12) all economic sectors
- career opportunity (8 out of 12) in manufacturing, industry and restaurants

And finally, we asked them to indicate the key measures to retain foreign workers in the company we resume per economic sectors the results:

Services (people care)

- Job security, advantageous wage conditions, family support. COMP_3
- Adequate economic wage, improving working condition, favor the psychophysical well-being of the employee COMP_2

Services (for companies)

- Integrated system of welcoming, social engagement for the single person and/or the related family COMP_16

Restaurants, hospitality and tourism

- Give security, availability, be welcoming and understand their possible problems. COMP_13
- Training and stabilization in the company in the long term. COMP_14
- Encouraging optimal corporate climate, the respect and the inclusion. COMP_7
- Creating an inclusive and respectful work environment, providing opportunities for professional development, and providing support for cultural integration to improve employee satisfaction and to promote greater job stability COMP_9

Manufacturing

- Provide in-house training in line with market needs COMP_17
- Help in finding a home and attention in facilitating inclusion in the group. COMP_18
- Creating the conditions that allow a migrant to have a dignified life and the possibility of growth. COMP_2

Industry

- Offer the same conditions given to local workers and already hired. COMP_10; 11

These answers are not only interesting but highlight even more how much companies across all economic sectors we considered are really on the ball with respect to what their role can be in making the work experience of foreign employees as sustainable as possible.

1.3 Resume

Both closed and open responses illustrate how the issues highlighted in the literature analysis and statistical reports correspond to real-world situations. The interviewed companies, which play significant roles in their respective economic sectors, emphasized the structural challenges in finding labour and the potential solutions offered by migration. However, they recognize that effective integration involves professional training and embedding the worker within the socio-cultural context of the company. For instance, helping workers learn the local language, secure housing, and ensure good living conditions for their families are just a few strategies companies

are adopting to retain foreign employees. Some have already partnered with vocational training institutions (VET) and universities to facilitate this process.

2. Intermediaries (Employers' organizations, trade unions, labour market intermediaries and NGOs) and HE

As for the companies interviewed, we tried between June and July 2024 to collect the interviews of **intermediaries** through the online questionnaire, as shared in WP2 Methodological Guidance. Using the online questionnaires, we collected just 4 interviews with Int_1/VET_1: Cassa Edile / Scuola Edile di Bergamo (intermediary and training in the **construction sector**); Int_2: Diakonia Onlus Foundation / Caritas Bergamo (reception and integration of migrants/refugees); Int_3: Teacher (state public school); Int_4: JA ITALIA (Provision of training on job orientation for migrants and refugees in reception centres). However, since we have collected just 4 online interviews and considering the depth and the theme articulation, we preferred to adopt the Focus Group tool. Therefore, we organized 4 Focus Groups (FGs): FG_1 for Lombardy Region based stakeholders (3 participants); FG_2 for Lazio Region based stakeholders (4 participants); FG_3 involving several bodies/stakeholders that operate at the national level (8 participants); FG_4 involving representatives of Higher Education institutions (3 participants). The FG_1 lasted 1 h 4 min, the FG_2 lasted 1 h 23 min, the FG_3 lasted 1 h 47 min, and the FG_4 lasted 1h 35 min.

Table 12 Focus Groups dataset

ID	PARTICIPANT	LEVEL OF OPERATION	SECTOR	FG_ID	DATE
COMP_1	Intesa Costruzioni – Bergamo	Regional	Construction	FG_1 (Lombardy)	23 July 2024 at 3.30 pm
HE_1	ISRE-IUSVE	National/International	HE institution	FG_4 (HE_IT)	07 November 2024 at 4.00 pm
HE_2	ITS San Marco Venezia-Mestre	Regional	VET/HE (manufacturing, mechatronics, ICT, graphic communication)	FG_4 (HE_IT)	07 November 2024 at 4.00 pm
HE_3	University of Bergamo	National/International	HE institution	FG_4 (HE_IT)	07 November 2024 at 4.00 pm
Int_1/VET_1	Cassa Edile – Bergamo	Regional	VET provider (construction sector)	FG_1 (Lombardy)	23 July 2024 at 3.30 pm
Int_10	Gi Group	National	Labour market intermediary (multi-sector)	FG_3 (Italy)	27 September 2024 at 4.00 pm
Int_11	Fondazione Don Calabria per il sociale E.T.S. (Servizio MSNA)	Regional/National	NGO working in the reception and integration of migrants/refugees	FG_3 (Italy)	27 September 2024 at 4.00 pm
Int_5	CIES Onlus (Referente SOFeL)	Regional	NGO working in the reception and	FG_2 (Lazio)	19 September 2024 at 4.00 p.m.

			integration of migrants/refugees		
Int_6	Salesiani per il Sociale	Regional/National	NGO	FG_2 (Lazio)	19 September 2024 at 4.00 p.m.
Int_7	Randstad (Person 1)	National	Labour market intermediary (multi-sector)	FG_2 (Lazio)	19 September 2024 at 4.00 p.m.
Int_7bis	Randstad (Person 2)	National	Labour market intermediary (multi-sector)	FG_3 (Italy)	27 September 2024 at 4.00 pm
Int_8	Confcooperative Regione Toscana	Regional	Employers' organisation (social cooperation)	FG_3 (Italy)	27 September 2024 at 4.00 pm
Int_9	Confindustria	National	Employers' organisation (industry, manufacturing, etc.)	FG_3 (Italy)	27 September 2024 at 4.00 pm
VET_2	ENGIM – Lombardia	Regional/National	VET provider (care sector and others)	FG_1 (Lombardy)	23 July 2024 at 3.30 pm
VET_3	Ciofs Lazio (VET)	Regional/National	VET provider (Restaurants, hospitality, and tourism)	FG_2 (Lazio)	19 September 2024 at 4.00 p.m.
VET_4	ENAC Veneto - Ente Canossiano	Regional	VET provider (services for companies, manufacturing, industrial mechanics, ICT, logistics)	FG_3 (Italy)	27 September 2024 at 4.00 pm
VET_5	CEFAL Emilia-Romagna	Regional	VET provider (manufacturing, services for companies, construction, restaurants, hospitality, and tourism)	FG_3 (Italy)	27 September 2024 at 4.00 pm
VET_6	CIVIFORM	Regional	VET (restaurants, hospitality, and tourism, construction, manufacturing, wellness, ICTs)	FG_3 (Italy)	27 September 2024 at 4.00 pm

All focus groups were conducted via the Zoom platform, audio-recorded, transcribed, and synthesized directly using the AI companion plugin. The Italian research team utilizes thematic analysis as outlined by Clarke and Braun (2017), a qualitative methodology aimed at identifying, analysing, and reporting themes or patterns within textual data. This approach entails a systematic process of data coding that emphasizes significant and recurring elements within the material. The methodology is carried out in several distinct phases: first, familiarization with the data; second, the generation of initial codes; followed by theme development and review; third, the definition and naming of the identified themes; and, finally, the drafting of the analysis report. We selected this approach for its flexibility, which accommodates empirical and inductive analysis without the need for a predefined theoretical framework, thereby adapting to the unique characteristics of the data and research. Thematic analysis is particularly valuable for its ability to uncover both similarities and differences, enriching our understanding of the phenomena under investigation. In

our study, we simultaneously analysed the same FG discussions in Italian. Two individuals—one a participant and the other not—were tasked with highlighting the key aspects of the four collective discussions. They subsequently shared insights from the primary coding process, which was grounded in the comparison and discussion of the emerging thematic cores. Once our strategy was established, we finalized the analysis and developed a codebook, then we translated our findings into English, ensuring that the data from the Italian case study could be compared with those of our other partners.

2.1 Construction, manufacturing and care sectors with VET, employer organisation and companies

The FG_1 has addressed the challenges of the industry (construction), manufacturing and care sector, including the decrease in workers' production capacity, discussing projects to train immigrant workers and improving the sector's attractiveness. The importance of implementing better skills research and a better understanding of market needs, as well as the need to take a more cultural approach to the integration and inclusion of migrant workers, was widely addressed. Below, we will address each of the emerging challenges.

The main challenges in the construction and industry sectors: some possible solutions

During the FG, Int_1/VET_1, director of the construction school, as well as president of one of the most important business organizations in the sector, illustrated the contemporary challenges that the construction sector is facing, including the decrease in the number of workers and the potential decrease in the production capacity of companies.

Cassa Edile gives me the opportunity; it gives us the opportunity to the social partners, above all, to have a cross-section of what the sector is today. That is, we are focusing on workers: more or less 11,500 registered workers, of which 53% are not of Italian origin, with an average age of 46.5 years, with more or less 35%, i.e. 1/3 who are at least 50 years old, with more than worrying entry and exit rates. For five who retire, lucky them and deservedly given the effort they make, there is one who enters. In recent months, if there are 100 who enter, more or less 2/3 are not of Italian origin, and in any case, they have an average age of 38. Higher than that of the Italians, but not as low as we would expect, that of the immigrants, as I would expect that of the immigrants. So, the Cassa Edile side is very quantitative if you like. It describes a sector that has, like others, a massive problem with people who will work in it. So much so that the challenge is not to understand how to develop this sector further but, all else being equal, how to guarantee a constant production capacity. That is if the trend continues in this way, but it is already seen in many companies, it is

not clear how they will be able to guarantee a production capacity that they have always guaranteed.
FG_1_Int_1/VET_1

The interviewee stressed the importance of addressing these issues to ensure the sustainability of the industry *tout court*. As conductors of the FG, we have contributed and fuelled the discussion, stating that despite the lack of workers, construction remains an essential artisan component. The participants agreed that the need to address the issue of foreign workers in the construction sector is essential. Int_1/VET_1, giving practical examples, announced the launch of a project that, from September 2024, intends to train immigrant workers (from Tunisia) in the construction sector to learn the Italian language and acquire essential skills. COMP_1 highlighted the fragmentation of construction work into specialized tasks, often divided by nationalities/cultures of origin of the workers.

As far as the actual construction work is concerned, we are a general construction company that manages the construction site. In this sense, we found ourselves having to manage the language problem, which touched Int_1/VET_1 in a very... very important because basically, what we have seen in prospect is the fragmentation of the individual phases of work even by ethnicity, I don't know if Int_1/VET_1 has this way of finding this too substantially and by country of origin, precisely because of the language problem. What's going on? The processes and the various phases of work in the construction industry have been unpacked by the construction companies that by now at least I speak for mine, they have become real service companies, where more than anything else they coordinate the activities of companies that instead know how to do only one phase of the work and therefore a single input factor. We coordinate the various input factors and give a finished product. So, we go to interface on the market with companies, one of which does only one job. There is the iron installer, there is the construction hat maker, there is the one who makes plasterboard building structures, we have even seen specialization [...] We have really arrived in an almost Fordist perspective to break down the work phases as much as possible, because what does this entail? It involves making them simpler and easier... more easily a worker is able to acquire that type of professionalism there which, obviously, compared to the old masons Int_1/VET_1 was talking about, constitutes only perhaps a hundredth of the skills they had and that we are losing with the retirement of this age group [...] We have Pakistani ironmongers, i.e. iron installers for concrete. We have the subfloor workers who are all Romanians. We... There is this fragmentation of work precisely according to the country of origin, because at least among colleagues they can understand each other properly.
FG_1_COMP_1

He underlined the importance of highly qualified coordination figures who act as “go-betweens” we are facing, in fact, a restructuring of the construction sector in a **Fordist** sense: not only assembly line but functions divided based on stereotypes, socio-cultural conventions and pre-established customs.

Skills shortages in the services (people care) sector

The participants acknowledged the need for a more organized and structured approach to language teaching, emphasizing the importance of preventing conflicts between companies competing for qualified personnel. A significant concern arose from the focus group regarding the lack of training courses that adequately prepare connecting workers in the industry (construction) sector and beyond. According to INPS (2024)⁴¹, last year there were 833,874 domestic workers in Italy last year, marking a 7.6% decline from 2022, continuing a downward trend. The decrease follows increases in 2020-2021 due to the regularization of employment during the lockdown. Females comprise 88.6% of domestic workers, with male workers dropping below 96,000. The North-West region has the highest concentration of workers (30.7%), with Lombardy leading in numbers. Foreign workers make up 68.9% of the total, primarily from Eastern Europe. The division of labor shows a near-equal split between caregivers (49.6%) and housekeepers (50.4%). The 55-59 age group represents 18.1%, while those aged 60 and over account for 23.9%. Domestically, workers earn higher salaries than men in other sectors. Furthermore, the care sector highlights the “ethnicization” of labour, with migrants, especially women from Eastern Europe and Latin America, facing precarious work conditions and limited advancement opportunities due to cultural stereotypes. This aspect emerges across the various FGs we implemented, and is not strictly linked to this economic sector, but it overlaps all sectors, it appears as something that affects the foreign workers existence. Language barriers hinder career growth, while employers view these workers as essential, but policies lack structured pathways for skills development and certification.

⁴¹ <https://www.inps.it/it/inps-comunica/notizie/dettaglio-news-page.news.2024.06.osservatorio-sui-lavoratori-domestici-pubblicati-i-dati-2023.html> Retrieved March 24, 2025.

Integration of qualified workers and migrants in services (people care), manufacturing and industry (construction) sectors

A key point in the discussion was the inclusion of skilled secondary-level students in the labor sector, particularly within construction and manufacturing. Participants emphasized the need for effective training of young individuals in essential tasks, recalling how, in the past, apprentices received thorough on-the-job training. This approach was essential for ensuring that they grasped all phases of the construction and production process, a practice that has significantly diminished in today's context. The challenge lies in attracting qualified personnel who are willing to enter the workforce immediately after secondary school instead of pursuing a university degree. Companies are struggling to find individuals capable of performing office work as well as coordination tasks on production or construction sites. Furthermore, integrating migrant workers requires improved research into skill requirements and a greater understanding of labor market needs. VET_2 underscored the importance of career guidance, particularly in service sectors such as caregiving for the elderly, due to the aging population. This highlights the necessity for more systematic identification of skills and a clearer awareness of labor market demands. However, these discussions are often overshadowed by practical challenges, including the regularization of workers, obtaining necessary documentation, securing lawful employment contracts, and addressing the prevalence of undeclared work. This situation is frequently aggravated by fragmented employment practices, legislative gaps, and the insufficient enforcement of workplace regulations.

Training for incoming migrants in the construction, manufacturing and services sectors (care)

In the second part of FG_1, under the guidance of the researchers, participants explored the challenges faced by newly arrived migrant workers. They identified key issues related to training and integration, particularly concerning language acquisition, and discussed the opportunities

offered by the regulatory framework for initial training pathways. In this context, VET_2 shared insights from his organization, which, through the “Di casa in casa” (“From Home to Home”) project of Caritas-ACLI in Bergamo, has provided vital support to young migrants and vulnerable families. This initiative has established a support network for individuals who initially find themselves in a social environment lacking connections and relational assistance.

Work is a small piece of the problem of a foreigner or immigrant who arrives here, because there are many others before. So there is the theme of housing, there is the theme of health, there is the theme of services, there is the theme of a lot of things: the theme of language, of training, for which it would be interesting, and I was talking about it precisely on the work table together with Caritas, Acli, Patronato S. Vincenzo, those I mentioned earlier, in short, while then actors are a bit like those, that we were concerned with a network, that is, to create a network that can support where it is certain that there is work, in the sense that work is what keeps us alive and gives us the opportunity to live and earn money, but with attention also to all the other issues that revolve around. FG_1_VET_2

The discussion underscored the necessity to enhance and refine the processes and policies surrounding integration and collaboration among various institutions and stakeholders in the region. This collaborative effort aims to better address the needs of those seeking social and employment services, ultimately ensuring job opportunities, improved living conditions, and access to income. In relation to migration, an important issue for the construction sector is certainly attractiveness, as if the direct experience of foreign adults is negative, as a domino effect, it will not even encourage young people, their children to undertake that training and career path, leaving uncovered a sector that today needs both qualified and unskilled workforce.

Active skill partnerships: cooperation between Italian Labour Market and African Countries⁴²

Int_1/VET_1 has recently introduced a national initiative aimed at enhancing the appeal of the **industry sector** (construction). This project, which involves collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Labour, the Tunisian government, and various Italian training centres, seeks to train and integrate 2,000 Tunisian workers into the construction industry. As thoroughly discussed during the focus group, Italian companies are grappling with significant challenges in securing qualified

⁴² <https://www.elis.org/2024/11/05/tunisi-corso-per-lavoratori-settore-edile/> Retrieved: 07.11.2024.

labor. There is a growing demand for new skills, particularly in the plant engineering sector. This need is also evident in the industrial sector, especially within the pharmaceutical field, and has been highlighted in other focus group discussions. Int_9, representing a leading organization of Italian companies, outlined their role in FG_3 in establishing a system to address the challenges associated with integrating migrants into the workforce. The interviewee emphasized to the participants the importance of providing training to migrants in their countries of origin. In particular, he talks about the Confindustria project in collaboration with the “Don Bosco” VET centre in Cairo, Egypt⁴³, to meet the Italian demand for qualified technicians for manufacturing and industry sectors.

There is not only Egypt but also a constellation of Salesian formation institutions around. We are open to all types of collaboration. The Salesians are the most structured. However, that is the point we tried to insert with the Egyptian government; they see Don Bosco as a sort of excellence they try to copy. They tried to do it through FEIG, the Egyptian Confederation of Industry, which has opened seven academies with much money around Egypt that Don Bosco inspires, and we have tried to create bridges with these academies. It is precisely the method of the Salesians that has somehow contaminated. It will take more time there; it is not immediate. FG_3_Int_9

It is therefore important for the interviewee to also transmit know-how in non-EU places where they can carry out professional training and with which to build skills partnerships. Int_9 describes the success of this pilot project and others, such as the placement of Ghanaian welders in the city of Pordenone (North-East), facilitated by the pre-existing presence of the Ghanaian community. It underlines the need to simplify the process of skills recognition and obtain entry visas. However, they are all examples that in a certain sense aim to integrate highly trained and “Italian-style” trained people into the workplace.

⁴³ Similar projects are also being extended to other higher technical institutes in North Africa, always involving large Italian companies in partnerships.

2.2 Integration and migration with employment agencies, NGOs, VET providers and employers' organisations in all economic sectors

In FG_2 and FG_3, we examined the intricate issue of migration dynamics in Italy, focusing on the reception of migrants, their integration into the labor market, and their adaptation to various life contexts. We also investigated the challenges that hinder the recognition of educational qualifications and technical skills. Various stakeholders discussed successful practices and initiatives that promote labour and social inclusion, highlighting the necessity of a structural and systematic approach. Participants emphasized the importance of fostering collaborative networks among institutions, organizations, and companies to enhance the social and labor integration of migrants in **all considered economic sectors**.

Immigration in Italy: integration policies and practices

During the online meetings, the issue of immigration in Italy was explicitly discussed, drawing attention to criticisms of the current approach, which has been described as "colonial" and "emergence." The conversation emphasized the urgent need for establishing structural policies focused on integrating and including migrants rather than persisting with a voluntary approach.

The migration phenomenon is a constantly changing phenomenon. However, the denunciation of the emergency does nothing but send us back a significant lack of responsibility, if not for the most deleterious aspects of the institutions, that is, basically a lack of real supervision, a lack of competent attention on the part of the institutions continues to leave all responsibility for the emergency, where the emergency exists. Or in any case of a phenomenon that has been structural in our country for several decades now but is not adequately treated as structural, means that we always find ourselves without or having to somehow make up for institutional shortcomings in the response we give to the processes of accompaniment, to the work of integration. Obviously, even the migration policies that are very racist or, if I may say so, in this context, fascist and indeed, colonial of the current government, but also of the governments that, alas, preceded it, so they have done nothing but, how to say complicate the lives of migrants arriving in Italy, both because, with the Dublin Convention, for those who perhaps had to apply for asylum or those who were transiting here: by tightening the regulations to have a residence permit for work and beyond, they have done nothing but increase marginalization, but also the difficulty of job placement in more structured processes to fall the problem further, as an avalanche also on housing insertion processes, as well as more generally and socially. So, let's say that my attention goes above all to the tremendous institutional shortcomings and the tremendous political responsibilities of the insiders, who, at a certain level, in a wholly ideological and instrumental way, have speculated and manipulated at the expense of migrants, a series of policies that then cascaded and then reverberated at the social level. FG_2_VET_3

VET_3 mentioned the “Riace” model (Versace, 2019)⁴⁴, along with other successful examples, demonstrating how migrants have been actively integrated into the economic and social fabric of their communities, thereby regenerating and revitalizing these areas⁴⁵.

The Riace model was a model; it was a good practice that was also recognized internationally. Except that internationally, it has been recognized and appreciated; at the national level, however, it has been totally... dismembered, torn to pieces, having taken to court the creator Mimmo Lucano, who was its creator, so clearly the destructive and poisonous political will that was put in place in this. In this case, it is also a model of widespread inclusion. In short, he had. I will not dwell on it because I imagine we all know him, but, precisely, I would pay attention to that type of model because it was perhaps a *unicum* or at least a trailblazer from this point of view. It was truly innovative, cascading, even in a two-way way, and it created added value. Moreover, let's say that it was not only from a colonial point of view, if I may say so, from the aid from North to South, but in this case, it was also the migrant community, which in some way supported the entire local community. Thus, there was a mutual exchange, which was an exciting experience in terms of relationships and social impact. In addition, of course, to job placement and all that follows. FG_2_VET_3

Int_6 conveyed the realities surrounding the reception and integration of migrant families, highlighting the structural complexities that these individuals face in obtaining recognition for their qualifications, securing suitable housing, and achieving a level of autonomy.

The voluntaristic approach understood precisely, as was then explained earlier, actually is an aspect that, in any case, remains within the proposals because, especially in the emergency reception phase, with which we then tried to systematize the approaches of the voluntaristic experience, in the support of the educating community, let's call it, of the families was necessary to turn on to possibilities for the families, together then with everything related to the services related to the context, then to the educators and professionals that were put in place for all the various actions that we proposed. FG_2_Int_6

The text underscores the pressing need to enhance support and guarantee structured mechanisms for the organizations that assist these persons and families, which are striving to address ongoing challenges despite frequent regulatory changes. Discontinuity concretely undermines the autonomy of the subjects:

⁴⁴ Riace's integration model was born in 1998 with the landing of two hundred refugees from Kurdistan. On that occasion, the Città Futura Association was born, to help migrants who have just landed by making available the old houses abandoned by the owners who have emigrated over the years from the town in the Calabria region. The goal was to revitalize a municipality at high risk of depopulation. The inclusion system that has developed in the municipality of Riace has served to give rise to the repopulation of the village and houses have been renovated, ancient crafts have been resumed, and the village has been relaunched through breeding and agriculture activities. Riace is a model that not only makes you "touch with your hands" how coexistence between different peoples can actually exist, but also a model that has as its cardinal principle the belonging to the whole of humanity.

⁴⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/t-magazine/abandoned-italian-towns.html> Retrieved: 07.11.2024.

We have several experiences of difficulty in completing the autonomy of families even after two years. We are now in this phase, that many families who have escaped from the reception systems find themselves without any possibility. FG_2_Int_6

Migrants' employments: between emergency and assistance services in all economic sectors

The FG_3 convened representatives from various organizations to discuss migrant employment at the national level. Participants included ENAC International Canossa (VET_4) and Int_11, an educational welfare community, who shared their experiences in providing vocational and language training for migrants. Both emphasized the necessity of collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including public and third sector bodies such as cooperatives, non-profit associations, and NGOs, to offer comprehensive support to migrants—from skills training (both soft and hard) to job placement. At this juncture, we turn our focus to the challenges related to employment support services and the current integration obstacles. VET_6, the contact person for a vocational training centre in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region of North-East Italy, discusses the institution's experience with unaccompanied foreign minors, which has been ongoing since 2000. They outline the changes that have taken place in migration flows and the nationalities of the migrants involved.

Thanks to our history in the reception of unaccompanied foreign minors, I noticed that the (past) flows were those of the Balkan route that was intensely active, as you well know, in previous years, and all the flows deriving from the entry of the Tarvisio area, therefore from Austria to Italy. Currently, the flow has decreased for reasons related to the geopolitical situation it is seeing in our Mediterranean. Friuli Venezia-Giulia was first structured with large entities, just like in our case, which welcomes foreign minors. Then, in a second period, I can tell you 8 years ago, about 8-9 years ago, with smaller realities, because the political direction was to create more small communities in such a way that the interests that could derive from reception would not be concentrated. The political situation always has this somewhat sordid gaze on the subject. I can also tell you about your keywords (referring to Researcher_1): voluntarism and emergency stationing, and I fully share them. If there had been an act of will before, the region would have slowly become structured. The will of our institution, which has always been a collaborative partner on the part of my management, has always actively collaborated in designing courses aimed at the integration of minors, also with an eye to the turning point that the minor makes at the age of eighteen. There are also projects to accompany them in the working realities after age 18. For the emergency, yes, massive work would be needed, in my opinion, political, institutional and financial, precisely in structuring, no longer in emergency immigration, but a structured integration policy. Here, we were countries of emigration and then became immigrants, with some hints also of our researchers who aim in other countries, but the foreign team will always remain an important topic for our country because it makes up for work realities that perhaps our Italian citizens no longer want to do. FG_3_VET_6

VET_6, as well as the other participants, agree with the voluntary structuring of assistance services and the emergency with which institutions approach immigration, underlining the need for a more structured integration policy and the importance of immigration for the Italian labour market.

Integration practices in manufacturing and industry sectors

In Int_5 during the FG_2, the activities and target groups of the migrant reception centres are discussed. The individuals involved in this organization focus on training and include young people who are either nearing the end of their time at the reception centres or have recently departed from them. They manage job orientation and training services for young migrants aged 18 to 30, specifically in Rome. Both parties underscore the importance of raising awareness among businesses, particularly small enterprises, regarding the inclusion of migrant workers. They also emphasize the necessity of overcoming stereotypes through information and support. The group primarily consists of males from diverse backgrounds, including Afghanistan, Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal.

They are young people who may be near the exit of the centres or are already outside the reception centres. Access comes spontaneously. Sometimes, they are sent back through their operators. We develop awareness of their soft skills or those acquired in the country of origin and then translate them and use them in the host country in Italy. We try, pass me the term, to make the most of the economic resources to include them in training programs. Training aimed at job placement through extracurricular internships allows a period of practical trial that also puts the person in front of a different country and job. Maybe they often start from the assumption: "Ah, I already know how to do it because in my country I was a maintenance technician, I was a maintenance technician". They then find themselves in the Italian context, which is a new role and skill to be acquired [...] However, most of the young people who come to our desk, as you said (referring to the Researcher 1), are young people who have basic skills and therefore, the work that CIES has been doing for several years is to create a connection and get in synergy with local companies, actors and local authorities to build a network in a structured way, which is not that simple. Maybe the funded project of the turn passes, pass me the term. Well, you build a fantastic network and put resources in synergy, but at the end of the project, then everything vanishes. What CIES is doing is precisely structuring this network in such a way that over the years, all the resources at the financial level, at the level of human resources and whatever, are then maintained over time and are used in a structured way, precisely for the social and work integration of migrants. FG_2_Int_5

Int_5 describes their aim to support migrants leaving reception centres, focusing on skills development and job placement through extracurricular internships. It highlights the importance of creating a structured network with companies and local authorities to maintain

resources over time. At the same time, Int_5 mentioned a pilot project capable of creating a “Cluster” that can involve all socio-economic and welfare actors (including companies) in planning the social-labour and cultural integration of migrants in the Italian context.

Role of Social Cooperation in all economic sectors

Int_8, representative of Confcooperative⁴⁶ in Tuscany (Central Italy), insists on the crucial role of social cooperatives and training agencies in offering integration services. Despite the region’s intention to adopt a more stable and integrated model, he points out that in practice there are still difficulties in implementing these programs, as there is a lack – again – of an integrated vision between the different institutional levels and the need for an organic path for integration.

The 2019 Decreto Sicurezza immediately comes to mind, substantially restricting the SPRAR policy and leading to management difficulties, even quite suddenly, precisely the same structures and cooperatives. We have cooperatives that manage these people's reception, integration and education [...] there is a strong sensitivity on the subject. Unfortunately, I will not tell you that they say the exact opposite. However, our companies have difficulty concretely adhering to the concept of integration and renewal of the very concept of integration. So, I remain in the middle of the ford. There is this that will be perceived, but in fact, we are still a bit anchored to the recent past FG_3_Int_8

Training projects in the countries of origin are also discussed, such as those presented by Confindustria and the experience of Coopermondo⁴⁷.

Coopermondo, our reference NGO, oversees the establishment, protection and representation of cooperatives outside Europe. Here, too, we find cases of integration "at home" as, unfortunately, this definition of some of our (right-wing) politicians has become famous. In this way, we make, if I may use the term, to solve the problem at the source. There are more disparate cases. There are situations in South America where the cooperative model takes root, where there is a slightly more advanced (cooperative) culture, while in Africa, it struggles more both from a cultural and often also regulatory point of view because the two things are often related. FG_3_Int_8

Int_7bis confirms the existence of recent projects in Randstad to train qualified personnel in the countries of origin (thanks to the ‘Decreto Cutro’), in collaboration with Italian companies in all economic sectors which we considered, to meet the needs of the Italian labour market, it remains to take into account the right balance between the needs of the market and the needs of migrants, so as not to fall back into the consolidated neocolonial practices and the paradigm of cultural

⁴⁶ The Confederazione Cooperative Italiane

⁴⁷ Association for International Development Cooperation ETS <https://www.coopermondo.it/> Retrieved: 06.11.2024.

assimilation, but that we move more and more towards a migrant-centred approach that enhances the skills and abilities of the migrants themselves (Bonfanti, 2014). VET_4 also remarked that there are also Erasmus+ programmes that, in the last 2-3 years, these actions are being financed that are returned from *capacity building* in VET, therefore vocational training in Africa and the Balkans, to send experts, perhaps from the Italian CPIA and VET, to African Countries, Eastern European Countries, or other countries to strengthen the vocational training on site and thus generate local development, facilitate the arrival of more prepared professionals especially in the industry, manufacturing, tourism, agriculture and sustainable forestry sectors, as well as green and digital emerging competences with less skills mismatch and therefore encourage exchanges of trained students⁴⁸.

In my opinion, these are interesting because they are bottom-up initiatives, that is, they give money to training institutions rather than local bodies that work in the training, education sector or companies to create contacts and therefore not wait for the administrations to come to an agreement at the regional and local government level. FG_3_VET_4

Some examples are the MoVET project⁴⁹ enacted by Enaip in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro to modernize the vocational education and training in tourism, hospitality, and ICT, or the INVEST and ADDUPT projects enacted by CESIE in Western Balkans digital vocational training for the green sector⁵⁰.

In summary, these FGs highlighted the key constraints and opportunities associated with the migration phenomenon in Italy. The discussion centred on professional training **across all economic sectors** which we considered, employment, and the socio-cultural integration of migrants, analysing the diverse experiences of immigration—from dire circumstances to more privileged situations. It underscored the importance of providing pathways for personal and

⁴⁸ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-organisations/cooperation-among-organisations-and-institutions/capacity-building-vet/projects-proposed-for-funding-in-2024-a-e> Retrieved 29.03.2025.

⁴⁹ <https://www.enaip.fvg.it/it/42397/movet> Retrieved 29.03.2025.

⁵⁰ <https://cesie.org/project/invest/> <https://cesie.org/en/project/addupt/> Retrieved 29.03.2025.

professional development. However, certain constants must be acknowledged, such as the illiteracy of many unaccompanied minors and the structural under-qualification of migrant workers entering our country. While it is vital to recognize effective practices in skill partnerships, we must also consider the broader structural and problematic aspects of the overall framework. Moving forward, it is essential to identify the specific professional roles that tertiary training institutions should prioritize, adapt curricula to meet the evolving skill demands of the labour market, address the challenges faced by beneficiaries of higher education, and investigate the persistent low representation of non-EU foreign migrant students in higher education programs, both at ITS and university levels. Additionally, potential strategies to overcome this impasse should be explored.

Challenges of the employment and housing integration of migrants in Italy

The FG_2 and FG_3 explicitly address the problems of the employment and housing integration of migrant workers in Italy, **independently from which economic sectors they come from**. Int_6 discussed the difficulty of finding housing and the potential role of companies as guarantors:

Another thing that I wanted to emphasize is everything related to precisely what is related to the housing issue in the arrangements with housing agencies, such as the difficulty of having accommodations, accommodations that can be durable anyway. Moreover, here is the whole issue of how organizations can act as guarantors in this process, through which surety policies and some mechanisms could be put in place, but they are very complex and not always sure the attention and sensitivity on the part of housing agencies. Should they come out of the shelters, even with a job eventually, so with a financial arrangement, they still might not get the housing they deserve. The issue of housing and the relationship with the housing agency is another issue that we are exploring, but it is a critical issue that so many other organizations we are in contact with note. FG_2 Int_6

VET_3 highlights the problem of the “ethnicization” of the labour market, where migrants are directed to specific sectors based on cultural stereotypes, limiting their career opportunities such as **women from Eastern Europe addressed to caregiving activities, or people from India and Bangladesh to agriculture and livestock activities**.

Very often, migrants, based on their cultural and geographical origin, are directed by our labour market, almost naturally in specific segments of the labour market without considering, even in the presence of a qualification, precisely their previous skills. I am thinking precisely of the Indians in animal husbandry,

which is to say, a mere cultural prejudice that sees them engaged above all in cattle management, even in the face of perhaps other skills. However, since they are Indians, they automatically find space in that sector. The same thing can be said for the whole game related to women from Eastern Europe, for the whole question of caregivers. Moreover, there is precisely the so-called "ethnicization of the labour market", although I hate the word ethnicity and all its declinations. But, in short, let's say that the phenomenon is known in this way [...] There is a whole mechanism of stereotypes and prejudices, so of course, a migrant, as a migrant, not as a professional or competent in other areas...As a migrant, he is naturally diverted towards certain paths of job placement in specific segments of the labour market because the labour market expects this. Here, we return to social representation, to the collective imagination. FG_2_VET_3

In the Italian labor market, the ethnicization of certain jobs significantly impacts other sectors, such as logistics, where Latin Americans are more frequently employed as express couriers compared to other ethnic groups. The reliance on migrant workers for roles that require minimal specialization—often without confirming their professional qualifications or educational credentials—reflects a structural issue, as indicated by the official statistics from the *Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione* (2023). Overcoming these discriminatory patterns is contingent upon targeted “Diversity and Inclusion Management” initiatives that promote the employment integration of migrants.

Housing and training/job integration of unaccompanied migrant minors

Int_11, coordinator of the Community for unaccompanied foreign minors of the Don Calabria Foundation in Verona (North-East), describes how the organization works with young migrants, highlighting the difficulties in their school and housing integration. Int_11 emphasizes the difficulty of placing children in mixed contexts with Italians and the little time available to prepare them for autonomy, given that the project ends once the minors reach 18 years and 6 months of age. The interviewee also mentions the educational team's integral approach, which works according to areas of competence, to assist minors in school, work, and social integration as efficiently and effectively as possible. However, several difficulties emerge, especially in balancing education training and work for these young people who need to obtain a salary. It is also stressed that in these basic training courses – generally oriented towards acquiring basic skills – there are no Italians so, from the beginning, there is a problem of integration and there has been

talk of “classroom segregation” in this sense. Many times, even personal needs push these children to abandon the possibility of studying even in the bud, having to work to send money to their families. However, sometimes, thanks to volunteering, the talent and desire to continue studying and therefore fulfil, on the part of young foreigners, is enhanced and cultivated thanks to the direct support of some families:

We have another boy, however, who has recently left the project, but we have managed to enrol him in a training school for mechanics and he will then continue his studies independently. Thanks also to another project that we have always remedied with another partner, “L’Albero”, and which is called OANA, where there are these families who have the desire, the will to welcome these unaccompanied foreign minors, and a lady welcomed this boy who intended to continue with his studies FG_3_Int_11

Furthermore, Int_7, representing Randstad, joins the discussion in both FG_2 and FG_3 by bringing the perspective of his organization introducing their best practices such the “Without Borders” project that will be analysed in the following paragraph.

“Without Borders” project for the labour inclusion of migrants⁵¹

In the FG_2 Int_7 presents the “Without Borders” project, which offers free guidance and training to migrants and refugees to facilitate job placement and promote cultural diversity in companies.

Without Borders is a project that is not only aimed at migrants but is also aimed at accompanying companies in social responsibility processes because we work as an employment agency on two fronts: that of the candidate and the corporate one; on the one hand, we must promote these policies of social diversity and inclusion. We must also obviously inform companies of these and include them in this circuit to encourage sensitivity, promotion and planning. Without Borders is a project that provides for the orientation and training of migrant citizens to facilitate their job placement and promote cultural diversity in the company. It is a service, but it is also a project that allows us and has allowed, to date, to give over 5600 migrants and refugees free orientation, coaching, and training activities completely free of charge. In 2022, we were also involved in the Ukrainian situation, and we offered 1780 Ukrainian refugees Italian language learning courses, skills assessment, counselling, and psychological listening. Of these, 570 have completed the steps, and 240 have had opportunities to enter Italy. These numbers can be improved at this time because they already testify to our commitment to social sensitivity to find work: an improvement in the working and social culture in Italy with tolerance that is shifting. After all, for us, the employment of migrants and refugees is integration. Interculturality within the organization means precisely applying a model of inclusion, right? FG_2_Int_7

⁵¹ <https://www.randstad.it/azienda/servizi-per-le-aziende/diversita-e-inclusione-in-azienda/without-borders/>
Retrieved March 28, 2025.

They do this to meet the country's needs, afflicted by a profound demographic transformation and an evolution of the labour market that increasingly requires certain types of workers. However, this must also be done by facilitating the inclusion of workers within paths that accompany them in retraining what their skills are, because many workers, as statistical data also show, do not have them, so it is essential to give all possible support to migrants with training courses, counselling activities, insertion into a different social working context, working for the acquisition of fundamental language skills, doing skilling and reskilling paths and dialoguing with companies to promote these projects such as Without Borders which have a strong social and also work imprint, especially for individuals without recognized skills and qualifications. This project has been in operation since 2017 and focuses on the inclusion and occupational integration of foreign talents, migrants, and refugees in Italy. The program offers various training pathways that encompass language learning, civic education, career guidance, and, when necessary, technical skill development.

What we do is create paths that, starting from what is the mapping of the skills of these people, therefore that also linguistic competence, through a linguistic assessment, we go to build a learning path, learning skills that start from language learning, civic education and Italian culture to arrive, to go through professional orientation and then preparation for the labour market and then, if necessary, depending on the talents we are talking about, the specificities of the talent, also preparation in technical and complex terms (skills) concerning what are the needs of the labour market [...] These are pathways that allow these people to acquire, first of all, the necessary basic skills to be self-reliant, to be able to value themselves, to be able to communicate in the labour market, so tell who they are, what their story is, the skills to understand where they are moving, in which system they are moving. From a civic education point of view, we need to get them to understand our system country. So, all the characteristics to be able to move independently and meet their own needs. It is a gradual path that slowly brings them closer to the labour market, as well as the vocational orientation part that aims precisely to create for them the tools to tell themselves to a company, an organizational context, and an organization. And then the hard (skills) part, if you need to. FG_3_ Int_7bis

It also collaborates with the third sector to establish a robust support network, especially with companies which are most demanding workforce such as services (people-care and companie), restaurants, hospitality, tourism, manufacturing and industry (which are the for economic sectors we investigated)⁵² Int_7bis emphasized the importance of raising awareness among companies,

⁵² <https://www.randstad.it/azienda/mercato-del-lavoro/#mercato-del-lavoro-dati> Retrieved: 28.03.2025.

regarding cultural diversity and recognizing foreign populations as valuable assets in addressing the challenges of the Italian labour market. Furthermore, Int_7bis provided insights into the geographical backgrounds of the program's beneficiaries, noting that 65% originate from Africa and Eastern Europe, particularly Ukraine, while the remaining 35% come from South America and Asia. VET_4 (ENAC) then described the two projects underway, one in Foggia (Southern Italy) for the employment of migrants in the agricultural sector and one in Veneto (North-East) to facilitate migrants' access to GOL paths⁵³ in the services and manufacturing sectors, from which significant language barriers emerge such as for VET and ITS, problems related to mobility (having driving licence and private car) and the mismatch between skills and job opportunities.

Many internships have been activated, but some have been interrupted due to communication difficulties, particularly with the migrants. A big problem was that they did not have a car, and often, these people did not have a driver's license. So, imagine a territory, however, like that of the captaincy of Foggia, which is very large, and a person even to work must move for a moment. They, how to say, tried to overcome this problem through a third-sector body that took people around with minibuses. I am giving you practical examples [...] Another thing that emerged from the project is that the most straightforward job to find for these people was in the agricultural sector, obviously legalized and in companies and cooperatives that valued migrants' work and recognized it. Nevertheless, these people often did not want to work in agriculture. So, there is this substantial misalignment between these people's will and skills and what the local labour market could give as a natural and immediate outlet with the skills, including language skills, that these people had. The other project in Veneto is more of an experimental project with the task of inserting migrants into the GOL pathways that have just started. It is interesting because it networks a whole series of third-sector actors, the municipality, and the public body to encourage these processes of initial linguistic training, soft skills, culture, and, above all, accompaniment. FG_3_VET_4

Both projects (L'Albero and Without Borders) underline the importance of stable partnerships with third sector entities (associations and NGOs) and the need for structural funding to ensure a certain continuity for these projects: "these initiatives that we do are not stable, in the sense that, if there is no funding behind it, whether it is regional or national, it is also difficult to be able to support these projects" (FG_3_VET_4). FGs then focused on the description of some projects on a regional basis launched for the integration of migrants. VET_4 also describes some emerging *best practices* in Veneto and Puglia, emphasizing the importance of a 360 degrees pre-training for migrants

⁵³ <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/occupazione/focus/pagine/programma-gol> Retrieved: 06.11.2024.

For example, if you want to enter employment services in the Veneto region, you must still be registered with the Employment Centre. A whole series of bureaucratic procedures is also quite complex, especially if you are a migrant. I see that there is Int_7/Int_7bis (from Randstad) here, but also Int_10 (from GiGroup), maybe even familiar with these procedures and trying to take migrants and train them and insert them and accompany them to the employment centre and insert them within this new context is quite challenging. This project would like to try lines and mechanisms to facilitate precisely. I came up with the term filing, which is ugly, but if you are not within the GOL or regional systems, you also struggle to find opportunities. I do not give you allowances. Even being able to enter the system and get registered can still open doors for you, so finding a way to facilitate this transition and collaborating with the actors of the territory is one of the purposes of this project. FG_3_VET_4

Initiatives for the inclusion of immigrants in the Italian labour market: policy suggestions

During the FGs, the attention was then on the initiatives that have significantly affected the inclusion of migrants in Italy. Attention has been drawn to the necessity of updating Italy's primary legislation from 2002 to better accommodate evolving migration flows. Discussions also reveal territorial disparities in the management of activities and potential regulatory gaps. Meanwhile, Int_5 points to the desire for change and the inherent challenges of institutionalizing this transition process. Both Int_7 and Int_6 underscore the urgent need for effective monitoring of the reception system, noting challenges associated with the locations of reception centres, which are often poorly connected to public transport, thus impeding migrants' **mobility** for work and training opportunities. Int_5 agrees on the need for a comprehensive overhaul of the reception and inclusion system, emphasizing that recent government decrees have reduced the services available to migrants. It is vital to address these issues responsibly and to adopt systematic strategies that foster stable connections with service providers, institutions, and businesses.

Int_6 discusses "third welcoming" projects that aim to create a more organic integration system. Int_7 highlights the value of a multidisciplinary approach and stresses the need to establish connections among various institutions and organizations. Additionally, regarding the "Riace" model, the prevailing narrative often misrepresents reality, with even commendable projects inadequately portrayed and publicized. Such successful initiatives are frequently overlooked due to poisonous and destructive political will as VET_3 remarked.

Also during the enhancement of “talent” at the National level with VET, NGOs, employers’ organization the employment of migrants in Italy have been analysed, discussing the challenges of integration and vocational and language training initiatives at national level, involving subjects located in different areas of the country, given precisely this differentiation on a regional basis of the economic fabric, but above all the management of vocational training and integration projects. The participants shared experiences and projects launched, underlining the importance of collaboration between the different actors to provide complete and integral support to migrants. The discussion addressed issues such as training in the countries of origin, the integration of unaccompanied minors in our country and the need to balance the needs of companies with an inclusive approach to the integration of immigrants in the workplace, but also in the extra-work environment.

2.3 ‘Foreign talent’: challenges and future perspectives with HE providers in manufacturing, industry, economics accounting, governance and sustainability

Higher education in Italy faces several challenges, including funding limitations for public universities, which primarily rely on state financial support, affecting the range of training programs and research activities. According to the OECD report (2024), there is also a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in disadvantaged areas, contributing to educational inequalities (e.g. the so-called “Two Italies” referring to the structural divide between the North and South).

In recent years, there has been a persistent misalignment in Italy between the university courses chosen by students and the needs of the labour market. In particular, STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) have a strong shortage of graduates compared to the employment demand. The most critical areas include Engineering (electronic, mechanical, management), Computer Science, Mathematics, Physics and

Statistics, areas in which companies struggle to find qualified personnel. Another area suffering is that of the health professions, especially nursing, physiotherapy and laboratory technicians, aggravated by the demographic and health context of the country. Added to these is the world of post-diploma technical-professional training (e.g. ITS Academy), which is not part of traditional university courses but represents a key sector with very high demand and insufficient supply. In contrast, some areas such as law, political science, psychology (with exceptions in the clinical field), and humanities have an excess of graduates compared to the job opportunities available (UNIONCAMERE, 2024; AlmaLaurea, 2024; Censis, 2024).

For many of the figures required by our labor market, as illustrated in the tables in the previous sections, they are figures that do not specifically require a tertiary level of education, with the exception of nurses, mechatronics technicians or doctors. For most of the figures lacking in our country, VET or ITS is sufficient, where in any case the attending students have very high levels of placement and where – compared to the demands of manufacturing or industrial companies – the demand for specialized workers is very high (e.g. CNC operators, technicians, etc.). The service sector (care), on the other hand, is where there is a lack of workers with degrees and tertiary specialization such as nurses and doctors, where there are insufficient nurses and for whom, for people coming from abroad, there are still no preferential paths to access public tenders.

To attract international talent, Italian universities are expanding English-taught programs, simplifying visa procedures, and offering financial incentives.

Various bureaucratic, linguistic, and cultural barriers were identified that impede both the arrival of foreign students and their subsequent integration into the Italian educational, professional, and socio-cultural landscape. Additionally, the group assessed the shortages of

qualified personnel in service (people-care), manufacturing and industry sectors and explored potential solutions to enhance the attraction and integration of foreign talent within the Italian context.

However, given the autonomous nature of university management, this is not necessarily the case everywhere. The FG_4, in collaboration with representatives from the Higher Education sector (universities and Italian ITS), thoroughly examined the mismatch of skills within the Italian labour market, as well as the challenges that international students encounter when accessing higher education and integrating into the workforce in Italy especially in manufacturing, industry, economics and accountability sectors. The discussion particularly focused on universities and Higher Technical Institutes which are regionally funded and regulated as VET providers, and how they support and attract foreign talents.

Lack of effective policies and strategies for the integration

HE_1, director of the ISRE Higher Institute of Educational Research (Tran. *Istituto Superiore di Ricerca Educativa*) and professor at the Salesian University Institute of Venice (IUSVE), gave us an overview of the situation in the Veneto Region, markedly emphasizing the lack of effective policies for the integration and training of immigrants, who often rely on informal ethnic networks for support and job placement. The biggest problem highlighted by the interviewee is the language skill: with little knowledge of Italian, there is only low-skilled job opportunity. If you know at least English, you still work as a labourer, but in sectors where there is contact with the public or where you work in teams such as tourism, catering, cook, and if you are good-looking, you can also work in restaurant rooms. Another crucial aspect underlined by the interviewee (which emerged in part in FG_3 from the Int_9), is the role of some specific communities of foreigners who facilitate the process of integration into the socio-economic and social fabric of Italy. He described the case of

Venice, where the Chinese and Bangladeshi communities activate informal networks not only for the reception of their compatriots but – in the case of the Bengali community – the members of their class, tribe and/or caste to which they belong.

The training institutions that manage the so-called...the tourist flow for training, are located in Venice; they are not the ENAIP, the CNOS-FAP, the SIVE of Confindustria, but they are the Chinese community in Padua and the Bangla community in Mestre (Venice), because they can support, through a relational, mutualistic, solidarity-based but fundamentally ethnic system, I would like to say for the communities of Bangladesh also tribal, because they are also divided into ethnic groups within them, within the same cities of origin, they manage the time necessary for the newcomers to find accommodation, to find a hot meal, to find something that can guarantee them that for the period of stay, also guaranteeing them a regular temporary job because they are managing flows through these ethnic representations [...] This is something that everyone knows. FG_4_HE_1

He insisted a lot on this point both to tell the story of the change in the Venetian territory and, above all, to describe how often people, if they do not have these opportunities offered by their community, are left alone for lack of adequate public policies to respond to contemporary complexities and the needs of citizens. This is also considering demographic change, where half of births in Venetian hospitals are children of foreigners, and this is not aligned with educational policies. The fact that these communities are very supportive is undoubtedly virtuous. However, it is also a factor that further makes it difficult to address the integration issue since it overlaps internal rules of foreign communities with Italian law, which should instead be the common ground to refer to.

Several times during the FG, HE_1 returns to this point, denoting a certain degree of frustration concerning the inability to grasp, even from an opportunistic and rational point of view for our companies, the advantages that the migration phenomenon could bring to our country system, remarking on several occasions the “stupidity” with which the issue is addressed at an institutional level, media and cultural development.

We must not welcome because we are good, because we are good, because we are magnanimous, because we are people who think: "The world is the same for everyone". No. I do not believe it anymore. We must make much money. My anger is that we cannot understand that these, whom we theoretically call people, because then we believe that they could be great labourers, even high-profile ones, can produce wealth for us. We are dissipating not because we are bad but because we are stupid! This is an anger that I have. Because

disillusionment leads me to think: "But if we were at least intelligent and cynical enough to exploit this heritage by managing in the process, integrating, trying to bring the maximum profit". However, we do not even do that (laughs). Look, it is not a joke, it is up to a certain point. FG_4_HE_1

It greatly underlines a perhaps cynical, but certainly pragmatic vision of the competitive advantage that the country system could obtain from addressing migration as an opportunity. Nevertheless, this vision of the phenomenon is not valid even for the pragmatic purpose of making up for those work figures lacking in the territories. In the case of Venice, for example, there is a lack of people due to the condition of the “vaporetto”⁵⁴ in the lagoon. The lack of information flows then inevitably leads migrants to cross paths with what they find, as HE_2 points out:

This type of work context, in which migrants mainly gravitate, often also attracts other migrants in the same condition and with the same aspirations for better or for worse, in the sense that there is no virtuous circle that attracts people with higher education or with expectations of study paths such as those of the ITS because the voice in these communities, in these non-formal circles of insertion, in any case, the rumour that circulates is that the availability of work is that of low labour and therefore is called to low labour. We have activated 12/13 classes in the last 2 years of dental practice assistants. I think that 80/85% of those enrolled are foreigners, mainly from Eastern Europe, most obviously European, but also Eastern, non-EU Europe. FG_4_HE_2

There are bureaucratic limits that favour or discourage access, as in the case of the admission criteria for professional courses and the level of Italian language required (B1, B2, etc.) And this is also what the interviewee HE_3 told us about access to university courses and post-graduate internships in Italian companies.

Trends in integration of foreign students (non-EU): between qualification, skills recognitions, students visa in economics, accounting, governance and sustainability sectors

Still on the subject of integration, HE_3, professor of economics at the University of Bergamo and president of an international master's and doctoral course, compared to international students in Italian universities, highlights the success of second-generation

⁵⁴ Typical venetian lagoon boat.

migrant students (born in Italy or trained in Italy for most of their lives) and the high number of requests for pre-enrolment in masters and doctoral courses by non-EU students.

This is an excellent, powerful sign of hope for this integration because these students are, I believe, fully integrated. At least, as far as we see them in the classroom, I realize during the exam that they are foreigners. Then, I had difficulty making the roll call because I saw these names, which were often very strange, but you did not notice them in the classroom. Then, yes, it is true that, especially among Muslim girls, they are sometimes together, but it is not so defined. So, I would like to say that perhaps there is also this desire for investment redemption...to invest in the future of children about to graduate. So, the first generation of immigrants took place, I think, in the 90s, indicatively. So, these are the children of that first immigration. FG_4_HE_3

On the other hand, if we are witnessing the growth of international graduates, those who try to land in Italy to train, despite having every intention of bringing the skills acquired back to their country of origin, these subjects encounter insurmountable difficulties both in recognition of foreign qualifications (problems of equivalence in the EQF) and in obtaining visas, which lead to a significant gap between the number of applications received and the students who enrol.

There is also a **problem with the recognition of qualifications**, even through official channels, because our international affairs office explained that some countries have different degrees. So, indeed, some, especially in the countries of the Indian area, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, have what they call a bachelor's degree, like our three-year degree, but which is a qualification that is validated at a lower level. So, for example, for our types of master's degrees, having these numbers so high, but we have the exact numbers on all master's degrees; therefore, there is this desire to come and study in Italy or Europe, there are qualifications that are not, are not recognized as equivalent, because if we enter the number of hours and number of credits, I would say: they are not equivalent. They are more and a little at the level of our secondary schools, so they are a bit of a middle ground. However, the problem remains because, precisely, out of 100 people that we have heard and listened to, then the people who arrived, now I tell you, last year were 100 admitted to the interview. We admitted them to the degree course, and 67 arrived. So, there is a problem. Out of 67 applications, 4 arrived. Moreover, these 4, Surely these 63 who have been lost, someone may have applied to more than one university and changed their decision, but the impression is that most do not get a visa. I confirm this because these days, we, on the other hand, for this academic year that has just begun, have still received 400 applications in this case. The offices made a stricter selection, so they discarded 300 applications. However, we have selected 36 high-level students, and 5/6 have arrived. So, there is this rate of dispersion. They do not have...they struggle to get a visa because they write to us. They write to us saying: Do something. A letter of recommendation to the offices says that the Foreign Ministry, but this is to be verified, has asked not to interfere in the work of the embassies. FG_4_HE_3

Obtaining visas for study purposes, especially for those coming from the Indo-Chinese and African areas, is also a diplomatic problem, since even the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – we have been told – recommends not to force the procedures by issuing letters of

recommendations, for example. The biggest difficulties for non-EU applicants are proving financial support and their intention to return to their country of origin after their studies. But many come to Italy precisely to study and acquire essential skills for contemporary challenges such as environmental sustainability, training courses that they would not otherwise encounter in their contexts of origin.

The importance of the language skills

An aspect that is certainly central to higher education, in addition to giving courses and training courses in English (or other languages than Italian) to attract foreign students, is the provision to include the teaching of the Italian language in the training programs, both to promote the integration of students and to ensure future graduates and doctorates more job opportunities, since even during the course of study itself, foreign students, despite their high skills, find it more difficult to find internships and jobs than Italian students. HE_3 also highlights the growing diversity of international students, with a recent increase in students from African countries and the Middle East. For this reason, according to the interviewee, it is up to the University to give free courses and recognize training credits to encourage participation, as they are doing. Then, in fact, foreign students – at least the few who manage to obtain a **visa** (we are in the order of 1% of those who apply) – once enrolled have access to university residences, have scholarships and facilities for transport and other cultural and sporting activities on university campuses. HE_3 highlights that these dynamics are also common to other degree courses in the department, with a joint selection of international students based on language qualifications and certifications. However, those who struggle the most in obtaining visas are students who come from the Indochinese area (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh) and African countries. The low presence of foreign students in the Italian Universities, HE_3 explains that for courses in Italian a high level of linguistic

competence is required, while for courses in English the main problem seems to be the granting of visas. Despite this, HE_3 tells us about the high number of applications for doctorates from non-EU students, while HE_2 notes that in the ITS most foreign students are second generation.

The 'Istituti Tecnici Superiori (ITS)': How to Promote Higher Technical Training in Italy?

Subsequently, the FG focuses on the Higher Technical Institutes (ITS), the Italian VET, highlighting the lack of knowledge of these training courses both nationally and internationally. In fact, it is necessary to improve the orientation and knowledge of these educational opportunities among international students, as well as the difficulties related to the knowledge of the Italian language and the evaluation of foreign qualifications.

What I absolutely do not detect on the ITS, however, is the availability of foreigners who have just arrived in Italy or intend to arrive in Italy. There are none in our inscriptions [...] It is not a bureaucratic problem for us. It is not a linguistic problem. It is probably a problem of orientation of knowledge of the existence of this type of training. FG_4 HE_2

There is also a big problem behind ITS according to HE_2, namely the differences between the various Italian regions (since ITS are managed by the regions).

The ITS is the latest creation of the school system. If compared to the first Italian university in the world, it may be unequal as a challenge. We are struggling to make ITS known or distinguish Italians from FTS, in short, and make them known to the students of the training course of our cycle. So, there is much confusion about what ITS is trivially or what the opportunities related to ITS are. I have no doubts about this, let alone outside the regional borders, where precisely a path under regional management or on a regional strategic basis struggle to make an excellent name for itself [...] Understanding how much ITS is advertised outside the borders would be nice. Trivially, our recruitment campaigns do not go beyond the regional border; therefore, we have already made our choice in quotation marks. We do not believe that there may be anyone interested outside the regional border, or doubtful. FG_4 HE_2

Moreover, the preferences of Italian companies to hire workers and at least invest in internal training. At this point, the case of dual apprenticeship is explored as a possible effective solution, with HE_2 reporting positive experiences in ITS institution and where companies play a fundamental role, both in short and long-term dual apprenticeship (see section 3.2 and 3.3 > Skill formation > Dual model 4+2 model) that:

It works very well for those who can learn with their hands, as they say on this side of the school; that is, it works very well for those who have a little propensity or low propensity to 1 particularly intense study, and it works very well for those who have a remarkable ability to learn on their side, especially in working conditions and in this way they manage to bring home an educational success that otherwise they would not have obtained and also manage to reach levels of excellence. An ITS in automation or mechatronics is a good level of schooling compared to what could have been a second year of professional training until a few years ago, which was done in a standard way with the class. FG_4_HE_2.

Doctoral students and researchers from abroad in economics, accounting, governance and sustainability

On the other hand, HE_3 underlines how high the demand to start a PhD course in our country is. They are students who did not necessarily train in their country of origin but see Italy as an opportunity. However, although the courses are in English, the centralized system of CINECA (Ministry of University and Research) asks at the time of application to flag the knowledge of Italian, which is still essential. Many cleverly flag the same, but then, in that case, they compete directly with Italian students who have excellent degree grades.

Many people who have resumes that, for us, would already be associate professors and apply for a post-doc position have written to me because they are probably also adjunct professors. They have these titles and many publications but probably do not have a permanent place. So, this was a position for three years, and having a salary for three years is a guarantee. Then on staying... Now, I have these students who I would say yes, and they stay. There is the intention to stay. Then here and stop. My student is also married to her husband here. However, another, also from Iran, won a doctorate in Milan-Bicocca. FG_4_HE_3

The impression of HE_3 is that they come here for the opportunity to have economic stability, compared to other excellent contexts such as in the UK where perhaps the most prepared foreign students apply.

High-skilled workers shortages

The FG then transitions to the employment aspect of the discussion. The meeting highlights the shortage of qualified personnel in the **mechanical and communication sectors**, with HE_2 emphasizing the challenges companies face due to insufficient workforce to meet market demands, particularly regarding specialized workers and higher-trained technicians. This issue is especially pronounced **in the mechanical field, as well as in automation, printing, and communication (such as typography, design, and media)**. As previously mentioned,

throughout both the initial and concluding phases of the FG, HE_1 expresses significant frustration over the inability to fully utilize the potential of the immigrant workforce, largely due to bureaucratic barriers. Ultimately, our analysis reveals that the widening gap between economic needs, public perception, and the instrumentalization of migration for propaganda purposes denies the evident complexity of this phenomenon and its management. This complexity is anything but rational, not only from an economic standpoint but also from sociological, anthropological, and geographical perspectives, as it influences how cities, rural areas, and marginalized regions are inhabited. Urban centres may become merely dormitories for workers or showcases for tourism, while the countryside experiences a resurgence as the bourgeoisie moves into areas once populated predominantly by foreigners. Marginal areas turn into spaces inhabited by those who remain invisible and entirely excluded from these discussions, such as labourers in the Pontine countryside living in shantytowns, those from Puglia, Calabria, and Sicily, as well as individuals residing in train stations, the suburbs, or even in prisons.

3. Policy Makers

The last interview slot should have been about Policy Makers. However, we must specify that it was almost impossible to reach representatives of the institutions. The only interview we collected concerned UNI-ITALIA coded as PM_1, a recognized non-profit association jointly founded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), the Ministry of University and Research (MUR), the Ministry of Education and Merit (MIM), the Ministry of the Interior (MI), CRUI - Conference of Italian Rectors and Universities and ICE - Agency. This inter-ministerial body aims to promote the internationalization of Italian academic institutions through initiatives to attract international students and researchers to Italy and strengthen university

cooperation between Italy and foreign countries. Therefore, we have opted to submit to the Secretary-General and the Head of the Unit for International Promotion and Marketing some written questions we report below, together with the answers received from

The main challenges for education and qualification systems

In the context of VET and HE in Europe, there are currently no automatic agreements between countries for the mutual recognition of qualifications. This means that when students or workers move from one country to another, their qualifications/diploma are not always directly recognised. Instead, assessment is often based on the individual's competences, with host countries evaluating whether the learning outcomes match national standards or job requirements. Due to differences in education systems, training durations, and occupational profiles, formal recognition of qualifications is not always feasible, leading to potential mismatches and barriers to mobility. As a result, competence-based approaches and transparency tools like the Europass and European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) play a crucial role in facilitating mobility, even in the absence of harmonised recognition mechanisms.

The main challenges for **education and qualification systems deriving from immigration** are many and concern several fundamental aspects of the educational and integration path of students. The interview highlights several key challenges immigration poses to education and qualification systems, particularly in recognizing qualifications, overcoming language barriers, achieving social integration, and dealing with housing difficulties. One of the most significant obstacles international students faces is the complex and time-consuming process of recognising their academic and professional qualifications in all economic sectors. This often delays their access to further education and employment opportunities. Implementing bilateral agreements between

countries could help streamline this process, ensuring smoother transitions for students and professionals.

One of the difficulties encountered by international students concerns the recognition of qualifications obtained in their country of origin, used in the workplace in Italy, and used in their country of origin. In Italy, evaluating and recognising qualifications can often be long and complex, creating delays in access to training courses. The stipulation of bilateral agreements for the mutual recognition of qualifications represents an effective response to these problems, facilitating the international mobility of students and ensuring more excellent continuity in educational and professional paths. PM_1

Language proficiency is another significant barrier, as a lack of knowledge of Italian can negatively impact academic performance and delay degree completion. Many Italian universities offer free language courses to address this issue, and cultural institutions and international networks support linguistic and social integration.

Language barrier

Lack of knowledge of the Italian language constitutes a significant barrier for many immigrant students, negatively affecting their academic performance and often causing delays in completing their degree courses. To overcome this obstacle, many Italian universities offer free Italian language courses through the University Language Centres to promote language learning and student inclusion. To this end, the network of Italian Cultural Institutes and Italian Schools abroad could also play an important role. PM_1

Beyond academics, many immigrants struggle with **cultural adaptation and social isolation**, particularly if they lack a support network. To mitigate this, universities and local organizations provide extracurricular activities, mentorship programs like “Buddy” initiatives, and student associations that promote inclusion and a sense of belonging.

Difficulty adjusting and risk of social isolation

Another common problem is adapting to a new cultural context, which can make students feel socially isolated. This risk is particularly acute for those who fail to build an adequate support network within the university or local community. Italian universities promote extracurricular activities, such as sports, volunteering, and cultural initiatives, which allow students to socialize, integrate, and feel like they are part of the academic community. Other forms of support can come from associative networks of international students. Some Italian institutions have also activated “Buddy” programs that offer support and hospitality to students already enrolled as first-year students. The first few months are generally the most difficult: it is necessary to familiarize yourself with a new academic context, and for off-site students, even in a new city, international students face a culture and traditions that are often very different from those of origin. PM_1

A more structural issue is the shortage of affordable and adequate housing, particularly affecting international students who often arrive without an established support system. This challenge is not

exclusive to immigrants but is especially pressing for those navigating a new country without local connections.

Shortage of housing arrangements

The shortage of adequate and affordable housing poses a significant challenge for many international students, who are often forced to seek temporary or inadequate accommodation. This problem does not only affect immigrant students but is particularly relevant for those who move to Italy without a pre-existing support network. PM_1

Education and training for migrants: assessment and challenges

Regarding labour market integration, education and training policies present opportunities and obstacles. Vocational and retraining programs help immigrants develop skills aligned with local market needs, while internships and apprenticeships offer valuable work experience and employer connections. However, language barriers, bureaucratic hurdles, and socio-economic difficulties often hinder access to these opportunities. The EU's new Migration and Asylum Pact, set to be implemented in 2026, aims to introduce coordinated measures to support labour market integration for immigrants across member states.

Specific programmes, such as vocational or retraining courses, allow immigrants to acquire skills required by the local labour market. Access to educational pathways can foster language and cultural learning, which is essential for successful social and work integration. Internship and apprenticeship opportunities are valuable tools to facilitate the entry of immigrants into the labour market, offering practical experience and connections with potential employers.

These chances have been also specified by COMP_5 (industry), COMP_14, 15, 7, 9 (restaurants, hospitality and tourism), COMP_17, 18, 19, 2 (manufacturing) as valuable tools to satisfy the job demand and supply.

The challenges immigrants face in accessing training and qualification courses are often interconnected. One of the main difficulties is represented by language barriers: the lack of knowledge of the host country's language not only complicates the understanding of the educational content but also limits the ability to interact effectively with the educational system. Added to this is the procedural complexity related to recognising educational and professional qualifications obtained in the country of origin. This procedure is often lengthy, hindering access to job opportunities appropriate to the skills of immigrants. Starting in 2026, the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum will introduce coordinated measures at the European level to support the integration and inclusion of those arriving in Member States for their access to the labour market. A further obstacle is socio-economic difficulties, often preventing immigrants from sustaining education costs or reconciling study with work necessary for personal and family sustenance. PM_1

EQF and AQF role to improve skills matching and support skilled and circular migration

International qualification frameworks, such as the EQF and AQF, facilitate skilled migration by making qualifications more transparent and comparable across different countries. This improves skills matching and allows businesses to assess migrant workers more effectively. However, recognition procedures remain slow and inconsistent across nations, discouraging highly qualified migrants from seeking opportunities abroad. Expanding digital tools, such as online databases and e-portfolios, could enhance efficiency and transparency in qualification recognition. Strengthening cooperation between countries of origin and destination would also support sustainable circular migration, allowing skilled workers to contribute to both economies. While education and training systems provide vital pathways for immigrant integration, significant barriers still exist. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated policy efforts, institutional support, and increased collaboration at both national and international levels.

National and international qualifications tools are key resources for improving skills matching while supporting skilled and circular migration. Thanks to these tools, the skills and qualifications acquired in different countries can be better compared, making it easier for companies to assess the professional profile of migrant workers and thus fostering a more inclusive and dynamic labour market. Having a typical structure to compare qualification levels between different European national systems improves transparency and portability of skills. Similarly, international agreements for the mutual recognition of qualifications between countries through bilateral or multilateral agreements based on shared frameworks can facilitate skilled migration, in which workers find jobs suited to their skills and actively contribute to the economic development of both the host and home countries. However, despite the potential of these tools, there are still many challenges. Recognizing educational qualifications and qualifications is often *time-consuming*, with processes that vary between countries and can discourage highly qualified migrants. Access to higher education and retraining pathways is limited for many migrants due to language barriers, costs and lack of information on available pathways. To overcome these difficulties, adopting digital tools or local reference structures to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, such as online databases and e-skills portfolios, is a step towards greater efficiency and transparency. It is essential to strengthen the dialogue between countries of origin and destination to promote sustainable circular migration, in which skilled workers can transfer their skills between the two contexts, thus contributing to both sides' economic and social progress. PM_1

Executive summary

Services (people care and companies) sector

- Migrants, particularly **women from Eastern Europe and Latin America**, dominate the care sector, often working under **precarious and informal conditions**.
- **Live-in caregivers** experience **labour exploitation** due to long hours and lack of contractual protections.
- The sector is seen as an **ethnic niche**, making it difficult for migrants to transition into other professions.
- Language barriers impact **career advancement**, particularly in roles requiring interpersonal communication (e.g., elderly care, hospitality roles).
- Employers perceive **migrant labor as indispensable**, but policies fail to provide structured pathways for skill development and certification.

Restaurant, tourism sector and food production

- **Seasonal demand and informal recruitment** contribute to exploitative conditions, especially in Southern Italy permitted by the art. 24 Legislative Decree No. 286/1998 (TUI)⁵⁵ which allowed employers to hire migrants for min 20 days up to 9 months specifically for the touristic activities and agriculture⁵⁶
- Migrants from **India and Pakistan** are often employed in dairy farming, while **Sub-Saharan Africans** dominate fruit and vegetable harvesting.
- **Lack of housing and transport infrastructure** creates additional precarity for seasonal workers.
- **Regularization processes are slow and inconsistent**, leaving many workers in legal limbo.
- Some local policies aim to integrate migrant farmworkers, but their **scalability is limited**.
- Training courses provided mainly to migrant minors or young adults lead young people to give up more specific training for work needs. For example, one is "satisfied" to take a pizza course, instead of continuing and becoming a cook, due to the economic needs.

Manufacturing sector

- Migrants are largely concentrated in **low-skilled, repetitive tasks** with limited career progression.
- The sector is undergoing automation, reducing demand for manual labor but increasing demand for **technical skills that migrants struggle to acquire** due to barriers in vocational training.
- **Workplace discrimination** was reported as a major issue, particularly regarding access to training and promotion.
- **Skill Partnerships with Egypt and Ghana** have facilitated structured migration, but **bureaucratic delays in visa processing** hinder their effectiveness.
- Trade unions report cases of **migrant overqualification**, with engineers and technicians from abroad working as factory line operators.

⁵⁵ <https://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/98286dl.htm> Retrieved 28.03.2025.

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https://www.cliclavoro.gov.it/pages/it/my_homepage/focus_on/stranieri_in_italia/lavoratori_extra_ue/il_lavoro_stagionale/ Retrieved 28.03.2025.

Industry sector

- The sector is increasingly structured along **Fordist lines**, with ethnic segmentation defining specific job roles (e.g., North African workers in bricklaying, Eastern Europeans in finishing work).
- In the Construction Sector, given the seriousness of the accidents, there has been for years an individual training booklet in which to document the mandatory periodic safety courses designed specifically to guarantee all workers greater rights, applies to project leaders and companies that receive subcontracting.
- Skill acquisition is often **informal and experience-based**, with few opportunities for professional certification.
- The **Skill Partnership with Tunisia** aims to train workers before arrival in Italy, but its impact remains limited due to the persistence of irregular employment.
- Occupational health and safety violations are frequent, with **language barriers** affecting workers' ability to understand safety protocols.

Cross-Sectoral Challenges

- **Recognition of qualifications** remains one of the largest barriers, preventing skilled migrants from accessing jobs that match their expertise.
- **Work visa policies are restrictive**, limiting migrants' ability to transition from study to work status.
- **Language training is inadequate**, failing to prepare migrants for technical and sector-specific communication.
- The **ethnic segmentation of labor markets** persists, reinforcing stereotypes and limiting mobility across job sectors.
- **Informality in employment contracts** exacerbates vulnerability, particularly in agriculture, construction, and domestic work.

Policy Recommendations

Vocational Training and Skills Matching

- Expand **sector-specific training programs** for migrants, with pathways to formal certification.
- Increase **language training tailored to workplace needs**.
- Strengthen collaborations between employers and vocational institutions to ensure **demand-driven skill development**.

Recognition of Qualifications and Visa Reforms

- Streamline **qualification recognition** to allow skilled migrants to work in their trained professions.
- Facilitate **study-to-work visa conversions** to retain foreign talent.
- Expand **Skill Partnerships** with a focus on pre-arrival training and certification.

Addressing Workplace Segregation and Discrimination

- Develop **anti-discrimination policies** to promote diversity in hiring and career progression.
- Implement **monitoring mechanisms** to ensure fair treatment in training access and promotions.
- Increase support for **migrant workers' rights organizations** and access to **legal assistance**.

Labor Market Integration and Employment Protections

- Strengthen **collective bargaining agreements** to cover informal sectors.

- Provide **incentives for formal hiring**, particularly in caregiving **and agriculture**.
- Improve **housing and transportation support** for seasonal and low-income migrant workers.

Wrap-up

- Strengthen education-to-employment pathways for migrants.
- Invest in vocational training programs aligned with evolving labor market needs.
- Streamline qualification recognition processes to enable skilled migrants to work in their trained professions.
- Implement policies that prevent ethnic job segmentation and promote labor mobility.
- Develop a national strategy for integrating migrant workers into high-demand sectors through structured partnerships.
- Expand **Skill Partnerships**, such as those with **Tunisia for construction workers** and **Egypt and Ghana for manufacturing**, to improve skills alignment before migration occurs.
- Introduce **incentive programs for employers** to hire and train migrant workers in skilled professions rather than relegating them to low-wage positions.
- Strengthen **labor protections in caregiving and hospitality**, which disproportionately employ migrant workers in informal and often exploitative conditions.
- Implement **monitoring mechanisms** to ensure that migrants have access to career progression opportunities and are not trapped in low-skill sectors due to structural barriers.

Conclusions

The analysis of the phenomenon of skills mismatch, the labour market and the integration of migrant workers into the Italian economic and socio-cultural fabric has highlighted a series of structural critical issues that hinder the meeting between labour supply and demand, penalising foreign workers. This emerges from the statistical data presented in the first part of this report and the qualitative data collection section, which involved companies and privileged stakeholders. Concretely, the more we delve into this research, the more we realise how much further investigation would be needed to understand the dynamics and fully identify effective intervention strategies.

Highlights

In this context, significant barriers to entry into educational training systems for both young people and adults have been highlighted in several areas. On one hand, unaccompanied minors face challenges in accessing appropriate educational pathways, largely due to limited time and the responsibilities tied to individual and family survival. On the other hand, immigrant adults often find themselves unable to dedicate time and resources to professional development, as they are compelled to work merely to survive. Additionally, the language barrier poses a significant obstacle, as it is essential not only for securing jobs that provide a living wage but also for successfully completing the process of socio-cultural integration. A significant issue lies in the recognition of educational qualifications and the rigidity of migration policies concerning employment. The lack of acknowledgment for skills acquired abroad, coupled with the challenges in obtaining work visas or transitioning from study visas, significantly restricts the ability of foreign workers to secure positions that align with their training and experience.

The context surrounding this dynamic is evolving quickly. Transformations in the labour market, driven by automation, demographic shifts, external factors like economic crises (along with institutional investments such as the PNRR), and geopolitical tensions, are reshaping production demands and the necessary professional profiles. Nonetheless, existing policies appear to lack the flexibility and effectiveness needed to adapt to these changes. A notable disparity exists between the needs and aspirations of foreign workers and those of Italian workers. Many Italian employees, as well as young foreigners who have grown up in the country, often seek personal and professional fulfilment. In contrast, for many migrants, the primary concern remains economic survival. This situation compels them to accept positions that do not align with their skills and hinders their access to growth opportunities that could facilitate a smoother integration into the labour market.

Considering these considerations, the need for more inclusive and targeted policies becomes evident, capable of overcoming institutional barriers, facilitating language learning and the recognition of skills, and adapting training courses to the new needs of the market. Only in this way will it be possible to reduce skills mismatch and transform migration into a resource for the economic and social development of the country. In this framework, inclusion policies, or at least immigration management policies and active labour policies, should also have among their objectives the overcoming of *ethnicization of the labour market* and the *fragmentation* of tasks on an ethnic-cultural basis. Currently, many sectors employ foreign workers in highly segmented roles – think of agriculture, logistics, and family care – creating a rigid division of tasks that hinders social and professional mobility. Indeed, some workers, based on their origin, are "naturally" directed towards specific tasks, and the goal of a state should instead be to offer each of its citizens and inhabitants the same opportunities. Intervening on these mechanisms means not only ensuring more significant equity but also fully exploiting the potential of the migrant workforce in a

perspective of sustainable and inclusive development, as well as ensuring universal and inalienable human rights enshrined in international conventions.

Wrap-up

Considering these considerations, it becomes clear that there is a pressing need for more inclusive and targeted policies. Such measures can help overcome institutional barriers, enhance language acquisition, and promote the recognition of skills, while also tailoring training programs to align with emerging market demands. Only through these efforts can we effectively reduce skills mismatches and transform migration into an asset for the economic and social development of the country. Furthermore, these policies should support the establishment of a network, which has consistently been identified as a significant obstacle to addressing the challenges and shifting from a reactive to a proactive approach in the integration of migrants within our society.

In greater detail, we currently find ourselves facing an economic and social landscape where a replacement effect driven by AI has yet to emerge. However, we are witnessing a significant transformation characterized by the automation of numerous industrial processes and an urgent push toward enhancing the efficiency of production systems, particularly in terms of reducing environmental impact and energy consumption.

Furthermore, there is growing concern among companies regarding their workforce. Many workers, particularly Italians, tend to remain with a company for only a limited period before seeking new opportunities, prompting businesses to focus on employee retention. This situation is noteworthy because, contrary to other economic and socio-cultural contexts, Italy experiences a consistent increase in employment without a corresponding rise in productivity (Bellocchi and Travaglini, 2024).

Some quantitative indicators may lack a complete heuristic value when applied to the Italian context. Employment is on the rise, seemingly defying the principle that links productivity to a decrease in workforce size. The success of businesses is also intertwined with various other factors and values. Industrial companies, for instance, are receiving significant orders but are struggling to find skilled staff. For the first time, they are taking the initiative to train employees in-house, as they find it necessary to hire individuals even when they lack sufficient skills—around 60% of hires fall into this category.

Future Research Paths

Certain indicators, such as productivity, fail to adequately capture the complexities of the Italian context, which serves both as a destination and a transit country for migrants. Today, foreign workers often have greater certainty of employment, yet this is coupled with limited agency, relegating them to the lower tiers of the professional hierarchy. While this stability benefits companies, it simultaneously perpetuates a structural injustice that mirrors a colonial mindset regarding migration. Although it may be challenging to find suitable workers for various roles—be it caregivers, waitstaff, cooks, or managers—this does not justify continuing down this path. We must confront and transform these prevailing approaches and perspectives, as they are fundamentally unfair and utterly inefficient, even from a pragmatic standpoint. We are witnessing a significant transformation in our society, characterized by an aging population and, in some contexts, a situation where children born to foreign parents account for half of all births. Our society has already evolved, and there is a pressing need for new rules and norms that facilitate coexistence. We must establish new services and reconsider public investments to address the diverse needs of those who arrive in Italy each year or are born here. Various sectors, including construction, are undergoing changes, and it is essential that we work to ensure no one is left behind in this transition.

Research questions for S4J next WPs

A review of the identified literature, combined with statistical data and preliminary qualitative analysis, has highlighted a significant gap: the need for a deeper exploration of sectoral differences and the ways in which both Fordist and post-Fordist systems are reshaping work contexts. A key aspect of this transformation is the distribution of work tasks along ethnic and cultural lines.

On a qualitative level, an especially compelling area of investigation concerns the meaning of work and the differences in perception between migrants and natives.

- What does work represent for a young Italian compared to a young immigrant? Do they share the same aspirations?
- Are their professional interests aligned?
- Do they seek external and internal recognition in similar ways, or do their experiences and perspectives diverge?
- What drives their urgency to enter the workforce at all costs, or to pursue specific types of training?
- How do these factors intersect with their broader life trajectories?

Another critical aspect is job retention and mobility among Italians and foreigners. Currently, Italians-particularly in sectors such as ICT-tend to change jobs frequently. For foreigners, however, career mobility is more constrained due to limited access to training and resources, as well as the persistence of cultural biases. The Italian labour market, still shaped by a post-colonial mindset, often restricts the roles available to non-European migrants, particularly Black workers, seeing them as suitable for manual trades (e.g., plumbing) but failing to recognize their potential in fields requiring technical expertise, such as system design or architecture.

This raises deeper questions about the value attributed to workers:

- Are individuals regarded primarily as economic resources or as human beings? Are skills mismatches assessed within a framework that ensures fundamental rights?
- How do gender and intersectional factors shape the integration of migrants into the labour market, particularly for young workers? What analytical tools can improve vocational training, migration policies, and employment strategies?

- How can existing skill partnerships-among businesses, NGOs, government agencies, and labour market intermediaries-enhance migrant integration while addressing ethical concerns related to job fragmentation, which exacerbates worker vulnerability?
- How do ethical concerns surrounding job fragmentation increase migrant workers' precarity, and what strategies can be implemented to mitigate these risks, ensuring greater protection and social inclusion?

Addressing these questions is essential for developing a more equitable labour market-one that recognizes the full range of skills and potential among migrant workers rather than confining them to rigidly predefined roles.

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Figures

Figure 1 Unemployment rate in Italy and the euro area (2020-2022)	4
Figure 2 Female occupation in Italy (2019-2023).....	5
Figure 3 Net activations in macro-sectors	30
Figure 4 Planned entries of immigrant personnel by professional macro-group (absolute values*, 2022 and 2019) ..	31
Figure 5 Young people aged 18-24 ELET by parental qualification, gender, geographical distribution % citizenship. Year 2020, %	36
Figure 6 Employment rate in Italy and the Euro Zone (2020-2022)	37
Figure 7 Time series employment rate (15-64 years) by citizenship	40
Figure 8 Percentage incidence of the number of employment relationships activated involving foreign workers on the total employment relationships activated by sector of economic activity. Year 2022	42
Figure 9 Overqualification rates. Highly educated people employed in jobs requiring a lower level of education, 15- 64 years old, 2021 (Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, 2023b).	44
Figure 10 Permanent migration in Italy and the EU-OECD area, from 2011 to 2021. Annual admissions relative to the level observed in 2011 (2011=100)	49
Figure 11 non-EU citizens residing by gender as of 1 January (a.v. in thousands (k) and inc. % by gender). Years 2018-2022	50
Figure 12 People aged 15-64, with low (a) and high (b) level of education, not engaged in education in 2020.	51
Figure 13 non-EU foreign workers employed in 2022 (all genders).....	52
Figure 14 non-EU foreign workers employed in 2022 (women)	52
Figure 15 Employment rate of foreigners by level of education. Differences in percentage points compared to native citizens, people between 15 and 64 years old who are not in education or training. Year 2021.....	53
Figure 16 Percentage incidence of foreign workers aged 15 and over on the total number of employed persons by sector of economic activity. Year 2022	55
Figure 17 Industrial manufacturing and process automation in Italy by geographical area. Distribution % of internal turnover - year 2022	58
Figure 18 The sales channels of components and systems for industrial automation. % distribution of internal turnover - year 2022	58
Figure 19 Enrolment rates of 15- to 19-year-olds, by education level (2021)	60
Figure 20 Participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and training, Years 2007-2022, Italy, EU27 (%)	62
Figure 21 Participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and training activities in the countries of the European Union. Years 2007, 2021-2022, EU27 (%).....	63
Figure 22 Participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and training according to some socio- demographic factors - EU27 and Italy, Year 2022 (% value)	64
Figure 23 Rating availability of adequately qualified manpower	66

Tables

Table 1 Results of the literature review	17
Table 2 Population changes by occupational status, citizenship and gender (a.v. and %). II trim. 2022 – Q2 2023....	40
Table 3 Employed, jobseekers and inactive persons by age group and nationality (a.v. and % compared with the same quarter of the previous year). Q2 2023	42
Table 4 Employed persons aged 15 and over by type of employment and citizenship (a.v. & var. %). Year 2022	45
Table 5 Employed persons aged 15 and over by occupational status and citizenship (v. %). Year 2022.....	46
Table 6 Change in the number of employed persons aged 15 and over by nationality and sector of economic activity (a.v. & %). II Quarter 2022/ II Quarter 2023	54
Table 7 Employed people (15-74 years old) discriminated against in their current job by superiors, colleagues, customers or others (a.v. & %). Year 2021	56
Table 8 Profession shortage.....	66
Table 9 Most wanted qualifications.....	68

Appendix 1

Online Survey (Google Form)

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1VLaf_nn-RBt85JqJHCTzp5ZVQzvrOj5LDC9YIOPTaBA/edit

QUESTIONS

Your company

... (Description)

Please indicate the name of your company:

... (Short answer text)

How many employees are there in your company? (multiple choice)

- ☐ 1-15 employees
- ☐ 16-100 employees
- ☐ 51-100 employees
- ☐ 101-500 employees
- ☐ 501-1000 employees
- ☐ >1000 employees

In which sector of the economy does your company operate?

- Indicate your sectors as multiple choices as follows

In which sector of the economy does your company operate?

Multiple choice

B I U

- ☐ costruzioni X
- ☐ servizi alla persona X
- ☐ servizi alle imprese X
- ☐ alberghiero / ristorazione / turismo X
- ☐ industria manifatturiera X
- ☐ Other... X

Where is the main office/headquarter located?

... (Short answer text)

How many years has the company been in operation?

... (Short answer text)

Do you think that your company has a strategic structural importance for the sector at a national level?

Yes

No

Reasons for the previous answer

... (Short answer text)

How do you rate (from 1 to 5) the availability of adequately qualified manpower for your company? (Likert scale)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all adequate	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very adequate

What are the 5 professions/qualifications that are in short supply for your company? Is this a phenomenon that affects the entire sector in which you operate? What are the main reasons for these shortages?

... (Long answer text)

Which qualifications are most suitable for your company and are easiest to find on the job market? Which are the most complex?

... (Short answer text)

Are there any new qualifications (that were not previously required) that have become in demand for your company and industry in the last 5-10 years?

If so, what are they and why did they emerge?

... (Long answer text)

To what extent is the education and training system effective in responding to changes in the demand for skills and qualifications? What are the most important problems and challenges?

... (Long answer text)

To what extent and in what ways does your company help education and training institutions to meet the growing demand for skills and qualifications? What are the most important activities implemented by your company in this regard?

... (Long answer text)

Is it difficult for your company to attract and retain qualified employees with professional qualifications and/or higher education?

Yes

No

Reasons for the previous answer

... (Long answer text)

Do you think that immigration is a potential solution to attract and retain skilled workers with professional qualifications and/or higher education?

Yes

No

Reasons for the previous answer

... (Long answer text)

How does your company address the shortage of skilled workers with basic vocational training (VET) and higher education (HE) qualifications? (checkboxes)

- Increasing wages
- Improving working conditions
- Continuing education programs
- Developing the skills of employees already in the company
- Increased collaboration with vocational training schools and higher education institutions to prepare future graduates for the world of work
- Organizing internships
- Apprenticeship
- Skills assessment

- Other

Do you have an effective strategy to address the loss of skilled labour due to emigration?

Yes

No

If so, could you describe it?

... (Long answer text)

Is your company already hiring, or is/are you considering hiring, migrant workers to address labour and skills shortages?

Yes

No

Why?

... (Short answer text)

If your company hires migrant workers, how are these workers retained? Please indicate the benefits provided: (checkboxes)

- Attractive salary conditions
- Job security
- Career opportunities
- Support for families
- Other

Finally, from your point of view, what could be or are already the key measures to retain migrant workers in the company?

... (Long answer text)

Would you be available to be contacted for a further in-depth interview via telephone/online meeting to clarify some specific points?

Yes

No

If so, could you please provide a telephone number and/or email address where I can contact you?

... (Short answer text)