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MINISTERO DEL LAVORO
E DELLE POLITICHE SOCIALI
Direzione Generale per le Politiche
per l'Orientamento e la Formazione

From the Lisbon Strategy to Europe 2020

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Anno 2016

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INTRODUCTION

This text is about both EU policies promoting the development of European educational systems in order to face the challenges posed by the process of globalisation and the policies pursued by EU Member States in response to the solicitations at European and global level, with particular attention to Education and Vocational Training.

In particular, the text examines the policies pursued since the Lisbon Strategy was launched, in 2000, until the development of the strategy for 2020.

It was a very intense phase for the European activity in this area because, in the context of the Copenhagen process, the enhanced cooperation has taken place leading to the definition of a lifelong learning-oriented system and the creation of three important Recommendations introducing the European qualifications framework, a system of recognition of credits, and a European reference for quality assurance.

The examination of this phase also offers the opportunity to conduct a review of what has been achieved in relation to the targets set in 2000, of what are the current problems and how the European countries are acting.

1. The Lisbon Strategy

1.1 KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY, HUMAN CAPITAL AND LIFELONG LEARNING

In order to understand the European strategies for employment and training which have been adopted over the past 20 years it is necessary to take into account some "keywords": *Knowledge-based Society, Human Capital and Lifelong Learning*.

The term "**Knowledge-based society**" is often used to define one of the main features of contemporary economic and industrial system since the knowledge, instead of the "physical" capital, is increasingly becoming an indispensable resource for the production and development of the economic system.

The diffusion of information and new technology transforms the nature of work and the organisation of production. Routine and repetitive tasks which used to be the daily lot of most workers are tending to disappear as more autonomous, more varied activities take their place. The result is a different sort of relationship with the company. The role of the human factor is increasing but the worker is also more vulnerable to changes in the pattern of work organisation, because he has become a mere individual within a complex network. Everyone therefore has to adapt not only to new technical tools but also to changes in working *conditions*.

The growth in scientific knowledge, its application to production methods, the increasingly sophisticated products which thus emerge, give rise to a paradox: despite its generally beneficial effect, scientific and technical progress engenders a feeling of unease and even irrational misgivings in society.

In this context, which has been analysed at European level during 90's[1], the concept of Human Capital becomes fundamental.

The term "**Human capital**" has had a rapid and wide diffusion in the last twenty years, by analogy with the economic terminology identifying the material resources available within a society.

The human capital is one of business resources together with environment and physical capital and it is composed by a collection of skills and human resources such as knowledge, education, experience, technical ability, acquired during an individual's lifetime allowing to perform transformation and creation activities aimed at achieving social and economic, individual or collective objectives[2]. Training and development

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[1] EUROPEAN COMMISSION (1995) *White Paper On Education And Training – Teaching And Learning Towards The Learning Society* COM(95) 590.

[2] Regarding human capital see BECKER G.S. (1964), *Human Capital*, Columbia University Press, New York 3rd ed. 1993 and GORI E. (2004), *L'investimento in Capitale Umano attraverso l'Istruzione*, in VITTADINI G. (2004) *Capitale Umano. La ricchezza dell'Europa*. Guerini ed.

of human capital is accomplished through the educational processes taking place within the family and the social environment, at school and in the workplace.

Evidently in an economic system where knowledge plays a central role, the human capital becomes the key resource of the production system. New social categories are formed or developed such as the knowledge workers whose main capital is technological knowledge: managers, professionals, engineers, experts, etc. According to Butera[3] this social group is rapidly expanding compared to the early years of the last century. In any case all citizens and workers should broaden their competences, both basic and specialized, since they have to face the growing evolution of technologies which are applied to production and daily life.

It follows that, in order to ensure economic growth and competitiveness it is necessary to develop the human capital by encouraging and promoting learning in its different modalities and integrating training and work. Policies concerning the development of the economy and employment and those related to the development of education and training are thus closely intertwined. In order to provide employment opportunities and a more competitive and sustainable economy, Europe needs a highly skilled workforce able to meet the current and future challenges. It is therefore urgent to invest in skills and to improve the mutual correspondence between competences and job offer in order to anticipate future trends.

The European strategy which has been developed during the last 20 years aims to pursue these objectives. In 2000 the European Union has approved the **Lisbon Strategy** (see next paragraph), which recognises the crucial role played by education seen as an integral part of economic and social policies. In order to deal with the constant change and the demands for higher and up to date skills, learning cannot be promoted in a single stage of life, but should become a permanent condition (Lifelong learning): this is a top priority for employment, the effective action in the economic field and the complete participation in social life.

The concept of "**Lifelong Learning**" dates back to the 70s of the last century. According to the Faure Report published by UNESCO[4], the aim of education is to enable the subject to "become himself"; therefore, UNESCO mainly emphasizes the personal effects of lifelong learning. The Faure Report proposed "lifelong learning as the master concept for educational policies for the years to come".

During the 90s both OECD[5] and the European Union[6] together with UNESCO[7] expressed the need to develop knowledge economy and the knowledge society due to

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[3] BUTERA F., DONATI E., CESARIA R., *I lavoratori della conoscenza*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1998; BUTERA F., BAGNARA S., CESARIA R., DI GUARDO S. (2008), *Knowledge working*, Milano, Mondadori.

[4] FAURE E. (1972), *Learning to Be*, Paris, Unesco.

[5] OECD (1996) *Lifelong Learning for All*, Paris, OECD.

[6] COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (1995) *White paper on education and training – Teaching and learning: towards the learning society*, Com95_590 Brussels.

[7] UNESCO (1996) *Learning - the treasure within. Report of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century*, Paris, UNESCO.

the process of globalisation. Learning and employment or employability and education became the central issues on the agenda.

The Lisbon Council in 2000 set the goal for Europe to become the leading knowledge-based economy. It has noted that the achievement of economic goals also requires the achievement of social, cultural and personal goals. A person is not a mere economic entity and learning cannot be fulfilled without motivation and personal desire. Lifelong Learning should be a right, not an obligation. It was not only considered as a learning for employment but also for personal, civic and social purposes together with employability, adaptability and active citizenship. In order to analyse these themes the European Commission proposed a Memorandum[8] to all Member States, containing the following definition: lifelong learning includes "all learning activities undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence". The promotion policy of lifelong learning is based on the awareness of the institutions that one of their tasks is to encourage the right of citizens of all ages, social or professional status to train, learn and grow, both humanly and professionally, during their entire life.

The document which was presented in its final version in April 2000 after an extensive consultation process emphasizes two important objectives for lifelong learning: promoting active citizenship and employability. Active citizenship means *"if and how people take part in all areas of social and economic life, the opportunities and risks they face in trying to do so and the extent to which they belong and intervene in the society"*. Furthermore *"employability – the ability to find and maintain employment – is not only a feature of active citizenship, but it is also a decisive condition for reaching full employment and improving competitiveness and prosperity in the new economy"*.

Following the approval of the Memorandum, the European Commission issued in 2001 a document entitled *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality[9]*. The Communication firstly proposed a broad definition of learning, emphasizing that learning does not take place only in training activities proposed by the school (*formal education*). Learning takes place in training activities conducted outside the traditional educational context, e.g. in the workplace (*non-formal*) and also occurs in everyday life (*informal training*).

A degree or a qualification usually recognises only formal learning, but what matters is the actual acquisition of competences.

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[8] Commission of the European Communities (2000), *Commission Memorandum on lifelong learning* [SEC(2000) 1832. Brussels.

[9] COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality,* COM(2001) 678 Brussels, 21.11.2001.

To promote the participation in lifelong learning, the document has proposed concrete actions at all levels, including a new way of evaluating and recognising the skills acquired, in order to allow all citizens to freely move between different contexts of study and work enhancing the own knowledge and skills.

This document can be defined as the *manifesto* of the community strategy in the field of education since 2000.

In order to define concrete actions to achieve the goal of lifelong learning, the European Commission set up working groups in the field of qualifications, recognition of credits and quality assurance. The Commission has prepared relevant recommendations to all member states based on the work and proposals presented by these groups, which have been approved and ratified by the Council and the European Parliament.

The principle and the enhancement of lifelong learning has become the central objective of EU action.

1.2 THE LISBON OBJECTIVES

On 23 and 24 March 2000, the European Council held in Lisbon (for this reason it took the name of **Lisbon Strategy**) a special session centred on economic and social issues of the European Union. The Lisbon Council started from the fact that the European Union was confronting a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-based economy. These changes were affecting every aspect of people's lives and required a radical transformation of the European economy. The Union had to shape these changes according to its values and concepts of society and also with a view to the forthcoming enlargement. Hence the need for the Union to set a clear strategic goal and to agree a challenging programme for building knowledge infrastructures, enhancing innovation and economic reform, and modernising social welfare and education systems. Therefore, the EU Heads of States and Governments agreed to make the EU *"the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".* In pursuit of this objective a series of ambitious reforms were started, whose status has been periodically evaluated during the Spring sessions of the European Council[10].

Achieving this goal required an overall strategy aimed at modernising the European social model, investing in people and combating social exclusion, preparing the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society by better policies for the information society and R&D, as well as by stepping up the process of structural reform for competitiveness and innovation and by completing the internal market.

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[10] *Presidency Conclusions*, Lisbon European Council 23/24 March 2000.

The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 recognised the important role of education as an integral part of economic and social policies, as an instrument for strengthening Europe's competitive power worldwide, and as a guarantee for ensuring the cohesion of our societies and the full development of its citizens. A key area of the strategy was to give higher priority to lifelong learning as a basic component of the European social model, by encouraging agreements between the social partners on innovation and lifelong learning; by exploiting complementarity between lifelong learning and adaptability through flexible management of working time and job rotation.

OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION

The Open Method of Coordination has provided a new framework for cooperation between the EU countries, whose national policies can thus be directed towards certain common objectives.

In the Open Method of Coordination the responsibility regarding the definition of specific objectives and policy instruments remains at national level; the EU has the function to facilitate coordination and mutual learning between the Member States, without any formal attempt of monitoring the implementation of the general principles and objectives set at European level.

The implementation of the Open Method of Coordination involves the following actions:

• definition of guidelines at European level included the timing to achieve the goals;

• definition at European level of quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks based on the world's best performances and adapted to the needs of the different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practices;

• monitoring and evaluation of national policies in relation to benchmarks allowing to compare the performance of each Member State compared to others and to identify "best practices";

• organisation of periodic peer review with the aim of promoting mutual learning.

In order to foster lifelong learning four political objectives have been established:

•   To develop national *frameworks* containing and framing all degrees and qualifications awarded at different levels, from primary school to University.

•   To implement measures assessing and validating non-formal and informal learning.

•   To establish guidance systems promoting and supporting lifelong learning.

•   To implement initiatives improving transnational mobility.

The combination of these measures facilitates the activation of flexible training, making possible the transfer of learning outcomes from one learning context to another and from one country to another.

1.3 THE COPENHAGEN PROCESS FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In March 2002, the Barcelona European Council, endorsing the work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy, set the goal *"to make education and training systems in Europe a world quality reference by 2010"*[11]. Furthermore, it has called for further action to introduce instruments to ensure the transparency of diplomas and qualifications adapted to the field of vocational education and training.

In response to the Barcelona mandate, the Council of the European Union (Education, Youth and Culture) deepened the questions about *Vocational Education and Training* (VET) and issued in Copenhagen (2002) a Declaration to promote greater cooperation in the field of VET. The Council underlined the key challenges represented by the building of a knowledge-based Europe and an open European labour market and by the need to continuously adapt to new developments and changing demands of society. The intensification of cooperation in Vocational Education and Training would provide a valuable contribution both for the enlargement of EU and the achievement of goals set by the Lisbon European Council.

THE MAIN EUROPEAN BODIES

The European Parliament is composed of 751 representatives of the Union's citizens elected by universal suffrage. The number of representatives elected in each Member State varies depending on the size of the population.

Parliament takes part to varying degrees in drawing up Community legislative instruments, depending on the areas concerned: it can be required to deliver non-binding opinions or binding opinions; more commonly, legislative texts are adopted by joint agreement between Parliament and the Council, Parliament's assent on the final text being indispensable for it to be adopted.

The Council of the European Union is composed of Government ministers from each EU country, according to the policy area to be discussed (Foreign Affairs, Finance, Social Affairs, Transport, Agriculture etc.).

Until the end of 2009, the presidency of the European Council was an informal and temporary charge, carried out by the Head of State or Government of the Member State which held the presidency of the Council of Ministers. The Lisbon Treaty has made this office stable, which is assigned by the European Council and lasts two and a half years, renewable once.

The Commission is composed of 28 members (one from each EU country) who are appointed, for a period of five years, by the Council. The European Commission is responsible for drawing up proposals for new European legislation, and it implements the decisions of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. It also actively participates in the successive stages of the legislative process. The Commission implements policies and programmes adopted by Parliament and the Council.

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[11] "*The Copenhagen Declaration*", Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training.

It was therefore introduced the method of *Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training* (VET), with the aim of encouraging individuals to make wider use of vocational learning opportunities, at school, in higher education, at work or through private courses. In particular four priorities have been identified:

a) *Strengthening the European dimension in education and vocational training*, with the aim of improving closer cooperation in order to facilitate and promote mobility and the development of interinstitutional cooperation, partnerships and other transnational initiatives, all in order to raise the profile of the European education and training area in an international context so that Europe will be recognised as a worldwide reference for learners.

b) *Transparency, information and guidance:*
   • Increasing transparency in vocational education and training through the implementation and rationalisation of information tools and networks, including the integration of existing instruments such as the European CV, certificate and diploma supplements, the Common European framework of reference for languages and the Europass.
   • Strengthening policies, systems and practices that support information, guidance and counselling in the Member States, at all levels of education, training and employment, particularly on issues concerning access to learning, vocational education and training, and the transferability and recognition of competences and qualifications, in order to support occupational and geographical mobility of citizens in Europe.

c) *Recognition of competences and qualifications*
   • Investigating how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels, could be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training.
   • Increasing support to the development of competences and qualifications at sectoral level, by reinforcing cooperation and coordination especially involving the social partners.
   • Developing a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between approaches in different countries and at different levels.

d) *Quality assurance*
   • Promoting cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on exchange of models and methods, as well as common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training.
   • Giving attention to the learning needs of teachers and trainers within all forms of vocational education and training.
   • This strategy is based on the assumption that education and training constitute essential tools for promoting employability, social cohesion, active citizenship as well as the personal and professional fulfilment.

> **THE POWERS OF EUROPE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING**
> **AND THE METHOD OF ENHANCED COOPERATION[12]**
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> While vocational training was identified as an area of Community action in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, education was formally recognised as an area of European Union competency in the Maastricht Treaty which established the European Community in 1992.
> The Maastricht treaty states that: *"the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity"[13].*
> Regarding the policies of education and training, the European Union plays a subsidiary role. Member States are in charge of their own education and training systems, but they cooperate within the EU framework in order to achieve common goals. The EU political strategies constitute a support for national activities addressing common problems such as the ageing society, the skills gaps in the workforce and the global competition.
> In 2002 in Copenhagen the Education Ministers of the European Union has introduced the strategy for Enhanced Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET).
> The concept of Enhanced Cooperation is included in the Treaty on EU (title VII of treaty on EU). The Enhanced Cooperation is a tool to give greater impetus to the process of EU integration, it allows a closer cooperation between the countries of the EU wishing to develop Europe in the respect of the Union's single institutional framework.
> The deliberations of the States participating in Enhanced Cooperation are open to all Member States, but only those participating in Enhanced Cooperation have the right to vote. The States in Enhanced Cooperation regularly inform the European Parliament and the Commission about the progress achieved. The Member States concerned may, then, advance at different rates and/or with different objectives.

1.4 THE INSTRUMENTS OF THE COPENHAGEN DECLARATION

In order to implement the objectives set in the strategy for the development of VET identified in Barcelona and Copenhagen and in line with the broader strategy of promoting lifelong learning, the European Council has subsequently established a general **Programme** to foster mobility (**Lifelong Learning Programme**) identifying a number of critical areas to be improved. The work conducted by the Commission and the Member States in these areas has led to the definition of common objectives and instruments, in doing this, various Recommendations have been issued at European level.

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[12] COUNCIL RESOLUTION of December 2002 on the promotion of Enhanced European Cooperation in education and vocational training (2003/C 13/02).

[13] Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2010/C 83/01).

Recommendations are non-binding acts adopted by Community institutions to suggest recipients a given behaviour when they do not have the power to implement binding measures or when they believe that there is no reason to adopt more binding measures.

The Recommendations adopted to strengthen the implementation of the Copenhagen process are:

- the development of a **European framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences** (*European Qualifications Framework – EQF*);
- the introduction of a **methodology for the transfer of credits for education and training** (*European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training – ECVET*);
- the definition of a Framework for quality assurance (*European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training – EQAVET);*
- the definition of a **European framework for key competences**.

With these Recommendations, issued between the end of 2006 and June 2009, the political process outlined between Lisbon and Copenhagen has been completed. The European Union, after defining its strategic objectives in the field of lifelong learning and development of education and vocational training, through these non-binding acts has identified the implementation procedures which are "recommended" to the Member States after their approval. The key points of this strategy are:

- the shift of attention from the teaching process to the learning process,
- the strengthening of European citizenship key competences,
- the focus on learning outcomes, rather than on formal education and training paths,
- the possibility to obtain recognition of competences regardless of how they were acquired,
- the definition of common language and standards allowing the comparison of qualifications and degrees obtained in different national systems,
- the definition of a model and common tools ensuring control and continuous development of the quality of education provided in different countries.

With this strategy, the European Union is not involved in the organisation of training paths, which is responsibility of national jurisdictions, but sets some fundamental coordinates which may change significantly the education development in the next years. For some countries, such as Italy, the implementation of the recommendations involves a real cultural revolution: for example, the transformation of the current education system based on the offer of vocational education and training paths whose frequency is validated and recognised by the acquisition of the title, into a system in which it doesn't matter which path has been followed, what is important is the knowledge and the skills effectively acquired. This involves a total change of the current way of issuing of qualifications which is centred on the recognition and validation of formal paths. The creation of a single framework bringing together all the titles and qualifications is equally challenging; among various problems there is

the issue of cultural integration of two different systems, the academic and the vocational one: in Italy, but also in many other countries, the academic world has always looked suspiciously at the world of vocational training and the aim of gathering the titles and qualifications obtained in the different systems is not easy to achieve. Furthermore, the implementation of quality assurance models will be responsible for ensuring that the adoption of these models does not occur only on a formal level, but produces a real change in training.

The European Recommendations are described in detail in the following chapters. In addition, the Copenhagen process has led to the development of instruments to facilitate mobility and transparency of qualifications (Europass) and tools to promote information and guidance on training and career opportunities in the European Union (PLOTEUS portal and Euroguidance network).

1.5 THE LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME AND THE MOBILITY ACTIONS

The **Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)** was established by Decision of the European Parliament and the Council on 15 November 2006 and gathered all the initiatives of European cooperation in education and training from 2007 to 2013. Its aim is to contribute through lifelong learning to the development of the European Union as an advanced knowledge society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, while ensuring good protection of the environment for future generations (Lisbon Strategy).

The European Lifelong Learning Programme has grouped the concrete initiatives implemented by the European Union to achieve the strategic objectives of Copenhagen; these initiatives are not only focused on students, but also on teachers, trainers and all those involved in education and training. In particular it has fostered interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems within the Community, so that they become a world quality reference.

The programme has strengthened and integrated the measures implemented by the Member States keeping the responsibility entrusted to each of them about the content of education and training systems and respecting their cultural and linguistic diversity. The legal basis can be found in art. 149 and 150 of the Treaty on European Union which state that "The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action..." (Art. 149) and that "the Community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States ..." (Art. 150). In particular, four sub-programmes which fund projects at different levels of education and training have been implemented: *Comenius* (for high schools), *ERASMUS* (for higher education), *Leonardo da Vinci* (for vocational education and training), and *Grundtvig* (for adult education).

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TECHNICAL SUPPORT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE EUROPEAN OBJECTIVES

The European Union makes use of international technical agencies which in the field of Education and Vocational Training lead an activity of research, analysis, documentation and technical support to the Commission. Among these there are: the Cedefop, the European Training Foundation (ETF) and Eurydice network.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (**Cedefop**) was founded in 1975 and is located in Thessaloniki. It's the European Agency to promote the development of vocational education and training in the European Union. It is Union's reference Centre for vocational education and training. It does this by providing. Cedefop:

- provides scientific and technical know-how in specific fields and promote exchanges of ideas between different European partners;
- provides information on and analyses of vocational education and training systems, policies, research and practice.

Cedefop's tasks are to:

- compile selected documentation and analyses of data;
- contribute to developing and coordinating research;
- exploit and disseminate information;
- encourage joint approaches to vocational education and training problems;

provide a forum for debate and exchanges of ideas.

The **European Training Foundation** (ETF) is an agency of the European Union located in Turin. It was established in 1990 to contribute to the development of education and training systems of the EU partner countries.

Its mission is to help transition and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labour market systems in the context of the EU's external relations policy.

Its work is based on the conviction that human capital development in a *lifelong learning* perspective can make a fundamental contribution to increasing prosperity, creating sustainable growth and encouraging social inclusion in transition and developing countries.

The **Eurydice**'s mission is to provide those responsible for education systems and policies in Europe with European-level analyses and information which will assist them in their decision making. In particular the activity focuses on the way education in Europe is structured and organised. It provides a vast source of information, including:

- detailed descriptions and overviews of national education systems;
- comparative thematic reports devoted to specific topics of Community interest;
- indicators and statistics;
- reports related to education.

Eurydice consists of 35 national units based in all 31 countries participating in the EU's Lifelong Learning programme

2. Towards Europe 2020

The Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs has been the response adopted by the EU to face the challenges of globalisation, demographic changes and knowledge society.

It was aimed at making Europe more dynamic and competitive to secure a prosperous, fair and environmentally sustainable future for all citizens.

Despite the joint efforts which have been made, these objectives have been only partially achieved and the economic crisis has made these challenges even more difficult. In order to help Europe emerging from the crisis and to prepare its economy for the next decade the European Commission has proposed the "Europe 2020 strategy"[1].

The Europe 2020 strategy followed the Lisbon strategy, sharing some aspects, and set out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the 21st century by putting forward three mutually reinforcing priorities:

- *smart growth*, developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation;
- *sustainable growth*, promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy;
- *inclusive growth*, fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

The progress towards the achievement of these objectives is evaluated on the basis of five main goals to be achieved at EU level, which every Member State should translate into national targets to be defined according to its starting condition:

EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY INDICATORS

- to obtain an employment rate of 75% of the people aged between 20 and 64 years;
- to bring the levels of public and private investment to the 3% of the total GDP in research and development;
- to reduce GHG emissions by 20% compared with 1990 levels and to have a 20% share of gross final energy consumption from renewable sources;
- to reduce the proportion of early school leavers to less than 10% and to increase the share of the younger generation with a degree or diploma or equivalent level of education to at least 40%;
- 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty.

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[1] Communication from the Commission *Europe 2020 a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, COM (2010) 2020.

Education, training and lifelong learning play a key role in achieving these objectives. Finally, Europe 2020 identifies "seven flagship initiatives" focused on priority themes:

- **Innovation Union**, to improve framework conditions and access to finance for research and innovation so as to ensure that innovative ideas can be turned into products and services that create growth and jobs.
- **Youth on the move**, to enhance the performance of education systems and to facilitate the entry of young people to the labour market.
- **A digital agenda for Europe**, to speed up the roll-out of high-speed internet and reap the benefits of a digital single market for households and firms.
- **Resource efficient Europe**, to help decouple economic growth from the use of resources, support the shift towards a low carbon economy, increase the use of renewable energy sources, modernise our transport sector and promote energy efficiency.
- **An industrial policy for the globalisation era**, to improve the business environment, notably for SMEs, and to support the development of a strong and sustainable industrial base able to compete globally.
- **An agenda for new skills and jobs**, to modernise labour markets and empower people by developing their skills throughout the lifecycle with a view to increase labour participation and better match labour supply and demand, including through labour mobility.
- **European platform against poverty**, to ensure social and territorial cohesion such that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society.

Each Member State should provide a contribution to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy through national paths reflecting the situation of each country and its "level of ambition". The Commission is responsible for monitoring the progress and, in the case of "inadequate response" has to formulate a "recommendation" to be implemented in a given period of time. If a Member State, after the time-frame has expired, has not adequately responded to a recommendation of the Council, the Commission could issue a "policy warning".

On 17 June 2010, the European heads of state and government who form the European Council adopted the Europe 2020 strategy[2]. The strategy – as stated in the Final Report – will help Europe recover from the crisis and come out stronger, both internally and at the international level, by boosting competitiveness, productivity, growth potential, social cohesion and economic convergence.

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[2] European Council 17 June 2010 Conclusions (Euco 13/10).

The European benchmarks set in Lisbon have been achieved only in part, even the progress made in employment growth was cancelled by the international economic crisis. The financial and economic constraints imposed in Maastricht were not respected in many countries. Regarding social cohesion, problems resulting from an increased immigration are putting to the test the principles enshrined in the Treaty of Rome, which seemed clear after the Delors White Paper[3].

The impact of the European Social Fund (ESF), which is the main financial instrument for supporting employment and development in less-developed regions, has been unequal: even the countries which have benefited most of its support, such as Ireland and Spain, have successively experienced a serious economic crisis.

It might be wondered what would have happened without the European Union. Probably the effects of the international crisis on the economy of some European countries would have been even more devastating, without the protection offered by the wider European economic system and without the obligation to respect the Maastricht criteria. The European benchmarks have not been achieved, but in many European countries improvements have been observed and this has provided an incentive to deal with strategic questions, such as early school leaving. The culture of monitoring and evaluation of policy objectives has spread as a result of the strategic European approach. The European surveys (Eurobarometer) which are conducted every six months show that over 50% of Europeans support their country's accession to the European Union since it has produced more benefits than disadvantages.

2.1 THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE RENEWED EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR THE DECADE 2010-2020

Even in the field of education a strategic framework for European cooperation has been defined . The **Education and Training 2020** (ET 2020)[4] programme is built on the "Education and Training 2010" (ET 2010) work programme and the European Commission Communication on "New skills for new jobs" of 2008[5], and in the light of Cedefop's skill supply and demand forecasts has suggested to the Member States an education centred on business demand and on the professional needs required by the production system.

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[3] European Commission *Completing the Internal Market*: White Paper from the Commission to the European Council COM(85) 310, June 1985.

[4] Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on A strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training («ET 2020») (2009/C 119/02).

[5] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *New Skills for New Jobs – Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs* SEC(2008) 3058.

The **Education and Training 2020** programme implements the Open Method of Coordination and identifies four strategic long-term objectives:
- making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

As can be noted the programme largely confirms the goals already defined in the Copenhagen process, introducing the goal of innovation and creativity. According to the European Council creativity constitutes, as well as personal fulfilment, a source for innovation which is one of the bases of sustainable economic development. Creativity and innovation are essential in the creation of businesses and to compete at international level.

CEDEFOP'S FORECASTS
FOR EMPLOYMENT GROWTH IN EUROPE

According to the forecasts, assuming a slow but steady recovery, up to 2020, the European economy will create some eight million new jobs. However, around 75 million jobs will need to be filled as people retire or leave the workforce.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS BY SECTOR

	Amount (in thousands)				Growth(%)		
	2008	**2013**	**2020**	**2025**	**2008-2013**	**2013-2020**	**2020-2025**
Primary sector	16 324	15 441	14 177	13 481	-5.4 %	-8.2 %	-4.9 %
Manufacturing industry	37 778	33 864	33 010	32 547	-10.4 %	-2.5 %	-1.4 %
Construction industry	18 214	15 534	15 803	16 116	-14.7 %	1.7 %	2.0 %
Distribution and transportation	58 855	57 499	59 442	60 600	-2.3 %	3.4 %	1.9 %
Trade and other services	53 269	55 189	58 957	61 215	3.6 %	6.8 %	3.8 %
Non-commercial services	52 626	53 917	54 939	55 623	2.5 %	1.9 %	1.2 %
Total	237 068	231 443	236 328	239 583	-2.4 %	2.1 %	1.4 %

Source: Cedefop | Skills Forecasts | Data published in 2014

Although there will be job openings for all types of occupations, most new jobs will be at the higher and lower end of the skill spectrum leading to a risk of job polarisation. Weak employment growth indicates that there may be an oversupply of people with high-level qualifications in the short term, but by 2020, Europe will have the most highly-qualified workforce in its history. Furthermore, two-thirds of European jobs will be concentrated in the service sector and most of the additional employment will be characterised by knowledge-intensive and skilled jobs.

LABOUR FORCE BY LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION

	Amount (in thousands)				Growth(%)		
	2008	**2013**	**2020**	**2025**	**2008-2013**	**2013-2020**	**2020-2025**
High	67 754	78 914	91 553	99 709	16.5 %	16.0 %	8.9 %
Average	115 901	117 065	115 193	112 256	1.0 %	-1.6 %	-2.5 %
Low	63 111	54 769	47 649	42 639	-13.2 %	-13.0 %	-10.5 %
Total	246 766	250 748	254 394	254 605	1.6 %	1.5 %	0.1 %

Source: Cedefop | Skills Forecasts | Data published in 2014

While skill demand and supply forecasts in Italy reflect the European average trend, the data on labour supply and population denote alarming trends compared with the European average and the closer countries such as Germany and France.
The projections to 2020 show that Italy:
– will be the country (together with Portugal) with the highest rate of low-skilled workers (37.1%, against a EU average of 19.5%);
– will be in line with the European average on intermediate levels (45.4%, against a EU average of 48.5%);
– will face a serious shortage of highly skilled labour force (17.5% against the EU 32%).
If this is the scenario, Italy could find itself in a situation of serious professional deficit, with a lack of qualified technical workers in many fields, compromising development and competitiveness.

A first challenge is to ensure that all citizens can acquire transversal key competences such as "learning-to-learn" and communication skills, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, digital competence, cultural awareness and expression.

The second challenge is to ensure a fully functioning knowledge triangle of education-research-innovation. Partnerships between the world of enterprise and different levels and sectors of education, training and research can help to ensure a better focus on the skills and competences required in the labour market and on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in all forms of learning.

Within this renewed effort for the promotion of education and training systems and lifelong learning, the Council of European Ministers for Education and Training has approved six new quantitative benchmarks to be achieved by 2020:
- at least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education;
- the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%;
- the share of low-achieving 15-years olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%;
- the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%;
  an average of at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning;
- the share of employed graduates (aged 20-34 with at least upper secondary education attainment and having left education 1-3 years ago) should be at least 82%.

These benchmarks and their role in directing national policies will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

THE BRUGES COMMUNIQUÉ

The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020 reinforces the main VET development directions established within the Copenhagen Process. The Communiqué was adopted by the European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, the European Social Partners and the European Commission, at their meeting in Bruges on 7 December 2010 to review the strategic approach and priorities of the Copenhagen process for 2011-2020.

The Bruges Communiqué presents a vision of a modern and attractive vocational training system which ensures:
- maximum access to lifelong learning so that people have opportunities to learn at any stage in life and by making routes into education and training more open and flexible;
- more opportunities for experience and training abroad to boost language skills, self-confidence and adaptability;
- Higher quality courses, providing the right skills for specific jobs;
- more inclusion and access for disadvantaged people;
- creative, innovative and entrepreneurial thinking.

The Bruges Communiqué includes a mid-term plan aimed at encouraging concrete measures at national level and support at European level. This calls for countries to:
- Review the use of incentives, rights and obligations to encourage more people to take up training.

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- Implement the 2009 Recommendation on quality assurance in vocational training.
- Encourage the development of vocational schools, with the support of local and regional authorities.
- Introduce internationalisation strategies to boost international mobility.
- Increase cooperation with business to ensure training is relevant, for instance by giving teachers the possibility of practical training in companies.
- Launch communication strategies to highlight the benefits of vocational training.

In addition, also in the field of education and training the European Commission, by applying the general strategy Europe 2020, has launched an activity of closer monitoring of Member States' results, followed by specific recommendations for every country regarding reform processes to be implemented in order to achieve European objectives.

Data analysis on education and training systems highlight various critical elements:

- European education and training systems continue to fall short in providing the right skills for employability, and are not working adequately with business or employers to bring the learning experience closer to the reality of the working environment. These skills mismatches are a growing concern for European industry's competitiveness.
- Despite progress over the last five years in the percentages of those qualifying from higher education, sustained efforts will be needed to reach the headline target of 40% of young people completing higher education.
- Though significant improvement has been made over the last years, early school leaving remains at unacceptable levels in too many Member States, such as Spain with 26.5% and Portugal with 23.2%. Targeted action remains necessary to reduce early school leaving through comprehensive, targeted evidence-based strategies.
- There remains significant evidence of underperformance in other areas: 73 million adults have only a low level of education; nearly 20% of 15 year olds lack sufficient skills in reading; and participation in lifelong learning is only 8.9%.

In the *Rethinking education*[6] document the Commission has described the need to expand the scope and accelerate the pace of reforms so that skills may sustain growth and employment. Therefore, the Commission has outlined a number of strategic priorities that the Member States should face and has presented new EU actions.

Particular attention is given to combatting youth unemployment.

Rethinking education covers four areas which are essential to addressing this issue and where Member States should step up efforts:

- developing world-class vocational education and training to raise the quality of vocational skills;

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[6] Com (201) 2 669.

- promoting work based learning including quality traineeships, apprenticeships and dual learning models to help the transition from learning to work;
- promoting partnerships between public and private institutions (to ensure appropriate curricula and skills provision);
- promoting mobility through the proposed Erasmus for All Programme[7].

EDUCATION AND TRAINING MONITOR 2014[8]

These are the main critical elements emerged in the last monitoring carried out by the Commission (November 2014) and the subsequent recommendations:

1.1 Strong education performance cannot be expected without sufficient resources and reforms to ensure their effectiveness.

Yet nineteen Member States cut their education expenditure in 2012. Six Member States decreased investments by more than 5% (EL, ES, CY, HU, PT, RO). Some of the countries that devote relatively few resources to education have decreased their investment further (BG, RO, SK). Since 2008, six countries saw a decrease in expenditure across all levels of education (BG, EL, IT, LV, PT, RO). Underinvestment in human capital risks undermining Europe's prospect for sustainable and inclusive growth. Reforms will be required to make sure that education and training systems work effectively and efficiently.

1.2 The focus on employability has to be strengthened within education institutions.

Youth unemployment remains rampant across Europe and the employment rate of recent graduates stagnated at 75.5% in 2013. VET graduates have better employment prospects in countries where work-based learning is a strong component of VET programmes and higher education graduates are still about 11 percentage points more likely to be employed than those with upper secondary education attainment. But occupation mismatches by qualifications and competences demand that education and training systems become more sensitive to the needs of the modern labour market.

1.3 Education has to avoid proactively any form of discrimination and social exclusion, and to provide chances for all learners.

Socio-economic and socio-cultural inequalities continue to impact negatively upon educational outcomes. Parental education attainment still determines to a large extent one's own education attainment and new evidence suggests that intergenerational education mobility is actually slowing down in the industrialised world. Ten countries received CSRs to focus on disadvantaged learners in particular (AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, HU, LU, RO, SE and SK). Although tackling educational disadvantage is complex and requires wide-ranging, integrated strategies, Member States cannot afford to ignore these challenges.

2.1 Reducing the number of early school leavers will save Europe large public and social costs and protect the individual from a high risk of poverty and social exclusion.

There are still more than five million early school leavers across Europe, facing an unemployment rate of 41%. As Europe gets closer to the Europe 2020 headline target, 12.0% in 2013, it

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[7] "Erasmus for All" is the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport proposed by the European Commission on 23 November 2011.

[8] EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2014), *Education and Training Monitor 2014.*

becomes increasingly visible what a complex, multifaceted problem early school leaving is. A slow but steady progress is hiding significant disparities between but also within countries. The risk of early school leaving is 33.3% higher amongst men; more than twice as high for the foreign-born; no less than 156.1% higher for those suffering physical difficulties; and more than three times as high in bottom-performing regions than in top-performing regions in BG, CZ, PL, ES, UK and BE

2.2 In higher education, broadening access and reducing dropout rates amongst disadvantaged groups remains challenging.
The rate of tertiary education attainment in Europe has steadily grown to 36.9%, yet high-qualified employment is forecasted to have increased a further 13% by 2020. Moreover, the persisting disparities between and within countries leave no room for complacency. The rate of tertiary education attainment is 26% higher amongst women; about 10% higher for native-born; 62.4% lower for individuals suffering physical difficulties; and in CZ, RO and SK, bottom-performing regions have attainment rates that are at least 60% lower than those found in top-performing regions. Only a handful of countries strive to widen participation and boost completion rates amongst disadvantaged groups.

2.3 Targeted policy action is needed to reduce low achievement in key basic competences across Europe.
Amongst 15 year-olds, the EU is not making enough progress in order to reach the 2020 target of at most 15% low achievement in maths, even if negligible gender differences in maths and science hold potential for later STEM fields of study that can be exploited more fully. At the same time, the large and persisting reading disadvantage for boys across all Member States calls for specific policy initiatives. Across the EU's working-age population, the overall rate of low achievement in literacy and numeracy is 19.9% and 23.6% respectively, with significant discrepancies between countries in the skills-value of qualifications. Socio-economic status is still by far the most important determinant of an individual's key basic competences.

2.4 For individuals to thrive in a modern and evolving labour market, education needs to equip people with key transversal competences.
Policy efforts regarding digital competences are to be strengthened, as even amongst the younger generation only half can solve more than very basic problems with the use of ICT. Efforts across Member States to support and promote entrepreneurship in education are fragmented and lack coherence, while 15-year-olds are performing worse in solving non-routine problems than one would expect from their reading, maths and science skills. Despite language competences becoming key for employability of young people, national curricula show significant differences in the number of foreign languages being taught. The percentage of students in lower secondary school learning two or more foreign languages is less than 10% in BE fr, HU, IE and AT.

On-the-job training, through apprenticeship or other forms of school-work alternation, has become a strategic priority within the education policies of the European Union since it has demonstrated, in the countries where it is particularly carried out, to be an important tool to encourage learning and to combat unemployment. Therefore the European Union has launched the *European Alliance for Apprenticeships* programme, which aims to improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships across Europe and to change the mind-sets towards apprenticeship-type training and work-based learning.

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAFA) has effectively mobilised EU Member States and a large number of stakeholders to engage in quality apprenticeships. It has facilitated networking, cooperation and sharing of good practices. The Alliance has equally contributed to raising awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships. EAFA was launched in July 2013 with a joint declaration by the European Social Partners (ETUC, Business Europe, UEAPME and CEEP), the European Commission and the Presidency of the Council of the EU. This was followed by a Council Declaration and individual commitments by EU countries.

2.2 THE YOUTH GUARANTEE

Another important document about policies and interventions on youth employment is represented by the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a *Youth Guarantee*. The Youth Guarantee is a new approach to tackling youth unemployment which ensures that **all young people under 25** – whether registered with employment services or not – get a good-quality, concrete offer within four months of them leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The starting point for issuing the Youth Guarantee should be the registration with the employment service; Member States should define another starting point for NEETS[9] not registered with the public employment service for issuing the guarantee within four months.

The good-quality offer should be for a **job**, **apprenticeship, traineeship**, or continued **education** and be adapted to each individual need and situation.

The European Union through the European Social Fund (see Ch.7) will provide €6 billion to support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

2.3 The Erasmus Plus Programme

The new Erasmus+ programme aimed to support actions in the fields of Education, Training, Youth and Sport has been launched in 2014, bringing together:
*   *The Lifelong Learning Programme* (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig);
*   *The Youth in Action programme;*
*   Five international cooperation programmes (Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink, the programme for cooperation with industrialised countries).

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[9] NEET is the acronym of "*Not (engaged) in Education, Employment or Training*", used to define young people not holding and not looking for a job, not involved in the educational system, nor in any other form of training.

Furthermore, it will for the first time provide support for Sport. The European Commission has the objective to promote the integration of the different strategies of Community action, so that they can respond more effectively and more consistently to the goals defined by the European Union through the recommendations and decisions of the EU Council of Ministers.

The integrated programme also allows interested parties to have an easier overview of the grant opportunities available[10]. Erasmus+ is started in a time when in the EU almost 6 million young people are unemployed, with levels in some countries more than 50%. At the same time there are over 2 million job vacancies, and a third of employers report difficulty in recruiting staff with the required qualifications. This demonstrates the existence of important skills deficits in Europe. Erasmus + will address these deficits by providing opportunities for study, training or work experience or volunteering abroad. The quality and relevance of organisations and European education, training and youth welfare will be enhanced by supporting the improvement of the teaching and learning methods, new programmes and professional development of teachers and youth leaders, as well as through greater cooperation between education and the world of work.

THE STRUCTURE OF ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

The structure of the new Erasmus+ programme is focused on three transversal key actions:

Key Action 1 – *Learning Mobility of Individuals*
- Learning mobility of individuals
- Staff mobility (in particular for teachers, trainers, school leaders and youth workers)
- Mobility for higher education students and vocational education and training students.
- Loan Guarantee
- Joint Master Degrees
- Youth mobility, including volunteering and youth exchanges.

Key Action 2 – *Cooperation for innovation and good practices*
- Strategic partnerships between education establishments/youth organisations and/or other relevant actors.
- Large-scale partnerships between education and training establishments and business.
- IT supports platforms, such as eTwinning, the European Platform for Adult Learning(EPALE) and the European Youth Portal.
- Knowledge and sector skill alliances and Cooperation with third countries and neighbourhood countries.

Key Action 3 – *Policy reform*
- Support for EU agenda in education, training and youth through the Open Method of Coordination

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[10] For more detailed information visit http://www.erasmusplus.it/.

2.4 NEW PRIORITY AREAS FOR EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In November 2015 the European Council meeting *Education, Youth, Culture and Sport* adopted the 2015 joint report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training; the mid-term stocktaking confirmed the relevance of the four ET 2020 strategic objectives and selected 6 priority areas, which are declined into concrete issues:

PRIORITY AREAS	CONCRETE ISSUES
1) *Relevant and high quality knowledge, skills and competences developed throughout lifelong learning, focusing on learning outcomes for employability, innovation, active citizenship and well-being*	A. Enhancing targeted policy action to reduce low achievement in **basic skills** across Europe
	B. Strengthening the development of **transversal skills and key competences**, in particular **digital, entrepreneurship and language competences**
	C. Relaunching and continuing lifelong learning strategies, including non-formal and informal learning, and from education and training to work
	D. Fostering **generalised, equitable** access to **affordable high-quality early childhood education and care**, especially for the disadvantaged groups
	E. Reducing **early school leaving** by supporting school based strategies with an overall inclusive learner centred vision of education and "second-chance" opportunities
	F. Promoting the relevance of **higher education** to the labour market and society
	G. Implementing the Riga medium-term deliverables in **VET**[11], while reinforcing the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and strengthening the anticipation of skills needs for the labour market
	H. Implementing the **Renewed European Agenda for adult learning**

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[11] The Riga conclusions of 22 June 2015 proposed the following new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-2020:
- Promoting **work-based learning** in all its forms, with special attention to apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers, as well as by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Further developing **quality assurance** mechanisms in VET in line with the EQAVET recommendation and, as part of quality assurance systems, establishing continuous **information and feed back loops to initial VET (I-VET) and continuing VET (C-VET) systems based on learning outcomes.**
- Enhancing **access to VET and qualifications for all** through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- Further strengthening **key competences** in VET curricula and providing more effective opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through I-VET.

2) *Inclusive education, equality, equity, non-discrimination and the promotion of civic competences*	A. Addressing the increasing **diversity of learners** and enhancing **access to quality and inclusive mainstream education and training** for all learners, including disadvantaged groups B. Addressing the issue of gender gaps in education and training, and promoting **more gender-balanced educational choices** C. Facilitating the effective acquisition of the **language(s) of instruction and employment** by migrants through formal and non-formal learning D. Promoting **civic, intercultural, and social competences**, mutual understanding and respect, and ownership of democratic values and fundamental rights E. Enhancing **critical thinking,** along with cyber and media literacy
3) *Open and innovative education and training, including by fully embracing the digital era*	A. Further exploring the potential of **innovative and active pedagogies** such as inter-disciplinary teaching and collaborative methods, to enhance the development of relevant and high-level skills and competences B. Fostering **cooperation** by stimulating the engagement of learners, teachers, trainers, school leaders and other members of educational staff, parents and the broader local community C. Increasing **synergies** between education, research and innovation activities, with a sustainable growth perspective D. Promoting the use of **ICT** with a view to increasing the quality and relevance of education at all levels E. Boosting availability and quality of **open and digital educational resources** and pedagogies at all education levels F. Addressing the development of **digital competences at all levels of learning**, including non-formal and informal, in response to the digital revolution
4) *Strong support for teachers, trainers, school leaders and other educational staff*	A. Strengthening the **recruitment, selection and induction** of the best and most suitable candidates for the teaching profession B. Raising the **attractiveness**, for both genders, and the status of the teaching profession C. Supporting **initial education and continuing professional development** at all levels D. Supporting the promotion of excellence in **teaching** at all levels, in the design of teacher education programmes and in learning organisation and incentive structures, as well as exploring new ways to assess the quality of teacher training

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5) *Transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications to facilitate learning and labour mobility*	A. Fostering **transparency, quality assurance, validation and thereby recognition** of skills and/or qualifications, including those acquired through digital, online and open learning resources, as well as non-formal and informal learning B. **Simplifying and rationalising** the transparency, documentation, validation and recognition tools that involve direct outreach to learners, workers and employers, and further implementing the EQF and NQFs C. Supporting the **mobility** of pupils, apprentices, students, teachers, members of educational staff and researchers D. Developing strategic partnerships and joint courses, in particular through increasing **internationalisation** of higher education and vocational education and training
6) *Sustainable investment, quality and efficiency of education and training systems*	A. Exploring the **potential of the Investment Plan for Europe** in the area of education and training B. Encouraging Member States to use evidence-based policy-making, including the evaluation and assessment of education and training systems, to **monitor policies and design reforms** that deliver quality education more efficiently C. Encouraging innovative ways to ensure **sustainable investment** in education and training, examining forms of performance-based funding and cost-sharing, where appropriate

3. The European benchmarks

3.1 A STRATEGIC ROLE FOR INDICATORS

In many European countries is growing, in recent years, the tendency to quantify the objectives of government indicating precise quantitative targets, by establishing indicators which may be easily monitored and verified by both policy makers and public opinion[1].

In English-speaking countries this approach has entered permanently in the culture of government. For example, in England *Public Service Agreements* (PSA) have been introduced, which set out clear objectives for the improvement of public services, such as education and training. The objectives of the PSA included precise targets for the qualitative and quantitative growth of the education system. For example, among the objectives defined in 2004 there was:

Target III: *By the age of 19, all young people are ready for skilled employment or higher education.*

Indicators:

* increase the proportion of 19 year olds who achieve at least level 2 (*General Certificate of Secondary Education)* by 5 percentage points by 2008;
* increase the proportion of young people who achieve level 3 (*A level*);
* reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training by 2 percentage points by 2010.

These quantitative targets were applied also at local level in order to make local actors responsible for achieving them. The achievement of targets and related problems were periodically monitored, followed by the reformulation of the objectives[2].

The diffusion of a culture related to outcomes does not involve only English-speaking countries. Also the French system, based on the "*Loi organique relative aux lois de finances* (LOLF)" has radically changed its idea about public intervention, from a budgetary approach based on the financing of activities (of schools, teachers, etc.) to an approach based on the financing of the objective to be achieved, which is describes in measurable terms. Therefore in the financial law each ministry should specify in measurable terms the objectives to be achieved and not only the

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[1] ALLULLI G. (2007), La valutazione della scuola: un problema di governance, in *Economia dei servizi*, Il Mulino, n. 3/2007.

[3] CEDEFOP (2009), *Assuring the quality of Vet systems by defining expected outcomes*, CEDEFOP Panorama series, 158.

resources which will be provided. In this way, the Parliament and the citizens have a tool to measure the success of the public action which is financed annually allowing to take appropriate decisions, everyone in its field of competence[3].

As mentioned before, this type of procedure has become part of EU policies.

The use of indicators for setting goals to be reached has many positive aspects but also some critical aspects. In particular, the following advantages can be listed[4]:

- It obliges policy-makers to establish their goals and their priorities: sometimes the objectives of the political action are not expressed; the political action is just conceived as a process, and not as an activity aimed at achieving a result. But the use of the indicator forces the policy-maker to declare and make clear the objectives of its political action.
- It forces decision-makers to operationalize the objectives, so that they can be measured: often, even when goals are defined, they are general and do not give the opportunity to citizens to verify whether they have been achieved or not. The indicator consists of a precise and not general figure; this is useful for citizens and policy-makers.
- It allows comparison and benchmarking: the indicator allows to compare different situations identifying reference points which are set as goals to be achieved.
- It allows an impartial monitoring: the identification of precise reference parameters is able to prevent (or to reduce) the subjectivity of judgment.
- It allows to encourage those who achieve better results and to support those who have difficulty: the transparency ensured by the indicator allows to more easily identify the areas of excellence and the critical areas and to decide which are the most suitable policies to implement.
- It provides a solid starting point for the assessment. Without a quantitative base any assessment activity is at risk of subjectivity. It should be remembered that the assessment does not end with the quantitative analysis since it must always be integrated with a qualitative analysis.

On the other hand, the use of indicators for establishing the objectives to be achieved is not without any danger, an inappropriate use of indicators can bring out some unexpected effects:

- the need to establish measurable goals risks to focus only on the easiest goals; sometimes the indicators are selected depending on the available data neglecting the more complex aspects;
- it is often required to collect large amounts of data to monitor the results; this increases the bureaucratic burden for the structures which are subject to monitoring or evaluation;

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[3] Cfr. http://www.performance-publique.gouv.fr/.
[4] ALLULLI G. (2000), *Le misure della qualità*, Seam, Roma.

- the comparison between different situations without taking into account the context may be incorrect; sometimes the comparisons do not take into account the differences between the various contexts;
- the emphasis given to indicators may overshadow the qualitative analysis; an excessive dependence on the numbers risks to neglect the "qualitative" aspects of the assessment;
- the funding allocated on the basis of quantitative results could lead to negative effects.

If, for example, awards for schools presenting a low dropout rate are introduced, schools will select students in order to receive only the most talented and motivated or they could lower the standards to be achieved to facilitate the attendance.

Finally, it should be noted that the modification of a complex system such as the education system cannot occur in a short time; measuring the impact of an education policy on the system might take a long time; the behaviour of millions of teachers, students and families does not change in a few months. Therefore, to monitor the implementation and the evolution of a policy should not be used only result indicators, measuring the final effects of the policy (for example, decrease in dropout rates or raising of standards of learning), but also process indicators, allowing the verification of how the policy has been applied to the system.

There are many ways to use the indicators in public policy: for example they can be used for monitoring, for the comparison or for control.

Two approaches to their use can be identified: a "soft" approach, since its application is not preparatory to the adoption of particular initiatives, and a "rigid" approach, when the application of the indicator is preparatory to the intervention.

Examples of "soft" approach come from the use of the indicators:

- for internal monitoring of the processes launched;
- for comparison with other institutions, especially with those presenting similar characteristics;
- for the definition of the benchmarks, or reference points to be reached or to be taken as an example;
- for self-assessment.

The benchmarks set by the European Union in the framework of the Lisbon strategy are part of this approach; they are used to monitor the progress of Member States towards the achievement of the Lisbon objectives, in case of failure it is not involved any sanction against the country which hasn't achieved those goals. On the contrary, the Maastricht parameters are part of a "rigid" approach and their non-compliance shall lead to the application of sanctions.

There is a "rigid" approach when the indicators are used:

- for external monitoring, to check the progress of specific projects or programmes;

- to allocate additional funding, on the basis of statistical parameters;
- to verify the achievement of specific objectives (targets).

It would be appropriate if during the policy-making process the indicators were used by integrating the two approaches: it is necessary to establish measurable goals which everyone can verify, with the awareness that the indicator is a tool and not an end, and that the complexity of the education system requires a great attention to the different contexts, avoiding improper comparisons between different individuals or organizations.

3.2 INDICATORS AND BENCHMARKS FOR MONITORING PROGRESS TOWARDS THE LISBON OBJECTIVES

The Conclusions of the Presidency in Lisbon in 2000 and the subsequent European Councils have recognised the central role of indicators and benchmarks within the "Open Method of Coordination", the method used to promote the convergence of Member States towards the EU goals (see par. 1.2). In particular, the use of indicators and benchmarks has intensified in the area of cooperation on education and training in Europe.

In 2002 the European Council approved a detailed work programme which fixed 13 concrete objectives in education and training and an indicative list of 33 indicators, later reduced to 29.

It was established also the "Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks", composed of experts representing all Member States to counsel the Commission about the use of indicators and benchmarks.

The most significant action has been the adoption by the Council of Education of **5 benchmarks** ("reference levels of European average performance") in education and training, that is the adoption of five quantitative targets which the European Union was intended to achieve by 2010.

The benchmarks aimed at defining a concrete and measurable method in order to show the Member States the path to follow for building a learning/lifelong learning system and for measuring progress in this field.

The benchmarks were:
- at least 85 % of 22-year-olds should have completed upper secondary education;
- no more than 10% of young people should have left school before completing upper secondary education or vocational or other training;
- the average level of participation in lifelong learning should be at least 12.5% of the population in a month;
- the percentage of youth with low achievement in reading literacy should have decreased by at least 20%;
- the total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology should have increased by 15%.

Subsequently, the European Commission has constantly monitored the evolution of these indicators for all European countries, by setting up an annual report allowing to periodically review the situation. The survey conducted in 2011 (on data of 2009)[5] showed the following Italian and European situation:

Italian and European situation in 2009/10 compared to the Lisbon benchmarks

| BENCHMARK	EU average	Italian average
At least 85 % of 22-year-olds should have completed upper secondary education	78,6	76,3
No more than 10% of young people should have left school	13,9	18,8
The average level of participation in lifelong learning should be at least 12.5% of the population in a month	9,1	6,2
The percentage of youth with low achievement in reading literacy should have decreased by at least 20%	21,1% (-6%)	24.9% (+37,4%)
the total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology should have increased by 15%	+4%	+ 6,3

Source: *Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training. Indicators and benchmarks 2010/2001.* SEC (2011) 526
Education and training monitor 2014

As can be seen, with the exception of the last indicator, for none of the other benchmarks the progress of European countries has allowed to meet the objective. The following chart, which has been included in the last monitoring report produced by the European Commission on the Lisbon Benchmarks[6], shows the trend of European average of the five indicators from 2000 to 2009. Only the indicator regarding the number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology reveals a progress over the years. Three other indicators show a progress, but with a trend much slower than expected. Finally, the indicator of low achievers in reading shows even a clearly negative trend until 2006 which is increasing but is still below the EU target.

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[5] *Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training. Indicators and benchmarks 2010/2001.* SEC(2011) 526.
[6] Ibid.

Progress towards the achievement of the Lisbon benchmarks
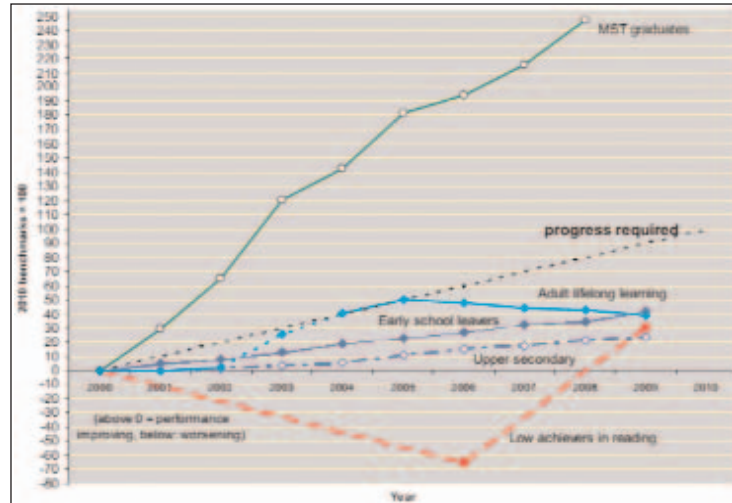
Source: *Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training. Indicators and benchmarks 2010/2011. SEC (2011)526*

In 2010, the European Council examined the data reaching the following conclusions[7]:

a) *It is required more action to improve literacy and to help disadvantaged people*
- The EU benchmark for 2010 is to reduce by 20% the percentage of low-achieving 15-years olds in reading literacy, this share has actually increased from 21.3% in 2000 to 24.1% in 2006.
- The performance of pupils with a migrant background in reading, mathematics and science is lower than that of native pupils (PISA data).
- A major source of concern is the deteriorating performance in reading skills compared to the 2010 EU benchmark. A good level of literacy is the basis for the acquisition of key competences and for lifelong learning.

b) *To strengthen the key competences in Vocational Education and Training and Lifelong Learning.*

Some progress has been made in increasing adult participation in education and training, but it is not enough to reach the 2010 benchmark of 12.5%. In 2008, 9.5% of Europeans aged 25-64 participated in the four weeks prior to the survey, with high skilled adults being five times more likely to participate than the low-skilled.

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[7] 2010 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the "Education and Training 2010" work programme (2010/C 117/01).

c) *Some progress on improving access to higher education*

There is growing political awareness that enabling non-traditional learners to access higher education is central to the achievement of lifelong learning. Most countries have taken measures to increase the participation of students with a lower socio-economic status, including financial incentives. 24% of the adult population in Europe (25-64 years old) have high (i.e. tertiary level) educational attainment, which is far behind both the US and Japan with 40%.

If the European situation does not appear exciting, the Italian one is even worse. For all benchmarks, with the exception of the one concerning science graduates, Italy shows values which are significantly lower than the European average. The only progress which has been made since the benchmark was set is in obtaining higher education diploma.

3.3 SIX NEW BENCHMARKS FOR 2020

Within the new Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET 2020) 6 new benchmarks have been identified. Three benchmarks had already been defined by the Lisbon Strategy, while the three new benchmarks concern the access to pre-primary education, the percentage of graduates and employed secondary or university graduates. These new objectives are part of the learning strategy that should cover every stage of life, "from cradle to grave", as stated by the Communication from the Commission of 2001[8].

The following benchmarks for 2020 have been set:
- At least 95% of children (from 4 to compulsory school age) should participate in early childhood education.
- The rate of early leavers from education and training should be below 10%.
- Fewer than 15% of 15-year-olds should be under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science.
- At least 40% of people aged 30-34 should have completed some form of higher education.
- At least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning.
- The share of employed graduates (aged 20-34 with at least upper secondary education attainment and having left education 1-3 years ago) should be at least 82%.

However it is not easy to reach these benchmarks, especially for our country. The last European Monitor published in 2015[9] shows the following situation:

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[8] Commission of the European Communities. *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* COM(2001) 678 Brussels, 21.11.2001.
[9] European Commission, *Education and Training Monitor 2015*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015.

Italian and European situation in 2014 compared to the benchmarks for 2020

BENCHMARK	EU average	Italian average
At least 95% of children (from 4 to compulsory school age) should participate in early childhood education	93,9%	98,7%
The rate of early leavers from education and training should be below 10%	11,1%	15,0%
At least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning in a month	10,7%	8,0%
Fewer than 15% of 15-year-olds should be under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science	Reading 17,8% Math. 22,1% Science16,6%	Reading 19,5% Math. 24,7% Science18,7%
At least 40% of people aged 30-34 should have completed some form of higher education	37,9%	23,9%
The share of employed graduates (aged 20-34 with at least upper secondary education attainment and having left education 1-3 years ago) should be at least 82%	76,1%	45,0%

Source: *Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training. Indicators and benchmarks*

As can be seen in the chart table, the situation of our country is particularly difficult regarding employment rates of graduates. Also dropout and university graduation rates are critical, since they are far below the European benchmarks and the current average of other countries. However, regarding the dropout rate our country made a significant progress during the last year: it decreased from 17% to 15% of young people between 18 and 24 without a diploma or professional qualification. Furthermore for this indicator Italy had set the objective of achieving by 2020 the 16% as the maximum value, then that goal has already been reached. Also with regard to the rate of graduation, Italy has set the realistic target of achieving by 2020 the value of 26/27%.

These and other progresses have been noted by the European Commission, which in the *European Monitor 2015* states: *"Italy has made progress in improving its education and training system over the last few years. A school evaluation system is being implemented, basic skills proficiency has improved, the early school leaving rate is on a decreasing trend and participation in ECEC is almost universal for children aged four to six. Moreover, the recent reform of the school education system can help create the conditions to further improve school outcomes. Nonetheless, the early school leaving rate remains well above the EU average. Regional differences in basic skills proficiency are wide. The tertiary education attainment rate for young people is the lowest in the EU and many students still drop out of tertiary education. Work-based learning is not sufficiently developed and entry into the labour market is difficult for young people, including the high-skilled. General government expenditure on education as a share of GDP is among the lowest in the EU, especially at the tertiary level"*.

As can be noted, together with the recognition of progress criticisms about the problems affecting the educational system of our country emerge. The next years will show the extent to which the 6 new targets for 2020 will be able to give a new impetus to the education policies of the different countries. Despite this, there is the political and educational significance of the benchmark: strategic reference point indicating in transparent and measurable terms the goal to be achieved.

4. The debate on competences and the European Qualifications Framework

4.1 BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

In the debate of the past 20 years, the discussion on educational policies has shifted from how to define and acquire knowledge to how to define and acquire skills (know-how).

The concept of "competence" has a long history in the field of vocational training and it has developed in the working environment. Guy Le Boterf, one of the greatest theorists in this field defined competence as *"a recognized and proven set of representations, knowledge, skills and attitudes pertinently mobilized and combined in a given context"*[1].

Only in recent years an effort has been made to use the concept of competence in general education, on the basis of the need to overcome the purely transmissive approach of knowledge.

An important step in the international elaboration process of the concept of competence has been represented by the DeSeCo Project (*Definition and Selection of Competences*) which was conducted between 1997 and 2003 by the OECD[2]; this project has played a significant role in the evolution of public policies, through the definition and systematization of an international reference framework. The project brought together several experts to compare definitions, establish convergences and finally list a series of key competences for the development of the society and individuals. These key competences should obviously be the main objectives of education and training.

This initiative is based on the awareness that the traditional basic skills are important but not enough to meet the requirements and the current social demand. The DeSeCo Project publications emphasize, in particular, a holistic definition of the concept of competence, giving to the term the meaning of a complex system of action, including cognitive and non-cognitive attitudes, and other elements: *"A competence is defined as the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context. Competent performance or effective action implies the mobilisation of knowledge, cognitive and practical skills, as well as social and behaviour components such as attitudes, emotions, and values and motivations. A competence – a holistic notion – is therefore not reducible to its cognitive dimension"*.

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[1] LE BOTERF G. (1990), *De la compétence: Essai sur un attracteur étrange*, Les Ed. de l'Organisation.
[2] RYCHEN D.S., SALGANIK L.H. (2007), *Agire le competenze chiave. Scenari e strategie per il benessere consapevole,* Franco Angeli.

The DeSeCo Project has identified nine key competences, divided into three categories, which may be relevant to every citizen.

KEY COMPETENCES ACCORDING TO THE DESECO PROJECT (A)
ACT AUTONOMOUSLY

1) The ability to assert rights, interests, limits and needs
This competency implies the ability, for instance, to:
• understand one's own interests (e.g. in an election);
• know written rules and principles on which to base a case;
• construct arguments in order to have needs and rights recognised;
• suggest arrangements or alternative solutions.

2) The ability to form and conduct life plans and personal projects
Individuals must be able, for instance, to:
• define a project and set a goal;
• identify and evaluate both the resources to which they have access and the resources they needs (e.g. time and money);
• prioritise and refine goals;
• balance the resources needed to meet multiple goals;
• learn from past actions, projecting future outcomes;
• monitor progress, making necessary adjustments as a project unfolds.

3) The ability to act within the big picture
This competency requires individuals, for instance, to:
• understand patterns;
• have an idea of the system in which they exist;
• identify the direct and indirect consequences of their actions;
• choose between different courses of action by reflecting on their potential consequences in relation to individual and shared norms and goals.

USING TOOLS INTERACTIVELY

1) The ability to use language, symbols and text interactively
This key competency concerns the effective use of spoken and written language skills, computation and other mathematical skills, in multiple situations. It is an essential tool for functioning well in society and the workplace and participating in an effective dialogue with others.

2) The ability to use knowledge and information interactively
This key competency requires critical reflection on the nature of information itself – its technical infrastructure and its social, cultural, and even ideological context and impact. Information competence is necessary as a basis for understanding options, forming opinions, making decisions, and carrying out informed and responsible actions.

3) The ability to use technology interactively
Technology can be used interactively if users understand its nature and reflect on its potential. Most importantly, individuals need to relate the possibilities embedded in technological tools to their own circumstances and goals. A first step is for individuals to incorporate technologies into their common practices, which produces a familiarity with the technology that then allows them to extend its uses.

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INTERACTING IN HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS

1) The ability to relate well to others
This key competency allows individuals to initiate, maintain and manage personal relationships with, for example, personal acquaintances, colleagues and customers. Relating well is not only a requirement for social cohesion but, increasingly, for economic success as changing firms and economies are placing increased emphasis on emotional intelligence.

2) The ability to cooperate
Co-operation requires each individual to have certain qualities. Each needs to be able to balance commitment to the group and its goals with his or her own priorities and must be able to share leadership and to support others.

3) The ability to manage and resolve conflicts
For individuals to take an active part in conflict management and resolution, they need to be able to:
- analyse the issues and interests at stake, the origins of the conflict and the reasoning of all sides, recognising that there are different possible positions;
- identify areas of agreement and disagreement;
- reframe the problem;
- prioritise needs and goals, deciding what they are willing to give up and under what circumstances.

(a) OECD (2003) *The definition and selection of key competences- executive summary*: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf

4.2 KEY COMPETENCES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

The European Recommendation of 18 December 2006 on *Key competences for lifelong learning*[3] identifies the key competences which everyone should acquire and which form a basis for lifelong learning; it encourages the Member States, as part of their lifelong learning strategies, to develop key competences for all citizens in order to ensure that education and initial training are offered to all young people preparing them for adult life, further learning and integration into working life.

To achieve this goal it must be taken into account those young people who, due to educational disadvantages caused by personal, social, cultural or economic circumstances, need particular support to fulfil their educational potential; according to the Recommendation, even adults should be able to develop and update their key competences throughout their lives, with a particular focus on target groups identified as priorities in the national, regional and/or local contexts.

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[3] Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning.

The Recommendation defines key competences as *"a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. Key competences are those which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment".* Without these skills it is more difficult to exercise the rights of citizenship and access and enhance the learning opportunities which are offered throughout life.

The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council identifies 8 key competences which every citizen should have.

KEY COMPETENCES ACCORDING TO THE EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATION (a)

- *Communication in the mother tongue,* is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing)
- *Communication in foreign languages*, is based on the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an appropriate range of societal and cultural contexts (in education and training, work, home and leisure
- *Mathematical competence*, is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations. Building on a sound mastery of numeracy, the emphasis is on process and activity, as well as knowledge.
- *Digital competence,* is the ability to use the new ICT.
- *Learning to learn* is the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organise one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups.
- *Social and civic competences*, include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life.
- *Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship* refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives.
- *Awareness* of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media, including music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts.

(a) RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/CE)

4.3 THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK (EQF)

The theme of skills and their definition and certification is crucial to give quality to the education system but also practicality to the process of integration between systems in the logic of lifelong learning. The integration has meaning if provided with models and tools making possible both constant dialogue with the socio-economic reality and the actual ability to capitalize the learning experiences conducted by individuals in different places, times and in educational contexts.

After a comparison between different Member States, the European Union approved in 2008 a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. The EQF will provide a common language to describe qualifications which will help Member States, employers and individuals compare qualifications across the EU's diverse education and training systems[4].

The EQF shifts the focus of qualification from the characteristics of training activities attended (duration, content, etc.) to learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences). No matter how the competence has been acquired (learning experience, type of institution), what matters is the final result: this approach does not only facilitate the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems, but also the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The European framework covers all type of qualification, ranging from those acquired at the end of compulsory education to the highest qualifications such as Doctorate. It consists of **8 reference levels** indicating the difficulty and the learning outcomes characterising every level. The EQF is focused on the learning outcomes and the person's actual knowledge and skills rather than the amount of study needed to complete the qualification programme.

All Member States shall indicate the correspondence of titles and qualifications delivered at national level with the eight levels established at European level, ranging from level 1 (the basic level, corresponding to the knowledge and skills acquired at the end of compulsory education) to level 8, corresponding to the knowledge and skills acquired at the end of a post-graduate degree course.

Level 1 is characterised by:
• Basic general knowledge
• Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks
• Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context

Level 8 is characterised by:
• Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields
• The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice
• Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

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[4] RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 April 2008 on *The establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning* (2008 / C 111/01).

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: BASIC DEFINITIONS

Learning outcomes means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;

Knowledge means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;

Skills means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);

Competence means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

In the European Recommendation it is stated that Member States shall:

1) Use the European Qualifications Framework as a reference tool to compare the qualification levels of the different qualifications systems.

2) Relate their national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework by 2010, in particular by referencing, in a transparent manner, their qualification levels to the European levels and, where appropriate, by developing national qualifications frameworks in accordance with national legislation and practice.

3) Adopt measures so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and 'Europass' documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.

4) Use an approach based on learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications, and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

4.4 TRANSPARENCY TOOLS

Before adopting the Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework, the European Union had already introduced **Europass**, a tool to facilitate the mobility of citizens by promoting the transparency of qualifications acquired. Europass has been established by a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences[5] and consists of five elements:

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[5] Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 *on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass).*

- *Europass Curriculum Vitae*
- *Europass language passport*
- *Europass certificate supplement*
- *Europass diploma supplement*
- *Europass mobility*

The ***Europass Curriculum Vitae*** shall provide citizens with the opportunity to present in a clear and comprehensive way information on all their qualifications and competences. It allows to standardize qualifications, professional experience, skills and competences.

The Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV) contains personal information in addition to details of any work-experience, education and training, personal skills and competences that the individual has developed even through non-traditional educational paths.

Europass Certificate* e *Diploma Supplement are issued to individuals who have obtained a vocational training certificate or a diploma.

The Certificate Supplement provides additional information regarding the award which is not available on the official certificate, such as the skills and competences acquired, the level of the certificate, and entry requirements and access opportunities to the next level of education etc. This makes it more easily understood, especially for employers and institutions outside the issuing country.

The *Europass Diploma Supplement* is the transparency tool developed by the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the European Commission, which aims to make more readable the titles and qualifications issued in the context of academic and non-academic higher education. The document is delivered together with the titles and qualifications issued at the end of an educational path at a University or an higher education institute.

The information on the *Europass Certificate and Diploma Supplement* is supplied by the relevant awarding body which makes the award.

4.5 KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCES: AN OPEN DEBATE

Despite the important progress made at national and European level to promote education and training based on the concept of competence, the conceptual framework and rules for the application of a "teaching through skills" still need to be clarified.

The definition: there is still no clear definition of competence; there are many definitions of this notion depending on the field (psychological, pedagogical, organizational) to which the definition refers. In addition, the distinction between the concept of competence and skill is not definite; the European Recommendation states that a **Skill** is the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems: in the concept of skill it is already inherent the applica-

tive dimension of the acquired knowledge, which is used to carry out specific task. While the **Competence** is defined by the Recommendation as the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. According to the Recommendation, the skill is distinguished from the competence because:

– The skill is demonstrated in work or study situations and in professional and personal development (but even the possession of competences and knowledge must be proven)
– To express competence it is necessary to use also personal, social and/or methodological skills.

The competence thus differs from the skill because also non-cognitive resources (attitudes, etc.) are mobilized. But at school, where especially cognitive skills are used, how it is possible to distinguish competences from skills? While in the workplace it is easier (but not always) to draw the dividing-line between the skills (cognitive dimension) and competences (involving other dimensions of the person), at school this division is not clear. In particular, there is a difficulty when it is needed to define or evaluate the objectives to be achieved with regard to the acquisition of skills and/or competences related to given disciplines.

A further complication is created during the Italian translation of the word "skill" which sometimes is translated with "abilità" but also with the term "capacità". Even in Italian language there is not a clear distinction between the expression "abilità" and "capacità".

The level of acquisition/demonstration of competence: the definition of the "level" of acquisition of a competence is not easy, especially when it must be defined a performance carried out in a non-working environment. While the satisfactory execution of a professional performance can be defined through a series of indicators (for example, through the listing of operations which should be fulfilled), the definition of a satisfactory cognitive performance requires also the specification of the type of knowledge used and promoted, otherwise there is the risk to remain on a generic level.

Competence teaching methods: according to the definition, the competence cannot be taught as a normal discipline; the acquisition and implementation of a competence is the result of a complex process involving the mobilisation of different resources: cognitive, attitudinal and motivational; to acquire and demonstrate a competence it is necessary to confront to real contexts. The translation of all this in the everyday school practice is obviously quite complex.

Evaluation modalities: evaluation modalities of competences present different problems. It has already explained the difficulty of defining the level of competence and then to evaluate it. But competences evaluation becomes extremely difficult within the school context. In particular, when the assessment tool is the written test it hardly can be defined as a competence evaluation, in the event it can be called "skills evaluation".

The ambiguity is caused also by the official documents: in the text published by OECD on Pisa 2009 Assessment Framework[6] the term competence is used only in the presentation of conceptual frameworks regarding mathematics and science (where, however, it is not clear the difference between competence and skill), while in the presentation of reading literacy framework it is always used the term skill. Therefore the question that arises is: a test as those normally given in schools is able to allow the assessment of a competence? Wouldn't it be more correct to talk about assessment of language, mathematics and science skills?

In recent years a concern about the emphasis given to the use of the term competence in schools has spread, together with the fear that the emphasis on competences could decrease the attention to learning. It has therefore developed, both in Italy and in other countries, a reaction movement which has tried to bring the teaching of contents back to the centre of school activity. A debate has opened between those who highlight the need to form solid conceptual categories through learning allowing to capture and select the information that is provided by the school (Edgar Morin, quoting Michel de Montaigne, stated *It is better a well made head that a full head[7])* and those who stress the need to acquire a solid knowledge, as a basis for the subsequent cultural and professional growth.

As noted by the Ministerial Committee, which is responsible for defining the procedures for the extension of compulsory education, there is no opposition between knowledge and competences: the competence, without the knowledge giving it substance, is just an empty container. The final text presented by the Commission states[8]:

"The key competences are not an alternative proposal to disciplines; on the contrary they are built using the knowledge provided by the first two years of upper secondary education institutions, starting from the cultural areas that have been identified. **Disciplines and competences** are the basis of a single teaching/learning process. ... The processes leading to the acquisition of key competences are therefore not intended as a new curriculum that is going to be juxtaposed to the existing ones, but as the multi and interdisciplinary goal of educational curricular activities".

To conclude, the concept of competence is important because it highlights the operational implications of knowledge, promoting the passing of abstract teaching and because it encourages a consolidation of knowledge across different disciplines. Regarding the school environment it seems that greater clarity is needed concerning the terms knowledge, skills, competences and ability in order to build unambiguous frameworks.

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[6] OECD (2009), PISA 2009 *Assessment Framework Key competences in reading, mathematics and science*. Ed. OECD, Parigi.

[7] MORIN E. (1999), *La tête bien faite. Repenser la réforme. Réformer la pensée* Paris, Seuil.

[8] Commission with the task to deepen the issue related to compulsory education and develop possible ways to raise compulsory education *Indicazioni sulle modalità dell'innalzamento dell'obbligo di istruzione* March 3, 2007.

5. The Recommendation on European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET)

In recent years the quality of the educational and training institutions is object of discussion and intervention. The growing autonomy of vocational training centres and schools requires greater internal and external control on organisational processes and the results achieved, in order to ensure the efficient and effective use of public and private resources. Regarding education and vocational training, there is also the need to raise the quality of the training offer for at least three relevant reasons:

- to increase the attractiveness of a training offer which is sometimes judged as "of lower rank" compared to higher and technical education;
- to strengthen the capacity to response of vocational training to the needs of the constantly evolving production system;
- to increase the effectiveness of the training programme, responding to the needs of different users.

5.1 From inputs control to outputs control

The quality in the traditional school systems was ensured by controlling the "inputs", that is the characteristics of the educational system were established: the minimum and maximum number of students per class, their entry requirements, the number of teachers per class, their certified training, the teaching programmes, the type of facility, the educational and laboratory equipment; etc... Minimum standards of quality of training have been (and still are) defined and guaranteed, on the assumption of ensuring in this way a substantial homogeneity of the results.

The external controls on the results were reduced to a minimum, and their function was validating the educational path completed, more than actually verifying it.

In the last twenty years it has grown the awareness that to ensure the quality of the system is not sufficient (and not even useful) to define and control the "starting" standards (inputs), but it is quite useful and necessary to define "arrival" standards. It is therefore necessary, through autonomy, to make the local educational structures able to respond to diverse needs and to focus their attention on the results (outputs); this is achieved by carrying out periodic surveys on pupils' learning outcomes at national and international level and through other measures (for example, through the analysis of indicators of efficacy and efficiency). This approach governmental of the education system has internationally developed also thanks to the OECD work, which since the 90s has started the data collection and comparison of the different

national education systems through an integrated system of indicator[1]. The OECD through the PISA Project has begun 10 years ago, in the countries belonging to the organisation, a systematic survey and analysis of 15-year-old students' learning outcomes, which is acquiring importance for the evaluation of national policies outcomes in the different countries[2].

5.2 INPUT-OUTPUT MODELS

According to traditional input-output assessment models, the quality of an education system and its schools is determined by verifying the extent to which (*output*) it is possible to transform the raw material (*input*) following the set goals. The following elaborations and reflections on this model have led to the concept of input, by distinguishing the starting condition (the Context) from the resources supplied[3]. In any case, attention is focused on the Products (as determined in the initial objectives), representing the key litmus of the quality of education.

The evaluative research has highlighted the connection between the Educational Product and the Context, and the attention that should be paid, during results assessment, on the resources employed (human, economic and structural). Therefore, the evaluation of training outcomes shall always take into account the starting points and the resources used: for example, it would be incorrect to equate the results of a school located in a wealthy area with those of a school located in a blighted area. Also the concept of objective can change, adding complexity to the assessment model: intermediate objectives can be identified close to the final objectives.

However the classical input-output models have a significant weakness: the lack of mechanisms for feedback. They allow to describe the current situation, but without elements to direct the system towards improvement; it is more a quality control than a quality development. The purpose of the evaluation, however, is not only to obtain a certificate but it is necessary also to correct the system; the main purpose of the assessment is to help decision-making. It is therefore also necessary a verification of the processes, in order to understand not only the training outcomes, but also how the results have been obtained and on the basis of what processes.

The reflection and the formalisation of processes is the most problematic aspect of the input-output models. It is relatively easy to evaluate, using quantitative indicators allowing comparisons in space and time, the Context, the Inputs and the Products, but it is much more complex to define the indicators to assess the processes.

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[1] OECD, *Education at a Glance*, OECD indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris.
[2] OECD (2007), *PISA 2006 Science competences for tomorrow's world* Volume 1: Analysis, OECD Publishing.
[3] STUFFLEBEAM D. et. al, (1971), *Educational Evaluation and Decision Making,* Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock.

The assessment of the training effects through the detection of outputs is further limited: it risks to be little relevant in the short term, as the impact of training is visible in medium-long term.

In any case, the completeness and the systematic nature of the so-called CIPP model, namely Context, Input, Process, Product make it the most widely used to analyse the quality of education, both at single structure that at system level.

5.3 THE PROCESS-BASED MODELS

Therefore, the main problem is the connection between assessment and decision making. In the business world this issue has been faced since the '50s by Deming.

According to Deming the principle of quality control at the end of the process is not suitable, since it acknowledges that it should exist in any case a certain amount of "waste" or "errors", and therefore a loss, even if small, of company's efficiency[4]. The quality control should shift the attention from the product to the processes, that is from what is downstream of production to how to handle upstream processes[5]; in addition the principle of quality control should be replaced by the principle of total quality (because the quality concerns all stages of production, and not only the final one).

Deming has introduced the quality circle: Plan, Do, Check, Act, namely:
- to plan, on the basis of diagnosis made;
- to do;
- to check the results;
- to act by correcting the errors detected, in order to improve the results.

So the cycle never stops, and produces continuous improvement, another central concept of this approach.

Deming's work had a remarkable success since it has been one of the factors of rebirth of Japanese industry in the 60s and 70s (Deming was greatly appreciated for his work in Japan).

In the following years the principles of total quality spread in Western countries; during the '90s these principles began to be applied also in the world of production of intangible goods, the world of education, school and university.

Several models inspired by these principles have been created: it is enough to recall ISO, EFQM, CAF models.

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[4] ISFOL, ALLULLI G. and TRAMONTANO I. (2007), *I modelli di qualità nel sistema di formazione professionale italiano*, Rubettino.

[5] According to ISO standards an activity or set of activities using resources, and managed in order to enable the transformation of inputs into outputs, can be considered as a process (UNI, Quality management systems, Fundamentals and vocabulary, December 2000).

In order to adapt the models inspired by the principle of total quality to the training field specific regulations have been established[6], defining the quality system as "an organizational/managerial tool centered on monitoring/control of processes which have a direct impact on the quality product, the clear division of responsibilities and the provision of adequate resources in order to prevent problems and to ensure the compliance with the requirements of the customer and his satisfaction. It is also an instrument of continuous improvement, necessary for a competitive presence on the market".

This approach has three distinctive features:

- it is focused on processes rather than on products; the underlying logic is that if the process is appropriately conducted also the product produced will comply with the requirements imposed, while the verification which is conducted only at the end of the process may not tell us anything regarding to the reasons for success or failure; in addition it is better to prevent failure by controlling the execution process, rather than simply record a failure in the end.

- The second feature is that of involving management in the quality assurance process: the management is not only the user of this process but is also subject to the verification; the ability to take into account the results of the assessment by modifying the activity is not only a desired effect, but is also a process analysed by the quality system; the revision of the activity is a stage of the quality cycle.

- The third characteristic concerns the concept of quality, which is not a relative concept to be defined from time to time with respect to the objectives, but an absolute concept corresponding to the way in which given criteria, previously defined by the model, are met. For example, the EFQM Excellence Model developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management, and the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) define for each predefined quality criterion a score to be attributed to the assessed institution.

These features are the strengths and weaknesses[7].

Regarding the first of these characteristics, the focus on processes, while in the business sector it is reasonable to assume that a good compliance with the procedures can produce good results, in training it is not the same: the training outcomes are the result of many complex factors, even if a school strictly respects the rules and the organisational standards, the students' results will not be necessarily positive. The evaluation of the results should therefore maintain a specific and autonomous role: it is not enough to ensure that the "quality procedures" are implemented, but it is essential to monitor the results of these procedures; the quality of training is not deduced only through the verification of the procedures but also through the verification of actual results.

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[6] UNI, *Guidelines for the development and adoption of a quality system in training according to UNI EN 9001*, Milan 1998.

[7] ALLULLI G. (2007), La valutazione della scuola: un problema di governance, in *Economia dei servizi*, Il Mulino, n.3/2007.

The control of the result is often limited to the verification of customers satisfaction; but in education this is not a sufficient parameter to evaluate the students' outcomes. In fact young users, and often their families, are unable to express a critical judgment about the contents of the training: an inexperienced user can evaluate the most tangible aspects of the service (regularity, attention to the needs of users, etc.), but it is more difficult for them to express an adequately informed opinion about the content of the teaching activity. It should also be considered that users do not necessarily express high expectations for the educational offer: for example, those who want to get a degree without excessively committing themselves in the study can get a diploma in a school where the level of training offer is not fundamental, it just allows to get a certification.

Regarding the involvement of the management as "object" of assessment, it becomes a problematic aspect in the moment in which those who verify the respect of quality procedures is in a hierarchically subordinated position to the evaluated manager. This happens when quality models are a reference for the self-assessment; in this case the independence of evaluation activity may be seriously questioned, while the authority of the self-assessment is supported by objective evidence if it is focused on the results achieved and on solid empirical evidences.

In short, it is not sufficient to verify the compliance with the "quality procedures", but it is important to actually verify the results obtained in order to state whether a particular institution arranges a quality training offer or not.

The models of "total quality" which have been adapted for the services and the public administration (such as EFQM and CAF) consider the assessment of the results really important (50% of the final score); it remains, however, the contradiction between the philosophy of quality assurance based on the evaluation of processes and and an approach aimed at evaluating the results.

Finally, the attention given to the processes can easily end into the attention to the respect of procedures; this is a serious risk, especially in environments such as the school.

5.4 THE RECOMMENDATION ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The need to closely link the evaluation with the decision making process is also the basis of the model to which the European Recommendation on quality assurance in VET refers[8].

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[8] RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on *the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training* (2009/C 155/01).

As part of the initiatives taken in the light of the Lisbon strategy, the European Union has promoted in 2000 a technical and political path aimed at strengthening the devices quality assurance in education and vocational traisupport to be used on a voluntary basis by the Member States and all stakeholders to promote and monitor continuous improvement of Education and Vocational Training, according to common criteria and principles. The European Recommendation requires Member States toestablish a national strategy fitting with the European Framework of Reference.

EQAVET comprises a quality assurance and improvement cycle consisting of four phases (*Planning, Implementation, Evaluation/Assessment and Review/Revision*)

The first phase (*planning*) consists in the establishment of clear, appropriate and measurable goals and objectives in term of policies, procedures, tasks and human resources. In this phase the involvement of stakeholders is crucial.

The second phase (*implementation*) consists in the execution of the planned actions to ensure the achievement of the objectives. It is necessary that the rules and procedural steps are clear to all stakeholders.

The third phase (*evaluation*) provides a combination of mechanisms of internal and external evaluation. The effectiveness of the assessment depends on the definition of a clear methodology and by the coherence between the predetermined objectives and indicators and data collected.

In the fourth phase (*review*) the data collected through the assessment are used to provide the necessary feedback and the implementation of appropriate changes. In fact, the improvement is a continuous and systematic process.

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[9] EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2006a), *Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems,* Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament,{SEC(2006) 1096}.

The European Model of quality Assurance
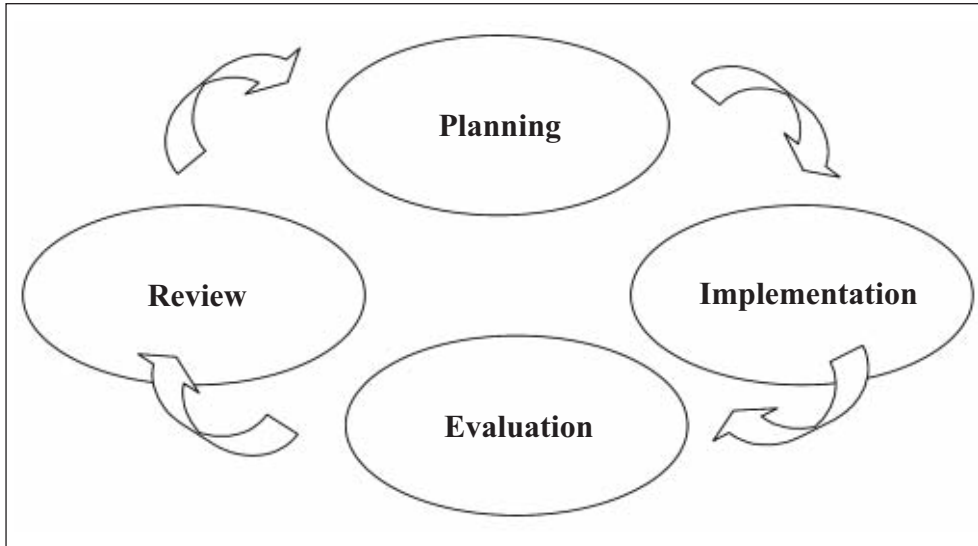
As can be observed, the European model is very similar to the "*Quality cycle*" proposed by Deming, but in this case more emphasis is given to the control of the results.

The four phases of the model are described by the Recommendation through a list of criteria and quality descriptors, exemplifying the actions to be performed for each phase. These are very useful information because give more substance to a model that might otherwise be perceived as mainly theoretical.

In addition, the Recommendation proposes a set of indicators relating to different aspects of the training. The use of indicators is not compulsory, but it is a useful reference point to compare some strategic aspects of the educational process, such as the levels of participation, the educational success, the employment rate, the use of acquired skills, the inclusion for disadvantaged people, etc.

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10 QUALITY INDICATORS (a)

N. 1 Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers:
a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative
b) share of accredited VET providers

N. 2 Investment in training of teachers and trainers:
a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training
b) amount of funds invested

N. 3 Participation rate in VET programmes:
Number of participants in VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

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N. 4 Completion rate in VET programmes:
Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

N. 5 Placement rate in VET programmes:
a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria
b) share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

N. 6 Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace:
a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria
b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences

N. 7 Unemployment rate according to individual criteria

N. 8 Prevalence of vulnerable groups:
a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender
b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender

N. 9 Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market:
a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels
b) evidence of their effectiveness

N. 10 Schemes used to promote better access to VET:
a) information on existing schemes at different levels
b) evidence of their effectiveness

(a) RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on *the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training* (2009/C 155/01)

The European Union has requested all Member States to define a plan for quality assurance, indicating what measures intend to adopt in order to introduce the European model at national level.

The EQAVET Recommendation is strictly connected to that one on European Qualifications Framework, already examined, and to that one on the recognition of credits which will be presented in the next chapter. The introduction and enhancement of a quality assurance system is a prerequisite for strengthening the context which is necessary to encourage Member States to recognise and give validity to titles and qualifications issued by other European states. It should be noted that the Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework contains some quality principles to be respected:

COMMON PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EQF (a)

When implementing the European Qualifications Framework, quality assurance - which is necessary to ensure accountability and the improvement of higher education and vocational education and training - should be carried out in accordance with the following principles:

- quality assurance policies and procedures should underpin all levels of the European Qualifications Framework,
- quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions,
- quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies,
- external monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review,
- quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes,
- quality assurance systems should include the following elements:
  – clear and measurable objectives and standards
  – guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement
  – appropriate resources
  – consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review
  – feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement
  – widely accessible evaluation results.
- quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis,
- quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community,
- quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.

(a) RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 April 2008 on establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008 / C 111/01)

Compared to the model proposed by the Recommendation on the quality, the principles of the European Qualifications Framework appear more concrete. However, there is a substantial coherence between the two documents: both emphasize some fundamental principles:

- the quality assurance should be an integral part of the management of the training activity;
- the quality assurance is based on the definition of clear and measurable objectives, on appropriate implementation mechanisms, on internal and external evaluation, and on feedback mechanisms to ensure the change and continuous improvement;
- the results of the learning process are a key component of the assessment.

6. The European Recommendations on ECVET and the validation of non-formal and informal learning

6.1 THE VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

The education systems are based on the offer of school and training courses held under the surveillance of a central authority. At the end of these paths, after the learning outcomes assessment, a degree or the corresponding qualification is issued. However, learning does not take place only in formal training, but also in training activities conducted outside the traditional educational context: in the workplace (non-formal training) or in the experience of everyday life (informal training).

Generally only the results of formal learning are recognised; it is difficult to recognize the skills acquired in non-traditional contexts (the skills acquired at work, or in educational experiences abroad). But for some years new procedures have been established in the United States and in some European countries (France, UK, Netherlands, etc.) in order to recognise prior learning regardless of how it was acquired (Assessment of Prior Learning - APL).

6.2 THE EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ECVET)

In order to facilitate the capitalization and transfer of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) of a person moving from a learning context to another and/or from a qualification system to another, and to support the recognition of learning outcomes regardless of where they were acquired, the Parliament and the European Council approved in 2009 a Recommendation on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)[1]. ECVET concerns the whole system of vocational education and training and allows to receive credits in relation to learning experiences, regardless of the fact that they were carried out within formal or non-formal paths. ECVET promotes flexibility of training systems: learning outcomes are assessed and validated in order to transfer credits from a qualification system to another, or from a training path to another. According to this system, the students can accumulate over time and obtain the recognition of lear-

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[1] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the *Establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training* (ECVET) (2009/C 155/02).

ning outcomes required to achieve a certain qualification, in different countries or in different situations without attending further vocational education and training.

ECVET can be applied in a regional or national context (in case of inter-regional or formal - non formal mobility) and in case of transnational mobility. In particular, it has been created a methodological framework in order to recognise the learning acquired during periods of mobility through the definition of a common language and by stimulating mutual trust.

In order to facilitate the credit transfer, the ECVET Recommendation provides a methodology for the description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes, which are associated with credit points. Basically, the qualifications or education/training programmes can be divided into units or parts of units. A unit is defined within ECVET as the smallest part of the qualification, and is based on the result. The unit is the subject of evaluation and can possibly be certified. Each unit corresponds to a specific combination of knowledge, skills and competences and can be of different dimension, in accordance with the national systems of education and training.

6.3 HOW DOES ECVET WORK?[2]

ECVET is based on the following concepts and tools:
- Learning outcomes
- Units of learning
- ECVET points, which provide additional information about units and qualifications in a numerical form
- ECVET credits

Just like the EQF, ECVET focuses the certification on the **learning outcomes** rather than on the training processes or the programmes attended. The learning outcomes are defined as sets of knowledge, skills and competences which can be acquired in a variety of learning contexts. They indicate what a person knows, or can do, at the end of the learning process.

ECVET: THE METHODOLOGY

ECVET breaks qualifications down into units of learning outcomes. **Units of learning**. A Unit is a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence. The Units should not be confused with the elements of the teaching programme. They can be defined on the basis of the work processes which the professional figure must support corresponding to the qualification. The same unit can be part of several qualifications.

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[2] EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2009), *Get to know ECVET better - Questions and Answers.*

In this way, the qualifications can be compared and validated even among different countries. Each Unit can be assessed, validated and recognized. A person can achieve a qualification by accumulating the required units which have been acquired in different countries.

In addition, each unit of learning can be "measured" assigning a score based on the consistency that covers compared to the overall qualification. As a reference base it is estimated that the learning after a year of education and training is equivalent to 60 **ECVET points**. The qualification is measured with respect to the expected time of teaching/formal learning. Then the single Units are measured.

ECVET Credit for learning outcomes designates individuals' learning outcomes which have been assessed and which can be accumulated towards a qualification or transferred to other learning programmes or qualifications. Based on this documentation, other institutions can recognise learners' credit.

The **Memorandum of Understanding** is an agreement between competent institutions which sets the framework for credit transfer. It formalises the ECVET partnership by stating the mutual acceptance of the status and procedures of competent institutions involved. The **Learning agreement** is an individualised document which sets out the conditions for a specific mobility period. It specifies, for a particular learner, which learning outcomes and units should be achieved together with the associated ECVET points.

6.4 THE VALIDATION OF NON FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The European framework for recognition of competences has been completed by a Recommendation of the European Council of 20 December 2012; in order to give people an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned outside formal education and training and to make use of such learning for career and further learning, the Recommendation has required Member States to establish, by 2018, arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to:

- have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated;
- obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, part qualification, on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences;
- include, as appropriate, the following elements in arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning:
  a. identification of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
  b. documentation of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
  c. assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
  d certification of the results of the assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form.

Therefore, the Recommendation, in addition to ask the Member States to establish a framework for recognition of competences, also suggests a methodological approach, which is based on the subsequent moments of identification, documentation, assessment and certification of the results. In addition, it lists some important principles to ensure the coherence and the proper functioning of the system, including:

- the need of a link to national qualifications frameworks (in line with the European Qualifications Framework);
- information and guidance on the benefits and opportunities for validation;
- the attention to disadvantaged groups, including individuals who are unemployed and those at risk of unemployment;
- quality assurance of the validation process;
- the development of the professional competences of staff involved.

7. The European Social Fund

7.1 A TOOL TO PROMOTE HARMONIOUS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEMBER STATES

The ESF is one of the five European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)[1]. The Structural Funds are financial instruments supporting social cohesion in Europe focusing on the less developed regions.

The ESF has been regulated by the Treaty of Rome in order to improve opportunities of employment in the Common Market and thus contributing to raising the standard of living through the promotion of employment facilities and the geographical and occupational mobility of workers. In particular the European Social Fund was intended to be a tool for supporting areas that are lagging behind or crisis situations, with particular reference to the southern Italian regions, which more than the others were likely to suffer the consequences of the enlargement of the Common Market.

As a result of the continuous worsening of the employment situation and in particular of youth employment, new rules related to the tasks of the ESF have been adopted, giving priority to the measures assisting young people and the areas with high unemployment rate. The changes introduced were an important development for the Fund, which took on the character of a policy tool particularly addressed to young people aged under 25, unemployed, whose chances of finding a job were particularly low due to lack of training or inadequate training, and to people over the age of 25 in a difficult situation (unemployed or underemployed, women, disabled people, immigrants, employed in small and medium-sized enterprises).

The European Social Fund finances activities in the following areas:
*   learning and lifelong learning for workers;
*   work organisation;
*   support to employees in restructuring contexts;
*   employment services;
*   integration of disadvantaged people into the labor market;
*   reforms in education and training systems;
*   networks of social partners and NGOs;
    training in administrations and public services.

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[1] European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), Cohesion Fund (CF), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

It is managed by seven-year programming cycles. The level of funding varies depending on the wealth of the region. EU regions are divided into three categories of regions based on their regional GDP per head compared to the EU average:

- the less developed regions, whose GDP per capita is less than 75% of the EU-27, which constitute the key priority. In the next programming period Campania, Calabria, Sicily and Puglia will be part of this group;
- transition regions, whose GDP per capita is between 75% and 90% of the average GDP of the EU-27; Abruzzo, Molise, Basilicata and Sardinia will be included in this group;
- more developed regions, whose GDP per capita is above 90% of the average GDP of the EU-27. This group will include the North Central regions.

The regions belonging to the first category, and (in part) to the second category receive most of European funding; furthermore the share of EU funding for the various projects can be much higher. The ESF strategy and budget is negotiated between the EU Member States, the European Parliament and the EU Commission. The strategy defines the objectives of ESF funding, which it shares partly or wholly with other structural funding. The ESF funding is responsibility of the Member States and EU regions. The detailed management of programmes supported by the European Social Fund is responsibility of the Member States at national and regional level. Once the strategy and budget allocation have been agreed, a shared approach to programming is taken.

Seven-year Operational Programmes are planned by Member States and their regions together with the European Commission. These Operational Programmes describe the fields of activity that will be funded, which can be geographical or thematic. The Member States designate national ESF management authorities that are responsible for selecting projects, disbursing funds, and evaluating the progress and results of projects. Certification and auditing authorities are also appointed to monitor and ensure compliance of expenditure to the ESF regulation.

The implementation of the ESF on the ground is achieved through projects which are applied for and implemented by a wide range of organisations, both in the public and private sector. These include national, regional and local authorities, educational and vocational training institutions, social partners and individual companies. The beneficiaries of ESF projects are varied, for example, individual workers, groups of people, industrial sectors, trades unions, public administrations or individual firms. Vulnerable groups of people who have particular difficulty in finding work or getting on in their jobs, such as the long-term unemployed and women, are a particular target group.

7.2 The Programming Period 2014-2020

The most important innovations for the new period concern the changes in the programming and management of the Structural Funds (ESF, EAFRD, ERDF, etc.,) through:
- the principle of complementarity of the funds and the establishment of a common strategic framework to define investment priorities and focus assistance on a limited number of common thematic objectives, linked to the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy;
- the conclusion of a partnership agreement between the Commission and each Member State, for the commitment of the contracting parties at national and regional level to use the allocated funds in order to implement the Europe 2020 strategy, as well as a performance framework assessing the progress towards the commitments;
- the close connection with the Stability or Convergence Programmes and the National Reform Programmes established by the Member States and with the country-specific recommendations adopted by the Council on the basis of such programmes.

Since 2014 the financial burden of the European Social Fund has increased: for 2014-2020 the total budget amounts to approximately €80 billion that is more than €10 billion per year. This amount will be complemented by a series of public and private co-financing at national level of approximately €50 billion, bringing the total amount available to around €120 billion. In particular, Italy has been allocated around €10.5 billion.

The Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 sets four thematic objectives:
- *Promoting employment and supporting labour mobility* (€4.086 billion of financial allocation for Italy); the European Social Fund will cooperate with the EU organisations to implement projects for educating citizens and helping them to find employment. **Helping young people to enter the labour market** will be a top priority of the European Social Fund in all Member States.
- *Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty* (€2.269 billion of financial allocation for Italy); disadvantaged people will receive greater support so that they can better integrate into society.
- *Investing in education, skills and lifelong learning* (€3.156 billion of financial allocation for Italy); the European Social Fund will finance initiatives to improve education and training and to ensure that young people complete their training path obtaining the skills to make them more competitive on the labour market. Among the priorities there are the reduction of the school dropout rate and the improvement of opportunities for vocational education and university.

- *Enhancing institutional capacity and efficient public administration* (€593.80 of financial allocation for Italy). The European Social Fund will support the efforts of Member States to improve the quality of governance and public administration and the structural reforms by giving them the necessary institutional and administrative capacity.

Funding should be more focused to achieve best results: by directing its actions on a limited number of priorities, the European Social Fund aims at ensuring the funding needed to make a real impact on the major challenges faced by the Member States.

The Programming Period 2014-2020 is implemented through operational programs. Each program covers the period between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2020 and is developed by the Member States.

Regarding Education and Training, the resources of the other structural funds are added to the funding allocated by the European Social Fund, in particular the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), which finances infrastructural and technological interventions also in the field of education.

7.3 THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR ITALY AND THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES

On the basis of the guidelines included in the *Partnership Agreement* the National Operational Programmes (NOP) and the financing of Regional Operational Programmes (ROP) have been defined.

The following table presents the main NOP being financed by the European Social Fund; to these funding those of the ERDF are added:

Programme Name	Resources Available (ESF)
Systems of active employment policies	1.180.744.376
School	1.154.692.048
Inclusion	827.150.000
Youth Employment Initiative	567.511.248
Governance and institutional capacity	328.669.463

In each Operational Programme it is defined a strategy to be implemented in accordance with the requirements of the Union's strategy, with the specific rules of each fund and the content of the Partnership, through modalities to ensure the effective, efficient and coordinated implementation of funds. Moreover, the priorities and the specific objectives are defined.

For example, the NOP School *"Per la scuola – competenze e ambienti per l'apprendimento"* (For the school - skills and learning environments), **is divided into four Axis:**
- AXIS I – Education (financed by the ESF)
- AXIS II – Infrastructures for education (financed by the ERDF)

- AXIS III – Institutional and administrative capacity (financed by the ESF)
- AXIS IV – Technical assistance (financed by the ESF)

Within Axis 1 (Education) the NOP School aims to support interventions to achieve the following objectives:
- Reduction of early school leaving
- Improvement of students' key competences
- Improvement of the ability to self-assess, to evaluate schools and innovation in teaching
- Raising the level of education among adults, with particular attention to less educated
- Qualification of Education and Vocational Training offer
- Spread of the knowledge society in the world of education and training and adoption of innovative educational approaches

The National Operational Programme **"Youth Employment"**, managed by the Ministry of Labour, intends to face the emergency of youth unemployment; beneficiaries of the interventions are the young NEET (not in employment, not in education, not in training), aged between 15 and 24 years old, with extension of the age up to 29 years old for some measures.

Below are some actions that will be implemented with the NOP:
- *Reception, taking in charge and guidance of young people in search of employment,* also within the Youth Guarantee Program.
- *Training* aimed at providing the knowledge and skills needed to facilitate the employment and reintegration of 15-18 year olds in training paths (VET).
- *Job placement,* through the exploration of the opportunities, tutoring, and matching with respect to the characteristics and propensities of the youth.
- *Apprenticeship:* for the professional qualification and degree; vocational or trade contract; for higher education and research (issuing of University and Master degrees, PhD, ITS Specialisation Certificate)
- *Extracurricular internship,* also in geographical mobility, aimed at facilitating professional choices and employability of young people in the transition between school and work
- *Civil service,* aimed at providing young people up to 28 years a range of knowledge on the areas of the national and regional civil service and transversal competences.
- *Support to self-employment and to self-entrepreneurship* for young people up to 29 years, through training and assistance for the drafting of business plan, support for access to finance, support services for the establishment of enterprise, support to start-up.
- *Transnational and territorial labour mobility*, within the national territory or in the EU countries.

- *Employment bonus:* promotion of the employment of young people by providing incentives to companies.

While the National Operational Programme "**Systems of active employment policies**", managed by the Ministry of Labour, will mainly implement system-oriented measures. In particular, the measures are focused on the following areas and actions:

a) *Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility:*
   - testing of active policies, direct interventions and actions of system and technical support;
   - improving the effectiveness and quality of employment services through inter-institutional cooperation for the implementation of the essential performance levels of employment services;
   - system action for the permanence / relocation of workers affected by crisis;
   - system actions generally referable to the observations and analysis on employability.

b) *Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning*:
   - systematization of the necessary interventions for lifelong learning supporting the agreements on educational, vocational and skills certification standards;
   - effectiveness of alternation school- training and job through assistance actions to the regions;
   - anticipation of training and vocational needs and upgrading of the skills.

c) *Institutional capacity*
   - implementation of measures for the construction of an integrated information system job-training, active and passive labour policies.
   - interventions for the strengthening of actors' skills in the system of active policies for employment, for the arrangement of monitoring and evaluation tools, for the promotion of the main devices on the same policies.

The NOP "Systems of active employment policies" is totally financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). The budget amounts to €2.177 billion, of which €1.181 is the support of the European Union and the remaining part is the national co-financing. The vast majority of resources (84%) will be aimed at strengthening the measures of the "Youth Guarantee" to improve employment services, to combat long-term unemployment and to enhance access to employment of women, unemployed and immigrants.

The following table shows the resources allocated to each region from the European Social Fund for the implementation of the ROP, the Regional Operational Programmes.

Region	Available resources
Abruzzo	71.251.575
Basilicata	144.812.084
Calabria	254.339.876
Campania	627.882.260
Emilia Romagna	393.125.091
Friuli Venezia Giulia	138.213.907
Lazio	451.267.357
Liguria	177.272.384
Lombardy	485.237.258
Marche	143.989.809
Molise	23.853.230
Bolzano	68.310.599
Trento	54.989.992
Piedmont	436.145.000
Puglia	772.409.449
Sardinia	221.253.335
Sicily	615.072.321
Tuscany	366.481.608
Umbria	118.764.401
Valle d'Aosta	27.786.275
Veneto	382.015.911
TOTAL	**5.974.473.722**

The themes of the regional strategy are developed within a programme structure including five Priority Axis, developed on the basis of the priorities set by the European Social Fund.
- Axis A - Employment
- Axis B - social inclusion and fight against poverty
- Axis C - Education and Training
- Axis D - Institutional and administrative capacity
- Axis E - Technical assistance

As stated above, the resources provided by other Community funds, in particular by the ERDF (European Regional Development) as regards structural measures and the EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) are added to those of the Social Fund.

8. The evolution of European educational systems in the context of the Lisbon challenges

The process of reflection and dialogue on international training needs and on the need to innovate educational systems has given a boost to the process of school reform in European countries. It is not possible to say that the time and the way these national reforms were made were dictated by Brussels, but it is undeniable that the growing international comparison within the European Union and the inputs originated from the analysis conducted by the OECD[1] have increased the awareness of the different countries to adjust their educational system and training in order to meet the challenges which are highlighted in the various offices.

Looking at the major educational and training reforms which have been implemented within recent years, one can observe two different approaches to educational policy.

The first approach, a more traditional one, is substantially centred on changing the regulation of the educational system, redirecting or redeveloping the resources allocated to the system (teachers, schools) or by introducing new processes, or correcting the existing ones.

The second approach, which has developed in Europe since the last decade of the last century, is focused on the control of results and is defined *outcome driven* (or *performance-based*) approach[2].

These two approaches differ from each other, but they are not mutually exclusive, since the strategies that motivate the latter approach do not deny the importance of process innovation, but are based on the principle that only a strong focus on the results achieved is able to encourage schools to improve processes.

8.1 THE POLICIES FOCUSED ON THE INNOVATION PROCESS

The principle underlying the policies focused on the innovation process is that to improve the school system, it is necessary to modify its structure, based on the needs resulting from an analysis of its functions and from the requests of the *stakeholders* (families, head teachers, teachers, and public opinion).

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[1] Consider the fact that OECD indicators on students' learning mechanism have a great impact on the public opinion.

[2] ALLULLI G. (2011), *Le politiche scolastiche e l'Output Driven Approach,* in Scuola Democratica, n.3, Guerini and associates, Rome.

The implemented policies, which could be traced back to this category, are various but in particular the following policies can be mentioned:
- The extension of compulsory education (and initial vocational training).
- The school curriculum reform.
- The assignment of new resources (especially for those areas at risk) or the reallocation of the existing ones.
- The teachers' recruitment, training and career reform.

In the following paragraphs it will be examined what has been done in Europe in recent years regarding this type of intervention.

8.1.1 *The extension of compulsory education*

The results of national and international surveys, such as the OECD-PISA survey, show that an early channelling of the students (under 14 years of age) can damage the equality of opportunity without improving the students' performance. Furthermore, the students' selection criteria are often conditioned by social factors and not by the performance.

Therefore, in order to ensure all students a basic education, adequate to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for a conscious continuation of schooling and training, or to enter the labour market and the society, most of the European countries have increased the duration of compulsory education until the age of 16; Hungary up to 18 years, with a full-time attendance. A growing number of countries are choosing a mixed model to extend compulsory school by integrating part-time attendance with different forms of work experience; among these there are Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy, which have extended the compulsory attendance up to the age of 18, but with a part-time modality (alternating school and work). The United Kingdom is considering this possibility.

Other countries have decided to lower the school starting age or have made preprimary school attendance compulsory.

However it has emerged that the compulsory attendance of general and longterm courses tend to demotivate the students less inclined to study, pushing them to abandon their studies. Therefore some countries, especially France, Spain and the United Kingdom, after extending compulsory education to full-time until the sixteenth year of age, had to introduce new training courses or a more flexible curriculum to offer the students more options to suit their interests and prevent early school leaving; they have also introduced new disciplines, more connected with the "real" world, in order to increase the students' motivation, especially of those less inclined.

Also Italy, by extending the period of compulsory education until the sixteenth year of age, has given students the opportunity to choose among different courses of study, including vocational education and training, in the last two years of compulsory education.

While in German-speaking countries, students are channelled at the age of 11 between two types of studies, either academic or vocational.

Terminal Education Age for Compulsory Education

NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	
1	18
1	17
18	16
12	15

As a result of these policies, a greater number of young people has graduated from secondary school: according to surveys conducted by the European Commission, the percentage of young people who graduated from high school has increased from 76.1% in 2000 to 78.5% in 2008, although the majority of European countries is still below Lisbon's target (85%). Finland, Sweden, Ireland, Cyprus and several Eastern European countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia) have already reached the European benchmark, while Malta, Spain and Portugal are below 70%. Italy, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta and Portugal have made the strongest progress since 2000.

During the same period there has been a slight improvement regarding the European average dropout rate, which has dropped from 17.6% to 14.9%.

8.1.2 *The curriculum reform*

The curriculum reform is another objective that many European governments want to achieve in order to improve the education system. First of all, based on the debate internationally developed with reference to the European Recommendation issued at the end of 2006 on this subject (see par. 3.1), many countries have acknowledged the importance for students to acquire some key competences useful for active citizenship, social cohesion and employability by the end of compulsory education and training, regardless of the type of course of study chosen. In particular, some European countries (France, Spain, Italy, UK, and Sweden) have reformed their compulsory education curricula taking into account the eight European key competences, introducing the acquisition of citizenship basic skills among the objectives to be achieved.

An important example that is often used as a reference for this European movement is the Common Base for Knowledge and Skills, which was introduced in the French education system in 2006.

THE COMMON BASE FOR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (FRANCE)

The implementation of the common base has been set in Article 9 of the Fillon law of the school reform on the 23 of April 2005 and it states that *"the compulsory education must guarantee every student the acquisition of a common base consisting in a set of knowledge and skills necessary to successfully complete their schooling, to continue their training in order to build their personal and professional future and become actively involved in social life".*

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The common base thus refers to compulsory education, with the ambition to be the necessary and essential foundation for lifelong learning.

Compulsory education cannot just be reduced to the common base, even if it is a foundation, since it does not replace primary and secondary school programmes. Its peculiarity lies in the willingness to give meaning to school culture, taking the point of view of the student and building bridges between disciplines and programmes. The common base defines what nobody can ignore by the end of compulsory schooling. The school shall provide all the tools so that each student's ability can be developed.

To master the common base, means being able to use what you have learned in complex tasks and situations, first at school, then in life; it also means having the abilities to continue to develop the own skills throughout life and to be able to become actively involved in society.

The common base is acquired gradually from kindergarten to the end of compulsory schooling. Each skill requires the contribution of several disciplines, and on the other hand, each discipline contributes to acquire more skills. All subjects taught in elementary school and in the *collège* (French middle school), including physical education, arts and music education, have a role in the acquisition of the base.

In Italy, in order to define the guidelines for extending compulsory education the Ministry of Public Education has set up a commission that drafted a document entitled *Guidelines on How to Extend Compulsory Education*[3].

The Commission has been working in the wake of the European Recommendation citizenship skills, characterized by cultural and cross-sectional components, the first ones have been highlighted as **cultural strategic axes** while the second ones as **cross-sectional competences**. The Commission has specifically established:

- four strategic cultural axis: *the languages axis; the mathematics axis; the science and technology axis; the social and historical axis*;
- Eight cross-sectional competences: *learning to learn, planning, communicating, to collaborate and participate, problem solving, acting independently and responsibly, to find connections and relations, acquiring and interpreting information*.

Based on the proposal of the Ministry of Public Education, the Commission has issued the regulations governing the extension of compulsory education[4].

CROSS-SECTIONAL COMPETENCES FOR COMPULSORY EDUCATION (a)
- **Learning to learn:** to organize own learning, identifying, choosing and using various sources and various means of information and training (formal, non-formal and informal), also depending on the available time, own strategies and method of study or work.

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[3] The Commission has the task to investigate the issue related to compulsory education and develop possible ways aimed to extend compulsory schooling *Guidelines on how to extend compulsory education* 3 March, 2007.

[4] Ministry of Public Education Decree of 22 August 2007, n. 139 "*Regulation regarding the fulfillment of compulsory education, according to Article 1, paragraph 622 of the Law of 27 December 2006, n. 296*" by the Official Gazette n. 202 of 31.08.2007.

- **Planning:** to develop and carry out projects concerning the development of own study and work activities, using the acquired knowledge to establish important and realistic targets and the related priorities, considering the constraints and opportunities, defining action strategies and verifying the results achieved.
- **Communicating:**
  – To understand different types of messages (journalistic, literary, technical, scientific) of different complexity, delivered by using different linguistic styles (oral, mathematical, scientific, symbolic, etc.) through various media (paper, computer and multimedia).
  – To represent events, phenomena, principles, concepts, rules, procedures, attitudes, moods, emotions, etc. using different linguistic styles (oral, mathematical, scientific, symbolic, etc.) and different disciplinary knowledge through various media (paper, computer and multimedia).
- **To collaborate and participate:** interacting in a group, understanding the different points of view, enhancing its own capacity and that of others, managing conflict, contributing to common learning and to the realization of joint activities, in recognition of others' fundamental rights.
- **Acting independently and responsibly:** Knowing how to actively and consciously integrate oneself in social life and to assert its own rights and needs while recognizing those of others, the common opportunities, limits, rules, responsibilities.
- **Problem solving:** facing problematic situations building and verifying hypotheses, identifying the sources and appropriate resources, collecting and evaluating data, suggesting solutions using subjects and methods from various disciplines, depending on the type of problem.
- **To find connections and relations:** to identify and represent, developing consistent arguments, connections and relationships between phenomena, events and different concepts, even from different disciplines, and distant in space and time, understanding the systemic nature, identifying similarities and differences, consistencies and inconsistencies, causes and effects and their probabilistic nature.
- **Acquiring and interpreting information:** to acquire and critically interpret information received in the various areas and through different communication tools, assessing the reliability and usefulness, distinguishing facts and opinions.

(a) ***Ministry of Public Education Decree of 22 August 2007, n. 139*** *"Regulation regarding the fulfillment of compulsory education, according to Article 1, paragraph 622 of the Law of 27 December 2006, n. 296"* by the Official Gazette n. 202 of 31.08.2007

8.1.3 *Assigning new resources (especially for areas at risk)*

Teachers tend to avoid, where possible, schools located in disadvantaged areas, therefore in these schools we usually find the less qualified teachers who often try to get transferred into other schools producing a continuous turnover. In many European countries, in order to enhance the quality of training, the training path has been improved especially in those areas socially and culturally disadvantaged. We can remember among other things, the *Excellence in Cities* programme**(5)** introduced in the UK in 1999, and the initiative of the *Areas of priority education*, which were introduced in the French educational system in 1982 (see the table below). These measures also provide better salaries for teachers for encouraging them to stay in

schools located in disadvantaged areas. However, it has been observed that the impact of the financial incentives over the teachers' choices is very limited[5]; to be effective the financial incentive should be quite significant[6].

ZONES D'ÉDUCATION PRIORITAIRES (AREAS OF PRIORITY EDUCATION)

The policy of the *Areas of Priority Education* (*Zones d'éducation prioritaires* – ZEPs) was introduced in France in 1982 to overcome the academic failure of disadvantaged students. Originally, the program was supposed to be temporary, but it has been confirmed and extended to many schools until it reached 15% of the students distributed among 800 priority areas, mostly located in urban areas.

To encourage schools to develop projects and partnerships at the local level, the programme has provided additional resources through:
• the reduction of the class size
• the allocation of economic and legal incentives to educators
• the allocation of additional resources to schools
• the increase of the number of teaching hours.

The programme has faced problems such as:
• the difficulty of families to cope with the educational needs of the students, given their low socio-cultural level
• the need to overcome inequality prematurely
• the concentration of disadvantaged students within the same class
• the lowering of teachers' expectations
• the teachers turnover and the difficulties for the ones recently hired. About two-thirds of the new teachers hired have begun their career as substitute in schools classified as "difficult" or in a priority area.

The results of the programme were considered low, since both the social composition of the students enrolled in ZEP schools (the stigma of ZEP dismissed students who could enroll elsewhere) and the quality of the teachers have worsened, mainly because of the difficulties in teaching in these priority areas that have resulted in the most experienced teachers to "runaway". Eventually, there were no significant improvements in the results of the students attending schools in these areas.

The results have revealed the need to concentrate more resources on a smaller number of schools in greater difficulty. Therefore, the French government has introduced the tools to select the best schools to include in the programme. The new programme, launched in 2006 ("Ambition reussite"), was more selective, based on the use of more trained and experienced teachers. Also it provides wage incentives to encourage experienced teachers to apply to teach in these areas, and instituting special teaching groups to provide teachers with no experience, strategies to improve the academic performance of the students.

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[5] BENABOU R., KRAMARZ F., PROST C. (2005) *The French zones d'education prioritaires: much ado about nothing?* Discussion paper serie No. 5085 , Centre for Economic Policy Research.

[6] HANUSHEK E.A., KAIN J.F. and RIVKIN S.G. (1999), *Do Higher Salaries Buy Better Teachers?*, Working Paper No 7082, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

8.1.4 *The teachers' career reform*

According to the OECD[7] you can define two basic models chatacterising the profession of teachers: the model "based on career" and the model "based on location".

In the model based on career, the management of teaching staff is generally centrally organised. Access to the profession is based on academic qualifications and/or on passing an entrance examination and the teachers are usually assigned to different schools according to fixed rules. The career progression follows predetermined criteria (often considering seniority rather than the results of the activity). France, Italy and Spain are examples of countries in which we can trace many elements of this system.

In models based on location, management and recruitment of the teaching staff are held by the local authority or by the individual school. It is up to schools or local authorities to select the most suitable candidate for each position, by external recruitment or internal promotion. This model enables a more flexible access to the teaching profession; for example, it is relatively common for older candidates or applicants with other careers to access education, as it is common to go from teaching to other careers. The career development of teachers depends on the success in the competition for the job vacancies, and the number of places available for higher level is usually limited. Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom all have a system which is similar to this model.

In school systems with a model based on career, the political concerns are the lack of incentive for teachers to continue their training, once they have been hired, and the strong emphasis placed on the regulations that limit the ability of schools to respond to local needs. Therefore, the priority in countries with systems following this model, is the introduction of policies defining more flexible working relations, allowing local education authorities and school principals a broader leeway and management by objectives.

In those countries where schools systems have a model based on the location, it has been often registered a high staff turnover, especially in disadvantaged areas. Since this model allows the adoption of more flexible rules for the recruitment of staff, there are often disparities between schools in terms of qualification and experience of the teachers.

The political priorities in these countries concern the designation of uniform criteria at a system level for the selection of teachers and the evaluation of their performance. The recruitment and training of head of school are also extremely important. The schools located in disadvantaged areas should be provided with more resources to enable them to compete in the recruitment of high quality teachers; There is also the need to increase the distinctionin wages and working conditions in order to attract the teachers less willing to move into these areas.

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[7] OECD (2005), *Teachers matter: attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers,* Education and Training Policy, Paris.

Many countries have tried to raise the status and quality of teachers, both through better selection and training, and through an improvement in their status and career.

As for the recruitment and training of teachers, the reforms that have been carried out in recent years have tried to introduce a more accurate selection and have enabled apprenticeship during the initial training, they have also introduced incentives to encourage the participation to in-service training, and finally promoted study periods abroad for foreign language teachers.

Regarding the career, it has been attempted to introduce a greater flexibility in professional positions, to decentralize staff decisions by giving more power to principals and local authorities, to increase the salary of teachers in areas at risk, to develop new systems to evaluate teachers (self-evaluation, external evaluation, tests and measures of added value), and finally to introduce incentives and distinction in salary.

In particular, many efforts have been made to develop new systems for evaluating the performance of teachers and provide them with incentives. For the evaluation of teachers different methodologies have been used[8]:

- External inspections, carried out on behalf of the national authorities (like in France, in collaboration with the headmaster) or regional (like in Germany or Austria, but only for career progression). The classroom observation, interviews, and the material prepared by the teacher are the typical methods used for this type of evaluation.
- Self-evaluation at a school level. This methodology was developed from 90' onwards; It can be used in its own right, or it can be used as a basis for external evaluation. In the UK, Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary, self-evaluation includes the analysis of teachers' performance.
- Internal evaluations, conducted by the head of school (usually the principal). This method has been in place in Belgium, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Austria, Romania, Slovenia, the Netherlands, France (in cooperation with the supervisors) and the United Kingdom.
- Results of the students, considering the added value gained by the pupils of the teacher.

In Ireland, Norway and Sweden, the emphasis is on the evaluation of the school unit, rather than on the assessment of individual teachers. Only in five countries (Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy and Spain) teachers are not regularly evaluated once in service.

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[8] EURYDICE (2008), *Levels of Autonomy and Responsibilities of Teachers in Europe*, Eurydice network, Bruxelles; OECD (2005) *Teachers matter: attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers* Education and Training Policy, Paris.

THE MERIT PAY

According to the OECD, 11 countries, out of 29 examined, link teachers' salary to their performance. This type of policy is called Merit-pay, or compensation linked to merit. In the US, eight states and many school districts link teachers' salaries to the pupils results, generally measured through tests.

The opinions on this policy are controversial.

In favour of this policy, it has been observed, that introducing awards for teachers and giving incentives increases the commitment and performance; the incentive and the highest salary also make the teaching profession more attractive and able to attract the best candidates.

The opponents, however, argue that the Merit-Pay programme produces a heavy bureaucratic burden, because it requires the construction of complex databases. In addition, competition among teachers, which is solicited, impairs cooperation within the school, which instead is a fundamental dimension of effective teaching. It is also pointed out that the success of the students, especially the disadvantaged, is difficult to measure and that teachers could be encouraged to alter the results of the students to improve their position.

8.2 THE POLICIES CENTERED ON THE CONTROL OF RESULTS

Faced with the growing dissatisfaction with the actual impact of the reforms on the improvement of educational process and the performance of students, a political school of thought has gradually developed, overthrowing the reformer approach; instead of intervening on the processes, waiting for their innovation to produce improvements in students' performance, it is considered more effective to put the results directly in the center of the reform policy in the belief that greater attention to the performance of students will push schools and teachers to change the teaching approach, in order to make them more effective. This will lead schools (which are granted a wider organizational autonomy),to think thoroughly about their teaching methods, the real improvement of the teachers' performance and therefore of the students' results.

School policies centered on the control of the results are largely based on:

- the definition of clear and measurable goals and targets: goals to be achieved are defined, also indicating the precise levels and quantities involved, using indicators;
- the definition of learning outcomes: studies and training are defined in terms of results to be achieved, rather than in terms of programs, schedules and disciplines to be studied;
- granting more autonomy to schools: staff and heads of school are granted a broadest powers in the field of resource management, recruitment, teaching and school activity organisation;
- evaluating students' results through the use of objective tests: instead of traditional examinations, which do not allow a real appreciation of the results achieved, standardized tests are introduced, allowing the verification of students' achievement level and a comparison between schools;

- the responsibility of the school for the results achieved: the results are communicated outside the school, and the school must be accountable to the authorities and the students' families;
- the introduction of an evaluation system for teachers: a system monitoring the activity of the teacher, his professional commitment, the results achieved by the students, either through external inspections or through the analysis of students' performance in objective tests;
- the granting of awards to schools and teachers based on their results; instead of the traditional career's mechanisms, based on seniority, it has been introduced a mechanism linked to actual merit;
- granting families the possibility to choose: the families are offered information tools on the actual quality of the schools, in order to make an informed choice, and regulatory tools to allow a choice not constrained by the place of residence.

The main objective is to introduce a competitive system based on the free choice of citizens-consumers, although remaining within the public service supply.

This approach is getting increasingly popular in many European countries (including Italy); in the United States and in England it has been at the center of the reform strategy (see file on the English Reformation); in many other European countries it has been introduced a system of evaluation of schools or of the school system (see file). The increased attention to the assessment of learning outcomes has been also supported by the debate which has developed in Europe.

The development of the evaluation activity is strongly linked to the growth of the autonomy of schools. During the last 20 years in most European countries a process of decentralization has gradually developed; it has been attributed to a growing responsibility of schools regarding the organisation of training courses.

Supporters of this approach reveal that the improvement of educational systems derives from a better management of each individual school, since teachers and heads of school have reference tools to compare their results and assess their weaknesses and strengths. Moreover, schools have to compete to be chosen by the students' families and therefore should strive to improve; also, the introduction of a reward system for schools or for teachers boosts competition. Meanwhile the families are more informed about the performance of the individual schools and can choose the best ones; and this strengthens the virtuous circle between evaluation and improvement.

Lastly, this approach allows for better management of the educational system at a central level, since policy-makers and education authorities are better informed about the results actually achieved at national and local level and may take the consequent decisions, both at a system level and at a school level (rewarding the best schools, or supporting, or closing, the disadvantaged ones).

THE EVALUATION OF EUROPEAN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

The evaluation of the school is a widespread approach and it is used in the field of European quality assurance. In 26 countries, both the external and internal evaluations of the school are carried out. Self-evaluation was introduced in many countries (such as the UK, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Czech Republic and Austria) as a practice of quality and quality improvement; self-evaluation often is the starting point for an external evaluation. The criteria and indicators for self-evaluation can be established at a national level. Over the past decade the expectations on internal evaluation of schools in Europe have grown. Since the early 2000s, the state of internal evaluation of schools went from recommended or possible to compulsory for a dozen educational systems. Currently the regulations at a central level, state that the internal evaluation is compulsory in 27 educational systems. Where internal evaluation is not compulsory, it is usually recommended. The only countries in which schools are not obliged or encouraged to carry out an internal evaluation are Bulgaria and France, the latter only for primary schools.

In most countries, the external evaluation is up to the Inspectorate, who manages the evaluation activities under the responsibility of the central or regional authorities. Inspectors often use standard criteria for school evaluation. Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Austria, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Portugal, Estonia and Poland are part of this category. In most cases, the external evaluation of the school focuses on a wide range of school activities, including educational and management activities, students' achievements, as well as regulation compliance. The evaluators base their work on an established framework that sets not only the focal points of the external evaluation, but also the rules defining a 'good' school.

A dozen educational systems do not follow this model. Some approaches to the external evaluation of schools focus on specific aspects of the school work, such as regulation compliance (Estonia, Slovenia and Turkey). In Sweden, the Inspectorate has autonomy regarding the evaluation criteria to be considered and defines them based on the *Education Act*, on school regulations and on the curricula for compulsory education.

In the second group of countries, local communities and the local government have a strong responsibility concerning the evaluation of schools; sometimes the evaluation conducted at a local level is integrated with the use of standardized tests at a national level. The Nordic countries, Belgium and Hungary are part of this group. However, even in these countries, the external evaluation of schools is becoming increasingly important: Denmark and Sweden, where the evaluation system was mostly focused on the local authorities, have strengthened the role of central authorities in the external evaluation of schools.

In Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom and Iceland, the results of the external evaluation of schools are published when they are evaluated by external evaluators (in most cases inspectors), who prepare their reports for the central authorities. In Sweden and Iceland, the results of the evaluations conducted at the local level are regularly published. In Hungary and Poland, the decision is made, respectively, at the local and regional level; sometimes the evaluation results are published.

Finally, in a few other European countries there is no real system for the external evaluation of schools, because the autonomy of schools is more limited. In these countries, the Inspectorate carries out a more formal role, or assesses the performance of individual teachers, as it is in France. Schools can lead initiatives of self-evaluation, but without having any standard criteria available as a reference to this activity. However, even in these countries initiatives have been promoted for the introduction of an external evaluation, through the use of standardised tests or other instruments. France and Bulgaria are part of this group. Italy has recently launched its own system as we will see later[9].

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[9] EURYDICE (2004), *Evaluation of Schools providing Compulsory Education in Europe*, Brussels and EURYDICE (2007) *School Autonomy in Europe Policies and Measures* Eurydice network, Brussels; EUROPEAN COMMISSION / EACEA / EURYDICE (2015), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

The critics of this approach emphasise that the methodology for evaluating the school and students' performance is flawed under many aspects. In particular, it is criticised the emphasis given to the administration and analysis of objective learning tests, which are the key element to the entire reform. These tests focus the attention of teachers and schools to few disciplines (usually linguistic and mathematical competences are evaluated through these tests), emphasising beyond measure their importance in comparison to other subjects, which end up being neglected. The teaching of these two subjects are likely to be overly focused only with the purpose of passing the test (teaching to the test is the term commonly used in English-speaking countries to indicate that teaching is aimed for students to pass the test) .

Another problem encountered in the analysis and the use of objective tests results is the great influence of the socio-cultural family background. In fact the results of the tests have generally a high degree of correlation with the environment, so the results of the students (and therefore of the teacher or the school that prepared them) should always be interpreted in the light of the characteristics of the family environment. In the United States we speak of "Volvo effect" in the sense that to predict the results of the students' tests it would be enough to count the number of luxury cars at the entrance of the various schools. Obviously this does not mean that the tests are not reliable, but rather the result of school activity is strongly influenced by the characteristics ascribed to students. Therefore those students attending schools located in socially advantaged areas tend to perform better than those who attend schools in socially disadvantaged areas, but this is not due to the teachers but to the students' social background, which strongly influences the performance.

That is why, in order to assess the results of the teacher's work the "added value" should be measured, in other words what the student has actually learned through school activities; this is done using comparable tests at the beginning and at the end of schooling, and analysing the difference between the two results. English speaking countries have shown great interest towards this process, but it is not easy to implement, especially on a large scale, because it assumes the existence of very large archives and especially the stability of the students and the teachers, both of which are not features of our system. Another risk, related to the measurement of the added value and any other assessments of the school and teachers' performance carried out measuring the students' productivity, is the possibility for schools to choose only well-prepared students, or the excessive selection during the course of study, to get the best final results. Schools, in order to achieve better results could exclude the students considered "difficult".

In France in order to overcome this phenomenon calculations have been introduced to evaluate the performance of students in different schools and regions. The average advantage or disadvantage that is encountered at the national level by the student of a particular socio-economic background is subtracted to the result of the various schools. In this way the "social background" factor is cancelled. The effect of early school leaving is also considered.

Furthermore, the comparison between the results obtained in different tests, from year to year, is not without difficulty and possibility of error.

Critics of this system argue that this approach is controversial not only from the methodological aspects, but also from the viewpoint of improving the system. Families choosing among schools want to choose the best school and not those who obtain the highest added value results. The schools located in disadvantaged areas may be abandoned in favour of those located in richer areas, even if their performance improves from year to year.

THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT (UNITED KINGDOM 1988)

In 1988 the British government launched the Education Reform Act, which introduced a national basic curriculum that all schools were required to apply.

It was also introduced a new evaluation system; this system includes inspections managed by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED, an independent body of the Ministry of Education) and standardised tests to assess the level of learning achieved by students in English, mathematics and science for each of the key age (7, 11, 14 and 16 years old).

The assessment results are used to evaluate the performance of schools operating within the public system, which are financially autonomous. Every year they set the lists of schools (*league tables*) based on the testing results; the rankings are published in local and national media to encourage accountability of the school towards:

- central and local authority and the governing body of the school (which includes family representatives, teachers and the local community),
- citizenship in general,
- families, to encourage their school choices.

The accountability of the school is ensured through systematic inspections regularly organized by groups of inspectors appointed by the OFSTED. The teams carry out very thorough inspections to schools, based on analytical models previously prepared and similar for all inspections. During these inspections, extensive data and materials on the operation of the school are collected, numerous interviews to teachers and students are conducted, meetings with the students' families are held, the teaching process is observed. At the end of this collection of information they prepare a rather analytical assessment report (with a variable length, from 60 to 100 pages), containing both indicators compared with national averages, and subjective analysis of the school functions, which are then summarised in a final judgement. These reports are sent to the OFSTED and to the Department for Education for the necessary decisions (schools showing major problems are in fact placed under observation), made public through the mainstream media, and widespread on the Internet.

A negative result of the inspection requires schools to prepare an improvement plan to overcome the weaknesses identified. In the absence of an improvement within the specified time, the school could be closed or completely renovated, according to the possibility of redistributing the students in other institutions after the dismissal of the staff.

Since 2002 the measures for the added value have been introduced. They measure student achievement compared with other students who previously had had similar results. This is a most accurate method of measurement since the input levels of the students are very different. Also contextual elements are taken into account, such as:

- The gender
- The first language
- Membership to different ethnic groups

• Special educational needs
• Economic status.
Despite the efforts to improve the testing quality, the criticism about their side effects are still strong. A report of the *Children, Schools and Families Committee*[10] concluded that "the use of national test results for the purpose of school accountability has resulted in some schools emphasising the maximisation of test results at the expense of a more rounded education for their pupils; 'teaching to the test' and narrowing of the taught curriculum are widespread phenomena in schools, resulting in a disproportionate focus on the 'core' subjects of English, mathematics and science and, in particular, on those aspects of these subjects which are likely to be tested in an examination"[11].

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[10] A Committee of the Parliament of the United Kingdom who monitors the expenditure, administration and policy of the Ministry of Education.
[11] HOUSE OF COMMONS (2008), Testing and Assessment Children, Schools and Families Committee, *Third Report of Session 2007–08.*

9. The Impact of the Lisbon Strategy on the EU Member States and the Italian Vocational Education and Training System

9.1 THE RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHT TO LIFELONG LEARNING

As we have said many times in these pages, the central objective of the Lisbon strategy is to foster the transition from an education and training focused on the early years of life to a continuous access to training opportunities in all its types, formal, informal and non-formal, which is developed throughout life. Even in Italy, after a long debate, the importance of this strategy has been sanctioned through the promulgation of the Law of the 28 June 2012, n. 92 (called Fornero Law), introducing in Italy the system of lifelong learning.

LIFELONG LEARNING ACCORDING TO THE FORNERO LAW

51. In line with the European Union, the lifelong learning refers to any activity, formal, non-formal and informal undertaken by people in the various stages of life in order to improve their knowledge, skills and competences, within a personal, civic, social and employment perspective.

Its policies are determined at a national level in agreement with the Joint Conference, proposed by the Minister for Education, University and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, after consulting the Minister of Economic Development and the social partners, starting from the identification and recognition of the professional and cultural heritage collected by citizens and workers in their personal and professional history and to document it with the full implementation of a single information backbone through the interoperability of the central and territorial databases.

52. Formal learning refers to what takes place in the vocational and education training and in universities and other institutions of higher artistic education (in art, music and dance), culminating in the achievement of a degree or a qualification or a vocational degree, also achieved through an apprenticeship under the single text of the legislative decree 14 September 2011, no. 167, or by a recognized certification.

53. Non-formal learning is characterized by a deliberate choice of the person, and it is achieved outside of those systems specified in paragraph 52, in each body pursuing education and training purposes, also as a volunteer, in the national civil service and private and social enterprises.

54. Informal learning means that, even apart from a deliberate choice, learning takes place in the performance of everyday life activities and in the situations and interactions that take place in it, within working, family and leisure contexts.

55. By the same agreement referred to in paragraph 51 of this Article, in line with the principle of subsidiarity and respecting the overall Regions programming, after consulting the social partners, addresses for the recognition of general criteria are defind and also priorities to promote and support the creation of local networks that include all education, training and work

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> *services organically linked to strategies for economic growth, access to employment for young people, the welfare reform, active ageing, the exercise of active citizenship, also by immigrants.*
> *In such contexts, are considered priorities all actions concerning:*
> *a) support to the people for the construction of their own formal, non-formal and informal paths as referred to in paragraphs 51 to 54, including the working path, highlighting and identifying peoples' competence needs in relation with the territories and productive systems' needs and with particular attention to language and digital skills;*
> *b) the recognition of credits and the certification of learning acquired through other means;*
> *c) the use of lifelong guidance services.*

As stated by the Joint Conference of State-Regions-Local authorities[1], the more significant scope introduced by recent legislation is the configuration of a person's right to learn (to be able to access and take advantage of real and significant educational and training opportunities throughout its life, and for the knowledge and skills acquired in a non-formal and informal way to be recognised).

The Agreement signed at the Joint Conference also points out five priorities:
* increasing the number of companies in support of lifelong learning;
* reinforcing activities of lifelong guidance;
* skills development of specific vulnerable or disadvantaged targets;
* access expansion through specific tools for transparency and development and integration of lifelong learning services;
* improving the relevance of education and labour market training

To achieve these objectives it is necessary to set up a range of services across the country:
* territorial networking services as the backbone of the lifelong learning system;
* activities of lifelong guidance;
* a system for the identification and validation of learning and for skills certification;
* an information system to monitor, assess, track and storage the released documents.

Therefore the lifelong learning system refers and includes the areas of formal, non-formal and informal learning. It is designed to support a person throughout its life, even in a perspective of employment and active citizenship.

The role of "non-formal" learning in local networks, is one of the novelty factors with higher quality. In fact, the non-formal training course enriches the cultural and social contexts of territories, playing a specific role that cannot be replaced, which integrates the role of the formal, public and private learning. In this context, non-profit organizations, can get in touch with citizens often at risk of social exclusion, thanks to non-frontal and interactive methodologies, to training flexibility, to interpersonal relationships and to the integration between social services and cultural offerings.

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[1] Joint Conference: Agreement between the Government, Regional and Local Authority on the Document Entitled: "Strategic Lines of Action with Regard to Lifelong Learning Services and the Organization of Local Networks." July 10, 2014.

9.2 THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATIONS ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS

The Copenhagen process and the 3 European Recommendations have generated a diversified impact on Vocational Education and Training systems, some countries were more ready to implement the Community's requests, also because the debate developed at a European level and the following recommendations were influenced by the culture and structures of these countries, which found themselves naturally aligned with the guidelines issued.

In fact the technical and vocational training displays different characteristics from country to country[2], in contrast to pre-academic institutions, like high school that may be called with different names in every country (*Gymnasium* in Germany, *Sixth Form* in Great Britain, *Lycee Cor B* in France, etc.) but shows a somewhat similar configuration. The reason for this difference probably lies in the fact that classical education or other traditional high schools refer to formalized knowledge, within the primarily communal cultural tradition that has been established in Europe, while vocational training has been strongly conditioned by the economic systems and local production structures of the various European countries. In particular, the strong business demand seems conditioning the system's development, where the production system is more steady; bigger is the effect on the training system, which therefore differs noticeably from that of the school system.

Each national system thus appears highly specific; however, despite the diversity of the different approaches there are two basic models:

- the French model, in which the initial vocational and education training are strongly integrated in the secondary school system, representing one or more training courses; for instance the *Licee professionel*, leading to the *certificate d'aptude professionel* (Cap), or to the *brevet d'etude professionel*(BEP); other examples come from the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Finland), in which the training courses are fully integrated into secondary schools, to the point that (in Sweden) a part of the curriculum of vocational training is common to the curriculum of academic courses.

- The German and English model, in which the two systems are completely separate. In these two countries, by the age of 16 after the compulsory schooling period, the division between academic courses and vocational training courses (*Berufschule* in Germany, *Further Education* in the UK) is quite clear. In Germany the two systems divide when the students are 15/16 years old, although

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[2] TREELLLE (2008), *Technical education: an opportunity for young people, a necessity for the country* Quaderno n. 8.

already at 11 years old the German students must choose (or they get selected for) the school course which will prepare them for the next step. At the end of middle school (articulated in *Gymnasium*, for those who will continue high school studies, and in *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* for those who will continue technical and professional training) they can choose the *Gymnasium* (high school), or to access a dual system apprenticeship, alternating the professional training with *Berufschule* attendance (vocational school). In the United Kingdom after the end of the *Comprehensive school*, which accommodates all young people up to the age of 16, even allowing a large number of options, students can continue, if they have good grades, to *Sixth Form* (two-years school before University), or access one of the many opportunities offered by *Further Education*, a non-scholastic system that prepares young people to enter the working world and it consists in a varied number of training courses either full-time or part-time.

Among the countries that are part of the first model, vocational education is mainly full-time, even if companies offer long-term internships.

Among the countries belonging to the second model, companies have a key role being the training provider; especially in Germany, where training is "dual", since the internship is partly carried out in the company and partly in school.

Italy belongs to the first model. One of the reason of the problems of our education and training, lies in the weakness of the relationship that has developed between school and business, also because of the development model of our production system, which after the 60's and 70's, era of the great industries, has increasingly faded into an economy based on medium, small and micro companies. These companies live on short-term contracts and seek professionals ready to work immediately; therefore it becomes difficult to invest in training and research. This is the difference between Italy and the other countries, such as Germany, where the production system is built on bigger companies, therefore the production system invests more, both in training and research[3].

In this situation the Italian school, facing with the problem of connecting with the production society, has tried to find within itself the reasons of its own existence; developing in a self-referential circuit, for which the reasons of the existence of the school have been sought within the same school culture, rather than in engaging with the external culture of the growing society, and the call for change from the working world.

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[3] AA. Vv. *Education for Citizenship, Work and Innovation: the German Model and Proposals for Italy*, In I numeri da cambiare, Treelle e Fondazione Rocca, January 2015.

However the European attention to the strengthening of the links between education, vocational training and the working world has led to the establishment in Italy of a new type of training course, the *Istruzione e FormazioneProfessionale* (IeFP, Vocational Education and Training), to establish a closer relationship between these different worlds. This type of training, which has been rapidly growing within recent years, has been conceived to offer an opportunity to the young people who wished to pursue a vocational path by the end of middle school, guiding them within three years to achieve a qualification and a diploma.

The monitoring report conducted by ISFOL on this sector[4] shows that the total enrollment for the year 2012-13 amounted to over 300,000 units. Meaning that our country is undergoing a process in which the education and working worlds are finally approaching one another, proved also by the launch of the *Istituti Tecnici Superiori* (ITS, Higher College of Tecnology), providing a higher specialization to secondary school graduates, and by the initiatives to have apprenticeships also in secondary school.

9.2.1 *The impact of the Recommendations on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF)*

The Copenhagen process and the European Recommendations still affect the different systems. For example, regarding the introduction of the European Qualifications Framework, the framework of all the titles and qualifications within a single frame, and the emphasis on learning outcomes are part of the tradition of countries like United Kingdom and Ireland, whose education system has privileged for a long time, the evaluation of the results rather than the management processes. In the UK, educational institutions have considerable autonomy, but there is a strong focus on the evaluation of the obtained results, through the standardization of qualifications. Ireland also follows a similar approach to system management, and since 2004 has introduced a national qualifications framework. Therefore Ireland, Malta and the United Kingdom were the first European countries to submit their national reference report, which put the national titles in correspondence with the eight European levels.

The European Commission's report on the implementation of the EQF[5] Recommendation highlighted that in 2008, three Member States already had a national qualifications framework and four Member States had referenced their national

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[4] Isfol, *VET a Professionalising Sector a.f. 2012-13.*
[5] European Commission (2013), *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Evaluation of the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Implementation of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning,* Brussels, 19.12.2013 COM(2013) 897 final.

qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010. By June 2013, twenty Member States had submitted their national reference reports to the EQF. The remaining countries (eight Member States, four candidate countries and Norway) are expected to complete their referencing process in 2013-14.

Presentation of the national reference reports to the EQF
(First Stage of the EQF Reccomendation) - 2013

By the end of 2010	FR, IE, MT, UK
2011	BE-vl, CZ, DK, EE, LT, LV, NL, PT
2012	AT, DE, HR, LU
2013	BG, IT, PL, SI

More delays have instead occurred in the implementation of the second stage of the EQF Recommendation, or the indication at the appropriate level of the European Qualifications Framework for all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by competent authorities.

Even in Italy there has been a movement of resettlement of vocational qualifications in favor of greater comparability on a national level. Through subsequent agreements established in the State-Regions conference[6], 22 terminal qualifications for the three-year course and the vocational course were identified. At the end of 2012 Italy has submitted their final reference report, indicating which of the 8 European levels correspond to the titles and qualifications issued in our country[7]. In the following page the referencing framework is presented[8]:

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[6] Agreement Conference of State July 27, 2011 - Development of IeFP regime; Agreement State-Region 19 January 2012 integration qualifications IeFP repertoire.

[7] State – Regions Agreement 20/12/2012.

[8] For more information on the described processes and to download the Italian referencing report, please visit http://www.isfol.it/eqf.

EQF Level	TYPE OF QUALIFICATION	COMPETENT AUTHORITY	RELEVANT EDUCATION/ TRAINING PATHWAY
1	Lower secondary school leaving diploma	MIUR	Lower secondary school
2	Compulsory education certificate	MIUR or Regions, according to the type of education pathway	End of the first two-years: High Schools, Technical schools, Vocational schools, three-year and four-year VET pathways
3	Professional operator qualification diploma	MIUR/Education	Three-year vocational school
3	Professional operator certification	Regions	Three-year VET pathways
4	Professional technician diploma	Regions	Four-year VET pathways
4	Upper secondary education diploma - High Schools (Licei)	MIUR	Five-year Upper secondary schools (Licei) (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
4	Upper secondary education diploma - Technical schools	MIUR	Five-year technical schools (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
4	Upper secondary education diploma - Vocational schools	MIUR	Five-year vocational schools (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
4	Higher technical specialization certificate	Regions	Higher Technical Education and Training pathways (IFTS) (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
5	Higher technical education diploma	MIUR	Higher Technical Education pathways (ITS) (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
6	Bachelor's degree	MIUR	Three-year bachelor's degree courses (180 credits - ECTS) (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
6	First level academic diploma	MIUR	Three-year courses (180 credits - ECTS)

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EQF LEVEL	TYPE OF QUALIFICATION	COMPETENT AUTHORITY	RELEVANT EDUCATION/ TRAINING PATHWAY
7	Master's degree	MIUR	Two year master's degree courses (120 credits - ECTS) (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
	Second - level academic diploma	MIUR	Two-year courses (120 credits - ECTS)
	First - level university master	MIUR	Minimum one year courses (min. 60 credits - ECTS) (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
	Academic specialization Diploma (I)	MIUR	Minimum two years courses (120 credits - ECTS)
	Higher specialization diploma or Master (I)	MIUR	Minimum one years courses (min. 60 credits - ECTS)
8	Research Doctorate (PhD)	MIUR	Three-year courses (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
	Academic Diploma for research training	MIUR	Three-year courses
	Specialization diploma	MIUR	Minimum two years courses (120 credits - ECTS) (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
	Second - level university master	MIUR	Minimum one year courses (min. 60 credits - ECTS) (Higher education and research apprenticeship programme)
	Academic specialization diploma (II)	MIUR	Minimum two years courses (120 credits - ECTS)
	Higher specialization diploma or Master (II)	MIUR	Minimum one years courses (min. 60 credits - ECTS)

EQF LEVEL	TYPE OF QUALIFICATION	ISSUED BY
3	Professional Operator Certification	Regions
4	Professional Technician Diploma	Regions

Lastly, we must remember that the National Directory of qualifications was regulated by the Legislative Decree 13 of 2013 and that it consists of all the repertoires of education and training qualifications encoded at national, regional or autonomous province level meeting certain requirements of the decree.

9.2.2 *The impact of the European Recommendations on the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the Recognition of Skills Acquired in Non-Formal and Informal Contexts*

The European credit system for vocational education and training has proved to be a rather complex tool to be implemented. The Evaluation Report of the European Recommendation[9] states that mobility projects based on ECVET believe that the main obstacles to transfer learning outcomes include:

a) a different terminology to describe learning units, modules, credits, and other relevant elements,
b) the incompatibility of the national credit systems with the ECVET (leading to the inability to use the credits to transfer learning outcomes)
c) and the heterogeneity in the quality of training courses and assessment.

The lack of guidance in the national education and training systems to the ECVET, a poorly developed legal framework at a national level (for example, the recognition of credits), administrative burdens and the difficulties in applying ECVET methodologies are some of the key issues that have slowed down the participants to use ECVET as a tool for future mobility. Units of learning outcomes in ECVET mobility projects were more likely to be recognized and rewarded, where the concept of unity existed in its national system.

For short-term mobility projects, the organizational papers of ECVET (Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and the Memorandum of Understanding) represent the most important elements to the initiative. These papers, in particular, have helped to increase the mutual trust between senders and recipients, thus potentially encouraging a long-term mobility.

It is completely different when we talk about the skills acquired in non-formal and informal backgrounds, we find the European countries on very different positions. Some countries have set up validation devices already established and functioning within their education system. The following chart illustrates the model of assessment of learning outcomes which was developed in France.

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[9] PUBLIC POLICY AND MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE (2014), *Implementation of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training(ECVET)*, Final Report, 2014.

THE ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES IN FRANCE[10]

France has a long tradition in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning and the national qualifications system is strongly connected with the labour market.

In the 90's the concept of *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* (VAP) was introduced into the French Law: people who had at least five years of work experience could be evaluated in order to obtain certifications and ministerial qualifications pertaining to secondary and higher education. To obtain the certification or the title, the subject must produce a portfolio containing the details of the activities and competences exercised, which is examined by a panel of assessors who can decide the number of credits granted or the type of studies necessary for the subject to qualify or the required title.

In 2002 the system for validation of work experience has been extended to all types of qualification and certification through the concept of *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE).

The concept of VAE stresses the importance of the summative assessment, namely to the acquisition of a title or a diploma rather than parts or sections of the training. The access to the experience validation for the achievement of a formal title is currently a right for all individuals who have gained at least three years' work experience.

In order to prepare and coordinate the operational framework of the initiative, in January 2002, the *Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle*(CNCP, Nation Commission for Vocational Certification), was created with the task of:

- activating and updating the *Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles* (National Directory of Vocational Certifications);
- monitoring the adoption of the education system and labor market reforms;
- supporting the agencies and organizations that deal with the validation and examinations for qualification.

The *Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles* contains about 15.000 different qualifications of which, 11.000 academic, 700 of second level, 600 certificates of vocational skills, 800 certificates of business skills issued by companies and another 400 certificates issued by different organizations.

Currently, the VAE device provides an evaluation conducted by accredited agencies (including the Skills Assessment Centre) on the basis of a portfolio of experiences presented by the applicant and verified by a panel of evaluation or a practical test.

Evaluation standards (*référentiels*) are defined by the type of qualification and can be changed and updated. The decision to grant or not the title is collective and it is based on the overall assessment of the capacity and the expertise owned and declared by the subject.

Parallel to the VAE, the Skills Assessment system plays an important role in the French validation system: the evaluation of skills is an activity conducted jointly by an individual and by one or more experts in order to investigate, define and describe the acquired skills. As part of the VAE, in fact, the Skills Assessment system is used to identify the skills that a subject may be examined for, therefore becoming a step within the VAE process.

By the end of the assessment, the Accredited Centre advisor prepares a summary paper, in partnership with the candidate, to develop the skills assessment and to establish a relation with the objectives and expectations of the subject. The individualized approach allows providing suggestions and recommendations for the access to training courses and to the recognition of individual credits.

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[10] The description of the French model is taken from the ISFOL book (1997), *Experiences of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Italy and in Europe,* edited by Elizabeth Perulli, ISFOL publisher, Rome.

The *Libretto Formativo del Cittadino*[11] (Citizen's Training Booklet) was introduced in Italy in 2005, it is a tool designed to collect, synthesize and document the different learning experiences of the working citizens, and the skills they have acquired: in school, in training, at work and in everyday life. The booklet is the key instrument for transparency in lifelong learning. It becomes a tool for transparent and formalized documentation of data, information, certifications, and it can be used by the individual in his training, growth and job mobility.

The objectives of the booklet are:
• to provide information on the subject and on his formal, non-formal and informal résumé, for job searching, job mobility and for the transition from one educational system to another;
• to make the skills acquired, recognizable and transparent in order to support employability and professional development;
• to help individuals maintain awareness of their own cultural and professional background and to guide the choices and future plans.

However, the implementation of recognition of acquired competences system is still a long way to go, because beyond identifying and making acquired skills transparent, it is necessary to introduce a shared recognition of the owned skills within a formalized system of qualifications.

As mentioned above (par. 8.1 and 8.2.1), after the publication of the European Recommendation ECVET a significant step forward has been made:
• Through Fornero Law, introducing territorial networks, and including all the services of education, training and work, the recognition of credits and the certification of learning acquired have been incorporated into priority actions (b, paragraph 55, art. 4 of the Law of 28 June 2012, n. 92).
• Through the Legislative Decree 13 of 2013, which formally established the National Directory of qualifications, made up of all the repertory of education and training qualifications encoded on a national, regional or autonomous province level.

National Directory of Education and Training Qualifications
(art. 8 Legislative Decree 13/2013)

1. In accordance with the commitments undertaken by Italy at a Community level, in order to ensure the mobility of people and facilitate the matching of supply and demand in the labor market, the transparency of learning and needs, as well as the wide range of use of certifications on a national and European level, without new or increased burdens on public finances, the National Directory of education and training qualifications has been established, in Article 4, paragraph 67, of the Law of 28 June 2012, n. 92

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[11] Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Decree 10 October 2005 *Approval of the model of citizen's training booklet.*

2. The national directory constitutes of reference framework for skills' certification, through the gradual standardisation of essential elements, even descriptive ones, of education and training titles, including vocational training and vocational qualifications and because of the possibility to link them also through the European shared system of credits recognition.

3. The national directory consists in all the repertoires of education and training titles, including vocational training and vocational qualifications also mentioned in Article 6, paragraph 3, of the Consolidated apprenticeship act, in the Legislative Decree 14 September 2011, n. 167, codified at a national, regional or autonomous province level, publicly recognised and meeting the following minimum standards:

 a) identification of the public authority;

 b) identification of the qualifications and skills that make the repertoires;

 c) reference report of the qualifications, and where applicable, to the statistical codes in reference to economic activities (ATECO) and to the nomenclature and classification professional units (CP ISTAT), in compliance with the national statistical system regulations;

 d) Reference report of the qualifications of the repertoire to the European Framework of Qualifications, carried out through the formal inclusion of the same in the national process of EQF referencing.

The national institutional framework has been set and within it we can find a complete recognition system of acquired skills. The Ministry of Labour has prepared a ministerial decree draft to define the procedures, in agreement with the Regions. Finally we have to remember the regional initiatives, which are introducing systems for the detection and the recognition of acquired skills as part of active policies to encourage outplacement[12].

9.2.3 *The impact of the European Recommendations on EQAVET*

The European Recommendation on quality assurance in VET is part of a varied European context regarding the development of training system quality assurance methods.

The tools of certification are widespread, they can refer to the ISO normative (widely followed in Italy) or the EFQM model or to other similar ones, which share the principle of focusing on the processes.

In Ireland, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom the educational structures must have by law an internal quality management system (EFQM, ISO 9000, or another model). Some of these models can lead to the release of "quality labels", certifying to the public the possession of certain requirements. Also in Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, there is a crossing between self-evaluation and external evaluation. The latter has many aspects, and it can be directed both to support educational institutions and to their management.

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[12] *See for example Veneto Region, Guidelines for the Validation of Skills Acquired in Non-Formal and Informal Contexts, 2012.*

In Austria, Romania, Finland, Hungary, the quality assurance systems have been reinforced both by enhancing the self-assessment, as in Finland, and by enhancing the role of the external evaluation, which is entrusted to the management of Inspection teams.

Another method often used in quality assurance of training providers is, accreditation. The accreditation, according to the CEDEFOP, is a quality assurance process under which the competent legislative or professional authority formally recognizes that an education or training program, meets certain standards[13]. It is a method used particularly when the curriculum is delivered by private authority.

Finally, almost all European countries have developed a system of indicators covering all major aspects of their education and training systems, which are normally used to monitor the evolution of the system, but can also be used to reward the most worthy educational institutions, as it is in Finland, where part (so far limited) of the training centers' funds are linked to results.

According to the results of a survey carried out by the EQAVET Secretariat and the external evaluation requested by the European Commission[14], more than 20 Member States have strengthened their approaches to quality assurance, and the EQAVET Recommendation has directly influenced the national system reform in 14 countries (BG, CZ, EL, HU, HR, MT, RO, FYROM, and BE FR, ES, IT, LV, LT, SL). Most approaches involve both the initial training and the training organised at the institutional level with public funding. Some of these countries were already basing on approaches compatible with the EQAVET Recommendation and therefore did not need to significantly change their system.

To this day, most of national education and training systems of the EU ask the providers of Education and Vocational Training to respect standard quality, which are part of the legal system or constitute the condition to obtain accreditation and funds.

Almost all Member States collect data to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their systems and have developed appropriate detection methods using questionnaires and by collecting data and indicators; also in most cases Member States publish the information collected on the results of the evaluation activities. However, this does not mean that the implemented processes are regularly reviewed and that plans for change are carried out, given the fact that the survey shows that only about a third of the countries regularly review their process resulting in action plans[15].

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[13] CEDEFOP (2008), *Terminology of European education and training policy, A selection of 100 key terms*, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.

[14] ICF GHK, *Evaluation of implementation of EQAVET Final report*, 2013.

[15] European Commission, *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training*, Brussels, 28.1.2014 COM(2014) 30 final.

As for Italy, the organization of the quality assurance activities for education and vocational training, changes depending on whether the activities related to the training course field are either controlled by the Ministry of Education (Technical and Professional Institutes) or by Regions (Vocational Education and Training and continuing education).

Regarding training courses controlled by the Ministry of Education, there has been a significant change with the development of the National Evaluation System.

THE LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEM

Also in Italy the national evaluation system has been finally launched, after some locally conducted tests (among which the assessment carried out by the evaluation committee of Trento was particularly significant, it has introduced the activities of self-assessment based on a set of indicators collected at a school level, in order to give schools the opportunity to meet with other schools, the committee of Trento also introduced the external evaluation of schools, although only experimentally[16]), and tests carried out at a national level (as for instance the project Vales, developed by Invalsi).

The regulation No. 80 of 2013 (*Regulation on the national evaluation system in education and training*) formally introduces the evaluation system and the subsequent ministry guidelines that take into account the foreign experiences, as well as the discussions about the experiments carried out in these years, avoiding some of the most common risks; in fact it states:

- the purpose of the evaluation has no rewarding or punishing intent but aims to improve the quality of service;
- the intertwining between self-assessment within an institution (based on test results and indicators provided by the Ministry of Education) and external evaluation;
- the integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis, and between the various tools (tests and indicators) that can represent the complexity of school;
- the need to take into account the influence of the social and economic context;
- the functional connection among various organizations (Invalsi, Indire, Inspectors), who interact on the basis of clearly defined roles, with the coordination entrusted to INVALSI, which is also responsible of issuing an annual report.

Therefore, schools, based on the model prepared by Invalsi, will have to collect the required indicators, analyse them and prepare a Self-Evaluation Report (SER), identifying strengths and critical aspects of the educational activity. This must be followed by the preparation and implementation of an improvement plan in order to solve the problems found. Each year a sample of schools is also subject to external evaluation by teams of specialised inspectors and other experts.

This system covers all types of education and therefore also technical and professional institutes, Education and Vocational Training (IeFP).

It cannot be said that the establishment of the National Evaluation System is a direct consequence of the EQAVET Recommendation or if anything has been accelerated as a result of the Recommendations submitted by the European Union to the

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[16] ALLULLI G. (2007), School Evaluation: a Problem of Governance, in *Business Services*, Il Mulino, No. 3 / 2007.

Italian government, following the severe economic and financial crisis of 2011. However, although the Regulation No. 80 and the subsequent implemented measures show no reference to the EQAVET model, the philosophy of the new evaluation system, aimed at improving the training course through an assessment cycle, both internal and external, is in line with the Community EQAVET model.

As for the technical and vocational institutes it must be observed that the Regulations related to the new organization of Secondary education (including the technical[17] and vocational[18] schools), explicitly recalls the European Quality Framework introduced by the EQAVET Recommendation, stating: *"With subsequent decrees of the Minister for Education, University and Research in consultation with the Minister of Economy and Finance, ... (c) indicators for evaluation and self-assessment of technical institutes, also with reference to the European Quality Assurance Framework of Vocational and Education Training are defined"* (Article 8 of the Regulations).

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Regions and Autonomous Provinces as a strategy to ensure the quality of training courses, have introduced the **accreditation of training structures**; it is an institutional activity through which each Region and Autonomous Province sets the rules, parameters and results to be achieved and maintained by the organisations that contribute to the provision of educational services using public funds.

The accreditation mechanism, introduced in 2001, is conceived to monitor the quality of training activities, both preventive, through the verification of the possession of certain minimum requirements and during the provision of these services.

The State-Regions Agreement of 20 March 2008, in line with the debate on the quality of education and training developed by the EU, has started the second "generation" of accreditation, whereof the main objectives are the promotion, awareness and valorisation of the accreditation as a quality tool, with specific attention to the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of training services in terms of employment and learning outcomes. The organisations providing accredited training courses at a local level must therefore make a gradual transition, from a predominantly organisational focused management to the adoption of an approach focused on the quality of the performance achieved and all the factors related to training product and its effects, rather than to those related to the process. The analysis of the new regional accreditation system conducted by ISFOL found that the Italian accreditation system, and in particular the latest version of 2008, uses different indicators required by the EQAVET Recommendation. From the results of the comparative analysis,

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[17] Regulations concerning the reorganization of the technical institutions under Article 64, paragraph 4, of the Decree Law of 25 June 2008, n. 112, converted into law on Aug. 6, 2008, n. 133.

[18] Regulations concerning the reorganization of vocational schools in accordance with Article 64, paragraph 4, of the Decree Law of 25 June 2008, n. 112, converted into law on Aug. 6, 2008, n. 133.

ISFOL has provided tips on how to develop the vocational training system in line with the EQAVET Recommendation. These tips refer to:

a) the strengthening of regional accreditation devices: the analysis found a high degree of consistency with the EQAVET Recommendation, but there is still room for improvement regarding the training of trainers (in terms of number of users and resources), companies satisfaction assessment, users working results, the prescription of structured procedures for analysing needs;

b) the introduction and strengthening of different devices according to the needs analysis and, above all, to survey tools for the detection and evaluation of the users and companies satisfaction;

c) the construction and strengthening of regional information systems (in connection at national level) for the collection of data on vocational training; in particular the data which the information systems could collect from providers are the following:
   • ownership of a quality certificate by the accredited facility
   • number of workers participating to training or continuos training course and amount of funds invested;
   • dropout rate and education success rate;
   • employment rate;
   • coherent employment rate;
   • number of participants to educational events from vulnerable groups.

ISFOL also notes that the EQAVET Recommendation and accreditation acts on fields which are not superposable:
   • The Recommendation frames the quality assurance throughout the whole planning-management-rating-review cycle, while accreditation is a device to access the training system evaluating the meeting of requirements and the recent years performance;
   • The Recommendation refers both to the quality of the systems and the quality of VET providers while accreditation covers only the latter;
   • EQAVET Recommendation focuses on the quality of both education and training systems while the accreditation devices regulate exclusively the access to training systems at a regional level.

Thus, accreditation is only one of the devices which Italy can use in the implementation of quality assurance devices in line with the guidelines of the EQAVET Recommendation[19]. An overall description of national strategies adopted or to be adopted with regard to the Recommendation on quality implementation, can be found in the *National Plan for the quality assurance system of vocational education and*

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[19] ISFOL, *Quality and Accreditation*, edited by Sandra D'Agostino, in Isfol Research Paper Series No. 17 - October 2014.

training, developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Education, University and Research, and by the Regional and Autonomous Provinces Coordination with the technical assistance of ISFOL[20]. The Plan, which was prepared in response to the requests of the European Recommendation, has conveyed a systemic view of the various initiatives already in place in the field of the quality assurance of Vocational Education and Training system in Italy and of the expected developments to implement the requests of the European Recommendation.

9.3 CONCLUSION

The results of the Lisbon Strategy are subject of debate among conflicting opinions. Regarding the aspects specifically targeting *Education* it can be said that the Lisbon Strategy has produced important results for the future of European educational systems. The attention to the enhancement and development of human capital, the promotion of a lifelong learning system, the consolidation of training systems, whether academic or vocational, the shift of attention from the teaching process to the learning process, the focus on results achieved rather than the path taken, the emphasis on the educational system quality and the integration between training policies and labour policies are key elements of a strategy which aims to equip European education and training systems for a future in which knowledge and skills are destined to play an increasingly important role, for the individuals and for the social and economic systems, while the learning process will be more and more the result of multiple processes, both formal and informal. The implementation of this strategy, however, shall face some important issues:

- The first one concerns the actual ability of the public and private production system to use and promote the available human capital. Despite the many rhetorical statements that we may read or hear, the available data show that not only the public and private investment in training is quite low, and even tends to decrease, but also that human resources, where available, are often undervalued and that their individual competences and skills are not recognised.
- The second one concerns the persisting difficulties of communication among the various subsystems of education: University, school and vocational training. The institutional, cultural and objective differences make the organisation of a unitary system really difficult.
- The third issue concerns the operational application of some key concepts, such as the skills or the credit, whose application, in the different subsystems often meets practical difficulties not easy to overcome.

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[20] ISFOL, the *National Plan for the guarantee of quality of Vocational and Education Training*, October 2011.

- The fourth one concerns the need to remove social and cultural conditioning preventing a large part of the population, usually the less educated part, to fit into a logic of updating and development of their own competences and knowledge.

The path of EU countries to achieve the Lisbon process and the 2020 Strategy is not easy at all and Italy is one of the countries starting from a disadvantaged condition; however, with the appropriate adjustments and adaptations, this is the path which best prepares to face the future.

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