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KA220-ADU - COOPERATION PARTNERSHIPS IN ADULT EDUCATION



**REPORT ON REGULATIONS AND DIRECTIVES ON ADULT EDUCATION IN ITALY**

1ST PROJECT RESULT – REPORT 1A (31/03/2023)



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## INTRODUCTION

Adult education is the great theme that is addressed in this important project that aims to promote lifelong learning, supporting adults in knowing how to orient themselves, in having greater self-knowledge, in self-evaluation, in being aware of their being and skills acquired by learning passively or actively, with a particular focus on policies and measures to support adults with low levels of skills and qualifications to access educational opportunities.

It is unfortunately a fact that less qualified adults are those less likely to participate in education and training than those with higher qualification levels, and this is a cause for concern, especially in today's times of rapid change, economic and social pressures, increased digitalization, and the consequences of the pandemic. The project therefore aims to encourage a broad and inclusive participation of adults in training and self-assessment activities.

In the paper we will analyze the origins of the term and adult education and lifelong learning, making a historical excursus on the birth and legislation of the subject in Italy. We will touch on training in the public and private sectors with a specific reference to the current Italian reality; we will do so by making a distinction of target, territorial context, role of the provincial centers for adult education, Individual Training Pact highlighting the various critical issues. We will also try to deepen the most recent legislation issued by the European Union, concluding with the good practices already in place in our country together with the intentions for the future.



## I. DEFINITION OF ADULT EDUCATION

The expression "Education of Adults" (EDA) is intended to identify the set of activities, public and private, aimed at the cultural and professional education of an adult public.

Today we mean that complex of educational interventions directed to the adult population with multiple purposes, including:

- Continuous training (*lifelong learning*);
- Possibility of recovery for those who have not had the opportunity to complete their study curriculum at the time;
- Teaching of basic knowledge useful for entering the world of work;
- Updating aimed at professional retraining;
- Other forms of non-formal teaching.

It is therefore the type of training which is intended to involve people regardless of age and employment status. It is in fact a constant learning, whose purpose goes beyond the typically scholastic one and extends to a broader concept that wants to create a participatory, active, and constructive citizenship. Therefore, the EDA assumes that even those who have already acquired a qualification at school and/or university need continuous updating to keep up with the ever-changing needs. Another prerequisite is that culture is a fundamental right of the citizen.

Adult education is formed by the set of formal educational opportunities (promoted by school and vocational training) and non-formal (cultural, social, health education initiatives or linked to the different aspects of associative life), intended for citizens in adulthood.

These activities are aimed at guaranteeing the right to lifelong learning, while promoting the full exercise of the right of citizenship. Adult education, in the education system, is carried out through the Permanent Territorial Centres (CTP) and the related networks of educational institutions.



EDA activities, certifiable and usable throughout life, are aimed at:

- Encourage the return of adults to the education and training system by allowing an expansion and consolidation of specific knowledge and skills;
- Promote the acquisition of new skills useful for the exercise of professional activity or for integration into social life.

The activities related to EDA, contrary to what is frequently thought today, are not a novelty in the Italian educational landscape, perhaps imported from the most advanced countries of the European Community, these educational activities have been carried out in Italy in an excellent way and for more than a century by the Popular Universities. It should be noted that the Popular Universities are not to be confused with the "Universities of the Third Age"; these have arisen much more recently to alleviate the discomfort of the elderly population. Only later did they make their activities available to non-elders, often changing the original name.

With the agreement signed on March 2, 2000, in the Unified State-Regions Conference, the Italian system has aligned itself with the directives of the European Union.

In particular, the main actors involved in the EDA system have been defined: the school system, the regional vocational training system, the employment services system, civic networks linked to educational initiatives, businesses, cultural and voluntary associations, universities, and all infrastructures used for cultural activities (museums, libraries, etc.).



## Lifelong learning

The concept of lifelong learning, also known as lifelong learning, is lifelong learning, i.e. it identifies the set of lifelong learning processes.

Lifelong learning aims to ensure the social and labour inclusion of individuals, without any difference of gender or social background.

It is important to highlight that we are not referring only to the professional dimension but also to the political, economic, and cognitive dimension.

In fact, adult education was born as a concept of modern pedagogy in which education is a constantly evolving process, which does not only concern the age group linked to the growth of the individual but the whole life.

Law no. 92 of 28 June 2012 "Provisions on labour market reform in a growth perspective", also known as the Fornero Law, in paragraph 51 of Article 4 defines and regulates the basic principles of lifelong learning: *"In line with the indications of the European Union, lifelong learning means any activity undertaken by people in a formal and informal way, at the various stages of life, in order to improve knowledge, skills and competences, in a personal, civic, social and occupational perspective..."*

The adjectives "personal, civic, social and employment" reflect the normative purpose that is to develop in the individual the awareness of his social role and his responsibility, civic and professional, with a view to collective growth.

Therefore, we can say that permanent development is developed based on three fundamental principles:

- The principle of participation
- The principle of globalization
- The principle of equal opportunities



It is intended to guarantee all individuals, regardless of gender, socio-economic status and culture, the same opportunities to participate in education and training courses aimed at self-realization, i.e. in the work, personal and social spheres.

The goal of "learning to learn" becomes the essential condition for an increasing number of people as well as a resource for the community.

Continuous training allows the development of professional skills understood as knowledge that can be immediately spent in work contexts, in organizational ones, in the most general life situations. It is necessary to reverse the traditional teaching/learning scheme: the classroom is no longer a place of transmission of notions but a space for work and discussion among peers. In the management of an ideal training course, the adult education expert provides all the materials useful for the autonomous exploration of the subject of study. These active learning experiences will be carried out autonomously and outside the formal learning contexts, and then continue with colleagues and trainers in the classroom. With this teaching strategy, adults are free to face the study at their own pace and in their own ways. This methodology really allows to carve out the training event around the needs of the individual. The trainer becomes a tutor, a facilitator, a guide. With this system, activities are proposed that not only aim at learning but also at experience. In this reasoning it is appropriate to introduce the identification and enhancement of the added value that can derive from experiences and good practices at several levels tested. Evaluating previous training experiences, satisfaction ratings and the results of evaluations already carried out allows you to think not only about the strengths and weaknesses of the planned training process but also about the motivation, expectations, characteristics of the target audience.

The topic of motivation deserves specific study, since a person in training achieves satisfactory results if he has a good motivation towards learning. This also applies to adult education. In people in training, often, the intrinsic motivation is lacking, which allows everyone to spontaneously invest the right energies to obtain the best result. At the didactic level you can provide a contribution to motivation if you work with teaching aids close to the interests of the students. Extrinsic motivation,



on the other hand, is supported with positive reinforcements that come from outside. Lifelong learning and skills development are key elements in responding to the current economic crisis, demographic ageing, and the broader economic and social strategy of the European Union. It is in this context that the European initiative that is spreading the culture of active ageing is inserted, the adoption of a set of measures aimed at improving the lives and participation of older generations through tools such as continuous training and involvement in socialization and voluntary initiatives.





## II. HISTORICAL NOTES AND CONSTITUTIVE NORMATIVE REFERENCES IN THE ITALIAN TERRITORY

Adult Education in Italy is a recent achievement and not yet fully achieved.

We can divide the historical process into three main phases:

A first phase, which can be placed in the first post-war period, is characterized by a very high percentage of the population illiterate or without an elementary school diploma due to poverty, a widespread devaluation of education and an early start to work. In this period, mass literacy begins through accelerated paths to the acquisition of the elementary license.

The post-war reconstruction has known the advent of the "Popular Schools", established in 1947 on the impulse of the constitutionally guaranteed right to school education. The activities were organized and hosted in "popular environments" (elementary schools, factories, hospitals, barracks, prisons, and on farms in rural areas). Burdened by the obsolete idea of "catching up" which in terms of education translated into the fight against illiteracy for the benefit of those who wished to complete elementary, middle, or vocational education, instead of being supported by a concept of education updated to the changed reality, schools were the answer to an imbalance that aimed to compensate for a disadvantage *ab origine*. According to some authors, the birth of adult education (known by the acronym EDA), coincides with the establishment of popular schools. An affirmation that indirectly confirms the original popular and compensatory characteristics of these Schools. In the period following the reconstruction, the Popular Schools have gradually severed the original popular roots, moving away from the primary objective represented by contributing to a real improvement in the living conditions of adults. While allowing thousands of adults and young people to obtain a qualification, in 1982 the Popular Schools were definitively abolished.

A second phase sees the recognition of the right to training as an opportunity for emancipation and socio-cultural redemption. It is the period of union demands and the establishment of evening and afternoon schools for the recovery of compulsory schooling to which the worker can access through "the 150 hours". In the early 70s, the Ministry of Education established experimental state middle



school courses for workers, the so-called "150 hours". In fact, there was the possibility of using 150 hours of paid leave during working hours for the exercise of the right to study of workers in medium and large industries within the state school. This "union conquest" represented a fact of great political importance in the sense that, for the first time, the principle of the "permanent right to study" was affirmed in general, not aimed at acquiring professional skills linked to the production processes of companies but rather at raising the levels of education and personal culture of all workers. From the school year 1983/84 the "courses of the 150 hours" became part of the staff of law and de facto of the lower secondary school and in them were merged the various courses for adults aimed at the middle school license that until then had been activated in Italy (ex. recovery courses and cultural updating C.R.A.C.I.S., prison courses, etc.). In parallel with the middle school courses, literacy courses were activated, also lasting one year, and concluded by the elementary license exam. In this second phase, there is a change in the social composition of the users of the courses themselves, now extended to other types of workers and subjects, such as housewives or young or old without a middle school diploma.

The third phase, from the nineties onwards, sees the birth of initiatives for the training of the adult population and the acceptance of the innovative scope of Lifelong Education.

Since the nineties, the Italian education and training system has been at the center of a profound innovation that after a long period of substantial immobility has changed the organizational physiognomy of schools, their relationship with the territory, the cultural approach to the idea of education, education, and training. A liveliness that owes much to the impulses of Europe interested in achieving a significant renewal of the education and training systems of the Member States. Strategy outlined effectively, in this period, in the two White Papers of the European Commission. 1996 is the European Year for Lifelong Learning and Education, in addition to important initiatives: OECD research and publications on adult language skills (*International Adult Literacy Survey*), the International Conferences on Adult Education that resulted in the Hamburg Declaration of 1997 and the Lisbon Strategy of 2000. It should also be remembered the affirmation of the principle of autonomy and subsidiarity, which for the school has been concretized in art. 21 of Law no. 59/97 and in the subsequent reform of Title V of the Constitution. Also in this period, the Ministerial Order n.



455/97 establishes evening courses for adults and the Provincial Territorial Centers (CTP). The latter are born as a seat of services for adult education, whose task is to organize literacy courses for the achievement of the middle school license for Italians or foreigners, artistic and linguistic workshops, and general culture courses where learning aims to promote the insertion and/or reintegration in the dual occupational and socio-cultural direction, allowing the subjects to better orient themselves, relate and operate in the community. CTPs are places for reading needs, planning, concerting, activating and governing education and training initiatives in adulthood, as well as collecting and disseminating related documentation. Places that ensure a unified vision of human formation consistent with the principle of lifelong learning.

In Italy, the right to lifelong learning was regulated only in 2012 with Law no. 92 of 28 June 2012 “Provisions on labor market reform in a perspective of growth”. Article 4 in paragraphs 51 and 52, in line with European guidelines, states: *“lifelong learning must become a reality for all to realize and exploit all their potential through the improvement of education and training systems”*; national policies in this area will therefore have to be implemented, through an agreement to be reached in the Unified Conference.

The agreement wants to reiterate that the center of the lifelong learning system is the citizen, who recognizes the right to use accessible and effective learning opportunities, as well as the right to make use of adequate supports for the recognition and enhancement of skills acquired in every formal, informal, and non-formal context, for the purpose of better personal and professional fulfillment and greater employability.

It must therefore be emphasized that it is no longer a service to the person but a right to the person.



### III. CONTEXTUALIZATION OF TRAINING IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS IN ITALY

The adult education and training system in Italy has recently undergone a profound reform following the issuance of the Decree of the President of the Republic no. 263 of 29 October 2012. The reform, aimed at better transposing the provisions contained in the European Agenda for Adult Learning drawn up by the Council in 2011, identifies institutional and educational changes in the adult education system. Although the reform has been formally applied, there are some critical issues linked to the decentralization of the system. In 2015, the MIUR issued a decree containing the guidelines for the application of the reform and the transition to the new system (Interministerial Decree no. 26 of 12 March 2015).

The educational offer for adults in Italy is based on two pillars: the CPIAs and secondary schools that offer courses to adults (formerly known as evening schools) that belong to the MIUR. Secondary schools offering courses to adults are affiliated to CPIAs and allow adults to obtain a diploma or professional qualification.

The CPIAs (Provincial Centre's for Adult Education) are managed at local level and funded by MIUR. The reform has accentuated the decentralization of the system, which today is organized at provincial level. Provinces are relatively small territorial units administered by special entities. This system guarantees, therefore, to the centers a certain autonomy of the organization and a widespread presence throughout the national territory. The CPIAs offer first and second level training courses, others aimed at improving reading skills and Italian language classes. It is also possible to follow these courses remotely. CPIAs also carry out educational research and experimentation.



The educational offer aimed at the adult population considers both the types of training needs expressed (the demand) and the responses by public and/or private training agencies. The educational offer divides the training activities into three types:

1. Formal activities
  2. Non-formal activities
  3. Informal activities
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1. Formal activities include all those actions aimed at obtaining a degree in the education channels of the training system. These include both compensatory activities for those who have not benefited from initial basic training (primary literacy, middle school license, diploma), and study courses aimed at acquiring a qualification that can be spent in the world of work (specialization courses and/or retraining). Since the training agencies par excellence are, in this case, governments and local communities, there is a strong degree of institutionalization of pathways.
  2. Non-formal activities are all those activities that, although not awarding a qualification, are aimed at extending knowledge in a particular field of knowledge or work, thus responding to specific training needs (language courses, computer courses, vocational courses, etc.). The degree of institutionalization is lower, and the promoters are often private training agencies (private social, corporate, etc.).
  3. Finally, informal activities include all those activities that, although implying a change, are not intentionally aimed at achieving specific training objectives, therefore do not fall into the categories. These present a great variety in terms of promotion agencies, users, duration, and content.

Among the innovations introduced by the reform of the adult education system is the revolution of teaching. Public institutions have moved from qualifications-based teaching to one focused on



individual skills development. The description of the training courses offered, from the first level of education to the most advanced courses, is expressed in terms of learning outcomes/objectives based on the skills to be acquired. The new teaching starts from the question “who is the *life-long learner*”? At the base of the request and desire to return to training, in the circuits of the public education system and in the opportunities for informal training offered in one's own territory, there is necessarily a situation of need and, in part, also of vulnerability and fragility. The conditions can be different: the need to certify skills to obtain residence permits and citizenship, lack of work, difficulty in finishing a course of study, imprisonment, having left the labor market, etc. Adult learners are different in background, starting level, knowledge, and know-how. Therefore, the new teaching is based on the need to put the learner's needs and aspirations at the centre of the learning experience: on the one hand, their cultural and personal heritage (transversal competences, language competences, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal training) must be taken into account together with their qualifications in the process of assessing their starting level; On the other hand, the educational offer must be flexible in order to adapt to the needs of the learner.



## Target audience

Adult education activities should be divided into:

- Compensatory activities aimed at "disadvantaged" adults. They have developed mainly by educational institutions supported by trade unions and workers' political movements since the early twentieth century and are aimed at adults who have not benefited from a basic training course or are lacking in sufficient cultural and material resources to face the complexity of productive, relational, and social life.
- Company training activities aimed at workers and/or new hires and have developed since the seventies in response to a rapid obsolescence of *know-how* until then considered sufficient to face the world of work.
- Continuous training activities, aimed at advancing and updating the workforce.

To date, according to Eurostat data, the proportion of adults without upper secondary education is high and participation in adult learning is low. For example, in 2018, 38.3% of Italian adults aged 25-64 had at lower secondary education, compared to the EU average of 21.9%, and only 8.1% of adults aged 25-64 had a recent learning experience compared to the EU average of 11.1 % (LFS, 2018). The low participation rate of low-skilled adults in training (2%) is worrying given the mismatch between the number of low-skilled jobs (2.5 million in 2017) and the number of low-skilled adults (over 12 million).



## Territorial context

Adult participation in training therefore remains lower than the European average, and this is important because an individual's human capital is not formed only through formal educational pathways (school, university). *Lifelong learning* is therefore becoming increasingly important, especially in the light of changes in the labor market, labor mobility and technological innovation. These factors increase the risk of skills obsolescence and require continuous adaptation and retraining. In addition, participation in lifelong learning promotes people's social life, active citizenship, and social cohesion.

According to the latest Istat report, the territorial gap in regional education levels remains strong. In fact, it emerges that the population living in the South is less educated than that in the Centre-North: 38.5% of adults have a high school diploma and only 16.2% have attained a tertiary qualification. In the North and Centre, about 45% have a university degree and more than one in five have a university degree (21.3% and 24.2% in the North and Centre respectively). The territorial gap in educational attainment is gender-independent, although more pronounced for women.

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In 2020, territorial differences in educational attainment are very similar to those of the previous two years, both for men and women. The territorial gap therefore remains almost unchanged for two consecutive years, while in the decade 2008-2018 it had increased, among the population with tertiary qualification.

Levels of education grow to a rather similar extent in geographical distributions: the population with at least a diploma increases by +0.8 points in the North, +0.4 in the Centre and +0.7 points in the South. The same dynamic for the graduate population, which grew by +0.6, +0.5 and +0.4 points respectively.





## The role of CPIAs

Since having taken the place of the CTP, the CPIAs - Provincial Centers for Adult Education, have the same administrative, organizational, and didactic autonomy as educational institutions. They are Centres that have their own organic endowment of personnel and other resources and are organized in such a way as to establish a close link with local authorities, the world of work and professions.

The educational paths organized by the CPIAs are aimed at adults and young people (including immigrants) who have completed the sixteenth year, even of non-Italian citizenship. Subjects who intend to fill situations of disadvantage, improve their condition on a linguistic, cultural, professional, and social integration within the community, who have not completed compulsory education, or who do not have the final qualification of the first cycle of education, or who intend to obtain the final qualification of the second cycle of education (former evening courses).

As a territorial service network, CPIAs are divided into three units (or levels):

1. Administrative unit: organize first-level courses and literacy and learning of the Italian language;
2. Teaching unit: stipulate network agreements with educational institutions that provide second-level courses for adults, also in order to connect those of first and second level;
3. Training unit: to expand the training offer, CPIAs enter into network agreements with local authorities and both public and private entities to integrate/enrich/encourage the connection between different types of education and training paths.

In addition, CPIAs carry out research, experimentation, and development (RS&D) tasks in adult education, aimed at:

- a. Develop training planning and evaluation research; training and cultural and professional updating of school staff; methodological and disciplinary innovation; didactic research on the different values of information and communication technologies and their integration into



- training processes; educational documentation and its dissemination within the school; exchanges of information, experience and teaching materials; integration between the various branches of the school system and, in agreement with the competent institutional subjects, between the various training systems, including vocational training;
- b. Enhance the role of the CPIA as a "service structure", through the development of the following system measures: reading of the training needs of the territory; construction of adult profiles defined on the basis of the needs of social and work contexts; interpretation of the skills and knowledge needs of the adult population; reception and guidance; improving the quality and effectiveness of adult education;
  - c. Prepare system measures capable of promoting connections between the educational paths carried out by CPIAs and those carried out by educational institutions that provide second level courses; drafting of the CPIA Training Offer Plan, common design of first and second level paths.

From the framework drawn, the action of the CPIAs can be traced within two main directions (conventionally defined as "axes"): training-research and schoolwork.

### Education-research axis

This axis highlights an aspect that is sometimes neglected in adult education: that the "compass" of the training process is represented by the needs of the direct owners; At the same time, this does not mean ignoring the demands that each social context expresses, with which the subject is in direct relationship. This statement is an implicit reminder for CPIAs to analyze the training needs of the target population and the territory using rigorous procedures of control, collection, processing, interpretation, and monitoring of data. In this way the action does not lose sight of the centering on the needs of the subjects and on the social instances in the background. Analyzing training needs, therefore, is not a simple collection of desires, but an educational research operation of which CPIAs must be helped to become fully aware. This means that training and research must proceed in an



aligned way, removing action from the randomness and simple common sense of the teacher. An unavoidable condition for ensuring symmetry between supply and demand for adult education.

### Work-school axis

"Popular" can be defined as an educational project interested in encouraging both the development of citizenship and self-competences, where the school is an agency of socialization and inculturation. Statements that recall the strong bond that must connect the school system and the adult education system, where the first is functional to achieve the purposes of the second. In this way, education, and school, on the one hand, and democracy on the other, are mutually influencing factors. The work-school axis underlines the dual direction of training intervention, which oscillates between the development of both the "cultural" and "professional" heritage of the subjects, where the CPIAs are called to identify satisfactory responses between the cultural needs of instructing (typical of school) and the professional needs of training (typical of work).



## The Individual Formation Pact

The Individual Training Agreement is a contract stipulated between the learner who is preparing to undertake the learning path and the commission composed of educators who evaluate his profile and the director of the CPIA, who defines the objectives of the individual training plan. The new adult education system therefore makes it possible to introduce elements of personalization. Each training agreement is drawn up by a commission following an interview with the learner. These interviews are conducted by adult educators and are based on a model aimed at evaluating and recording:

- Competences acquired in a formal learning context (irrespective of qualification attainment);
- Competences acquired in a non-formal learning context (e.g. skills and knowledge acquired through sporting, artistic activities, non-formal training courses, etc.);
- Skills acquired through informal learning (e.g. trades or professions learned in the family);
- Motivations and needs of the learner.

This information is then examined by the commission of educators appointed in accordance with current regulations, chaired by the director of the CPIA and, if the learner is a migrant, a cultural mediator, or a psychologist. Alternatively, the opinions of other professionals from different fields can be used, who identify and evaluate the above-mentioned elements and identify the learner level, the learning unit plan and the objectives in the form of competences to be acquired.



## Criticality

The Covid-19 outbreak has decreased the participation of Europeans in adult education activities. In 2020, according to the latest Eurostat data, the percentage of 25-64-year-olds involved is 9.2%, down by 1.6 percentage points compared to the previous year when it was 10.8%.

In 2009, the European Union had established to reach a participation rate in training activities, formal or not, of at least 15% of adults by 2020. However, the result has not been achieved, and even beyond the effects of the epidemic it is still quite far away. Italy, unlike other nations, remained around 8% for several years and then slightly exceeded 7% in 2020.

One of the elements influencing participation in continuing training is the level of education: graduates tend to benefit from it much more than those with a lower educational qualification, although these people generally need it more in the labor market. It has also been shown that employers are the most common source of education and training, providing around one third of the EU total. Another 20% came from non-formal institutions, and another 10% from commercial organizations for which this kind of activity was secondary. Almost as frequent and around 7-8% activities by formal educational institutions and non-profits.

In this sense, Italy is close to the European average, with a large part of the continuous training provided by employers. A peculiarity is that in our country, compared to the European Union, the incidence of institutions that provide formal education appears to be higher, while informal activities are rarer. The latter refer, for example, to activities such as self-taught instruction, by family members, friends, or colleagues, or through media such as the Internet, TV, or even through visits to centers such as museums or libraries. Eurostat data stress that it is important to measure these activities because a substantial part of continuing training can take place in very varied environments and often outside the usual (and formal) training channels. Despite this, informal activities can also play a role in promoting different skills such as *digital literacy*, as well as expanding opportunities to learn in an innovative and flexible way.



As the note of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies recalls, *“the integration of the various dimensions of learning into a single integrated system is one of the European priorities that Italy is also working on. It is a matter of creating territorial networks between schools, training institutions, universities, territorial centers for adult education, employment services, chambers of commerce, industry, crafts and agriculture, companies and their employers' and trade union representatives and of defining general rules and shared standards to validate the skills and knowledge acquired in different contexts.”*

Member States are called upon, on a voluntary basis, to redefine their education and training systems, in a way that links national reference systems and the EQF (*European Qualification Framework*), a reference framework for translating the qualifications and learning levels of different countries. It applies to all qualifications, from those obtained in compulsory education, to the highest levels of academic, technical, or vocational education and training. About the construction of the system, Italy has adopted a framework of definition and shared on the subject; minimum reference standards to validate and certify skills; the national directory of education and training and professional qualifications; the standards of attestations and certificates that can be used at European level; a monitoring and evaluation system.



## IV. APPLICATION IN THE ITALIAN TERRITORY OF EUROPEAN REGULATIONS AND DIRECTIVES ON ADULT EDUCATION

The Council of the European Union recently intervened with the Resolution of 17 December 2021, to define a new approach on adult education and training, through a New European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030 (NEAALL).

Over the last decade, since the Resolution of 20 November 2011 on a Renewed Agenda for Adult Learning (EALL), significant steps have been taken towards recognizing this area as a key part of lifelong learning and numerous initiatives have been launched in this direction. Consider, for example, the issuance of the 2016 Council Recommendation “*Upskilling Pathways*” on upskilling pathways, considered the most important legal act among those recently issued by the European Union on adult learning policy. The considerable work carried out in recent years by the European institutions has not, however, produced the desired results in terms of levels of participation in adult learning.

In fact, according to Eurostat data from 2020, the Education and Training Monitor for 2020 shows a low level of adult participation (1 in 10), with an EU average of just 10.8% of adults aged 25-64 who took part in learning in the four weeks prior to the survey. This percentage appears to have further decreased (9.2%) because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Existing initiatives are likely to have been limited in scope, focusing only on certain groups, rather than on all working-age adults. The 2016 Recommendation, for example, is mainly aimed at low-skilled people and does not recommend providing financial support to individual learners.

Therefore, unless decisive action is taken, adult participation in learning is expected to reach only 49% by 2030, thus remaining well below the 60% target set for the next decade. Considering this forecast, the Commission proposes a new approach to support the improvement of adult skills, in line with the “*Skills Agenda*”, which puts people at the centre and equips them with the support and tools they need to participate regularly in learning activities.



There are two issues that seem to affect the results achieved in 2020:

1. Insufficient financial support for people participating in training courses. For example, the cost of courses or the loss of income due to the period of absence from work for training, or even the scarce resources to overcome the obstacles that prevent you from finding time to devote to training.
2. Insufficient motivation to attend training courses. For example, lack of awareness of training opportunities or uncertainty as to whether employers will recognize the training acquired.

Annex I of the Renewed Agenda for Adult Learning is important because, in addition to identifying five priority areas on which to focus interventions, namely Governance, Provision and adoption of lifelong learning opportunities, Accessibility and Flexibility, Quality, Equity, Inclusion and success in adult learning, Green and Digital Transition, it intends to reiterate the need to support all adults of working age in accessing the training, including for professional transitions and regardless of their employment situation or professional status, affecting people's incentives and motivation. In addition, particular attention is paid to the age group of over sixty-five, to support their full integration and participation in society.

With the introduction of the New European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030, the Council of the European Union calls on Member States to commit to building shared responsibility by the entire Government. A strong link between relevant ministries and stakeholders is required, strengthened by strong public engagement leading to effective national, regional, and local coordination. The Council also invites the Commission to liaise closely with Member States to ensure the construction of a flexible and efficient governance structure involving the Working Group on Adult Education, the Network of National Adult Learning Coordinators, peer learning activities and other networking activities.

In the 2021 Resolution, an educational and learning approach centered on the needs of the learner is highlighted, unlike the previous 2011 Resolution where the term need is not used at all. This approach takes the form of encouraging adults to express affinities, desires, and preferences. Education and training programs offered in the context of adult learning should focus more on the





needs of the learner and their specificities: knowledge, skills, competences, and previous experience. The need to improve the offer through personalization that creates new opportunities for formal, non-formal and informal learning for all, but that are made ad hoc for everyone, seems to be paramount.

In line with this approach, the European Commission has put forward a proposal for a Recommendation to establish Individual Learning Accounts, which aims to ensure that every person has lifelong access to training opportunities adapted to their needs. The accumulation of individual training rights for a given period in a “personal account” allows individuals, regardless of whether they are employed or not, to undertake longer or more expensive training, to train for transitions between different jobs or to respond to emerging skills needs during times of crisis and in the context of the green and digital transitions.

Member States are urged to provide effective and efficient funding of adult learning initiatives through cooperation and partnership between stakeholders at national, regional, and local level.

Among the implementation instruments, continuous and regular funding is suggested, alongside which grants related to projects and funds to support the implementation of NEAALL 2030 must be guaranteed, as well as relevant European Union instruments (Erasmus+, the European Social Fund Plus, etc.). Member States are also invited to provide, where possible, that financial, fiscal, and other social benefits or compensatory measures at employer level result in a greater commitment by the employer to adult learning. In addition, consideration is given to the introduction of other financial and support measures, as well as concrete actions to support learners, for example in the form of financial incentives, such as loans, grants, and tax relief.

The 2021 Resolution aims to reiterate support for the professional development of educators and trainers. Professionalization, in the context of adult learning, is essential for the quality of education and training offered. In NEAALL, it calls for improving employment status and improving the initial and continuing education and training of educators and trainers, including by promoting the use of integrated (online, remote, hybrid) approaches and innovative resources (ICT infrastructure and equipment).



Increasing adult mobility opportunities means improving the quality of learning and promoting multilingualism. The Resolution encourages the use of the new Erasmus+ Program which offers many new opportunities to promote the mobility of teachers and learners in the field of AL. The further development and implementation of EPALE is recommended, as it is an important tool to support the Erasmus+ program for those wishing to present a mobility project or a strategic partnership in the field of adult learning by offering a dedicated partner search and project space.

The call for Member States to promote more flexible and modular learning opportunities, providing short learning experiences to acquire or update specific skills, is an important element of novelty compared to the past. This suggestion to national governments also appears to be based on the innovative learner-centred approach and goes beyond the approach that EU policy initiatives should focus on designing adult education and training provision (supply side), rather than on the process of making it accessible (demand side) that encourages adults to use it.

In line with this approach, in the NEAALL reference is made to the concept of Micro-credentials, for the promotion of which the Commission has put forward another proposal for a Recommendation. Through the establishment of Micro-credentials, it will be possible to promote the quality, transparency, and recognition of short training programs. This will help people adapt to changing labor market needs and ensure that current and future employers recognize their efforts to attend individual training programs. This initiative, together with the Individual Learning Accounts initiative mentioned above, complements several tools mentioned in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan of March 2021 and can contribute to expanding and strengthening lifelong learning opportunities.

The monitoring system of the adult learning sector took its first steps in 2011, as reflected in the EALL Resolution, in which it appears weakly recalled. In NEAALL, the monitoring of the process and results is well defined, and a precise strategy is outlined in this regard. It is no coincidence that the entire Annex II is dedicated to “Targets and Indicators at EU level” with the aim of establishing precise indicators to assess the average European performance in adult learning. By 2025, at least 47% of



adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning activities in the previous 12 months. By 2030, the level of participation is expected to reach 60%.

Only by monitoring progress with comparable and reliable data, considering the different situations in individual Member States, will it be possible to identify challenges and contribute to evidence-based policymaking to support the strategic priorities outlined in NEAALL 2030. The Commission is invited to present to the Council a systematic overview and roadmap, regularly update policies, cooperation, and funding instruments on planned and ongoing initiatives at Union level, such as upskilling pathways or Erasmus+, which contribute to the realization of the New Agenda.

The issue of social inclusion is not made a generic reference, as in the previous Resolution, but an important part of the Priority Sector is dedicated to it. Member States are invited to allocate adult learning resources in a balanced manner, considering funding models based on shared responsibilities and strong public engagement. The aim is to protect groups of adults from a disadvantaged background, or who have disabilities, or who are exposed to other factors that can generate exclusion. It is suggested that incentives be considered to remove obstacles to the participation of such groups (lack of time to study, low basic skills, poor professional skills, inaccessibility, low levels of motivation, etc.).

It is therefore clear that the Council of the European Union wanted to give a driving force to the change of an obsolete model. The new paradigm reflects the social changes that have taken place over the last decade and highlights the progress made in the development of the adult education sector. Certainly, the ongoing pandemic, climate change, the development of technologies is contributing to a rethinking of adult education and training and increasing awareness of the importance of making choices aimed at lifelong learning more concrete, so that it can be affirmed as a lifestyle shared by all.



## V. GOOD PRACTICES AND FUTURE RESOLUTIONS

In a perspective of continuity and integrated system and training of the skills of active participation and citizenship, the training offer has been articulated. In fact, there are various contexts and initiatives that promote lifelong learning and adult education: education, vocational training, company training, universities, the third sector, social volunteering.

Within the informal and non-formal system of supply are included cultural infrastructures (libraries, reading centers, museums, theaters, cinemas), the sector of associations and social volunteering, popular universities and the elderly, the universe of social cooperatives, or the third sector in the broadest sense. The wide and diversified panorama of the "Third sector" is part of the largest and most complex non-profit sector, composed of a multitude of organizations with extremely diversified purposes. At national level, the Permanent Forum of the Third Sector was established in 1997, as a second-level association that brings together the main realities of the world of volunteering, associations, social cooperation, international solidarity, voluntary integrative mutuality, foundations of our country. The associations that refer to the Forum have, among the various fields of activity, cultural, education, as well as other programs that develop training actions (such as those related to the fight against poverty, volunteering, citizenship rights). As part of the activities carried out in this sector, training is one of the lines of intervention in considerable growth.

Particular attention deserves the movement of popular universities, which originated in Italy since the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the last century, with a rapid spread throughout the peninsula. At the origin of the movement there were already the principles of social cohesion and education for active citizenship, through the expansion of opportunities for participation in training and culture. Universities of the third age are a recent development that can be traced back to the early 70s, when the risk of social exclusion of older population groups clearly emerged. Consequently, while the nineteenth-century popular universities set themselves the goal of redemption and social equity the formation of the weakest population, the more "modern" ones



of the third age were born to respond to a profound need for culture and updating of adult age groups, in consideration of the prolongation of life and the continuous and rapid transformation of production methods and lifestyles.

Most of the cultural offer, regardless of the content, is structured in courses, whose typology is very varied; The organization of conferences and seminars, cultural trips, motor activities, etc. is also planned.

Currently, there are two major confederations of reference of popular universities in Italy, the CNUPI – *National Confederation of Italian Popular Universities* and the Unieda – Italian Union of Adult Education, based in Rome. Both second-level organizations are members of the EAEA – *European Association for the Education of Adults*.

Cultural associations, for example, are places where the added value of *life wide learning* is expressed. The action of cultural organizations in favor of citizens offers continuous opportunities to actively participate in the construction of the fabric and territorial identity as well as the possibility of extending the spaces for the development of mastery of skills. In general, almost all the activities of the associations have a formative (non-formal) character, as their action represents an overall learning path that is divided into both training and educational moments. Often, then, in associations there are also various situations of aggregation with a formative value that arise from a demand for the needs of sociality and culture. Being an active member of an association therefore allows you to enrich your socio-cultural background. The value given by this enrichment was not immediately perceived, and perhaps we are not yet aware of the real formative potential of this model. This significant role played by non-formal and informal education thanks to the vitality of associations, has rarely been considered by institutions and official culture. The research action was therefore to make explicit what has been achieved by the associations in terms of skills development and compare it with: the perspective of the European Community through key competences; the perspective of the Provincial Indications. The associative reality of Laives, for example, is rather articulated, both for the substantial number of activities proposed, and for the variety of themes they embrace. Through



a work of data collection extrapolated from the final reports collected in the archive of the Municipality, it was possible to map 6200 activities promoted by 106 associations between 2002 and 2008.

With regard to policies for lifelong learning at the University, it is useful to remember how, in Decree 270 of 22 October 2004 in Article 5, paragraph 7 it was provided for the possibility for universities to *“recognize as university training credits, according to predetermined criteria, the knowledge and professional skills certified in accordance with current legislation on the subject, as well as other knowledge and skills gained in training activities at post-secondary level to the design and construction of which the university has contributed.”* The legal device, therefore, opens the possibility of recognizing, also through the attribution of university training credits, the learnings matured in professional contexts while, on the contrary, limits the possibility of recognizing the knowledge coming from training only to learning whose origin there is the imprint of the academy.

The new users, represented by an adult population, workers and not, at a first access to the university or in return, therefore presents non-traditional characteristics for the university. In fact, these are adults who intend to satisfy a personal need for growth, self-realization; or with needs for updating or professional retraining; or finally, to complete paths interrupted previously, and therefore seize a *“second chance”*.

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Another training tool is the Interregional Catalogue of Higher Education. It was founded in 2006, following a memorandum of understanding for the mutual recognition of vouchers for higher education signed between the Regions of Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, and Umbria, to which the regions of Abruzzo, Lazio, Piedmont, Sardinia, Sicily, and Valle d'Aosta subsequently joined. The Regions have developed the project of a Regional Catalogue of higher education that the Ministry of Labor initially financed with resources of the NOP "System Actions" programming 2000-2006 and the implementation was then ensured through resources of the Regional Operational Plans ESF 2007-2013.



This tool has established itself since its first edition as a valid means to increase the employability and skills of young people and workers, with the participation of more than 500 training operators and the financing of 2,600 vouchers worth over 11 million euros. The numbers of the second year were even more encouraging. In fact, the Regions that issued calls doubled compared to the previous edition (from 5 to 10), financing 5,175 vouchers (about 20% of requests) for a total of about 27 million euros. From this year onwards, workers in layoffs and mobility have also become part of the priority targets. 62.2% of the beneficiaries were unemployed and in 81.3% of cases the voucher applicants had a university or postgraduate qualification. The third year saw the participation of 11 regions, 1294 training bodies that presented courses, 63,437 vouchers requested against 15,537 financed with a financial availability of more than 35 million euros. The typical profile of the applicant appears to have an average age of 32 years, woman (61%), employed (52.9%) and graduate (74%).

Finally, it is useful to mention the Italian project *“Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning 2012-2014”* approved by the European Commission and entrusted to ISFOL as coordinator, aims to increase the level of awareness and awareness on the issue of lifelong learning among policy makers at territorial level, public and private operators in the field of education and training, social partners, companies, third sector operators.



## CONCLUSIONS

The adult is called to progress in adapting his studies and profession to the changing demands of life, not only for his personal emancipation but also for the progress of society. In fact, society is the educational context that provides cultural tools and general guidelines. This means that it is necessary, in the construction of training paths, to promote educational success which is a concept that is not limited only to the school experience but has to do with the more global concept of personal and professional fulfillment, with respect to his social roles.

Education is a continuum that is distributed throughout the person's existence. The existential task of man and the related educational commitment are declined in every age. The person develops at different ages, which do not simply follow one another in a sequential and linear way since each phase of life finds nourishment from the previous one. Only in this sense can we speak of human life as education a search for perfection of man in every age.

The need for specific intervention in the adult segment arose when the institutions of change were felt most strongly. The changes in society are evident and require the individual to build tools and strategies that allow him to make the fundamental choices of life in full awareness, responsibility, and autonomy. Furthermore, since there is a very strong link between society and the educational and training agencies, so that the changes in one influence the other and vice versa, it is necessary to manage educational and training processes effectively so that the complexity of today's society can be managed strategically.

Quality basic education is essential to foster lifelong learning in a complex and rapidly changing world. Training as a linear path no longer corresponds to the needs of today's society. Adults must therefore be able to reflect day after day on the learning achieved and to identify strategies that integrate what is still considered lacking. This reflection can become the instrument through which the adult comes to exercise his right to lifelong learning.





The right to learn even in adulthood is underlined by the awareness that humanity can survive and overcome the challenges that from time to time present themselves only if we are faced with conscious and informed men and women. Persons who can exercise this right are able to guarantee full participation in social life as citizens. Lifelong learning offers more economic opportunities, is essential for general well-being, is indispensable for personal growth.

Lifelong learning and skills development are key elements in responding to the current economic crisis, demographic ageing, and the broader economic and social strategy of the European Union.

The world is changing, and education must also change. Everywhere, societies are undergoing a profound transformation, and this requires new forms of education to promote the skills that societies and economies need, today and tomorrow.



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