

## **Baseline Report Key Questions: Connected Learning @ Youth Work**

Country: *Italy*

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Partner organisation: *The European Digital Learning Network*

1. What are the key statistics regarding YW in the partner country (numbers, growth, employed/unemployed, school leaver statistics, etc.)?
2. Are young people in the partner country qualified, experienced, in service, undertaking part-time work, volunteering, etc.?
- 3.
4. What types of non-formal digital education exists in the partner country and what qualifications are offered?
5. What types of formal digital education exists in the partner country and what qualifications are offered?
6. What types of formal learner (FL) digital education providers exist within the partner country? Who are these including size, location, ownership, educational offering, activities organised, etc.
7. What types of non-formal learner (NFL) digital education providers exist within the partner country? Who are these including size, location, ownership, educational offering and activities organised, etc.
8. What is the National Youth Work Strategy (or similar policy provision) in your partner country and the key priorities regarding work? How does this policy support developing digital competencies?
9. In your partner country what is the state of play regarding digital skills and competencies? What is the level of attainment and gaps identified by employers and/or young people? What is the national strategy to support development of these strategies?
10. What is the type and size of marginalised communities in your partner country? What support is being developed/provided by government, social economy and voluntary sector to support these communities in their learning?
11. What accreditation is given for Formal (FL) and Non-Formal (NFL) digital Learning in your partner country? Are these widely recognised by employers? Are there any digital competencies frameworks for young people to use to accredit their skills, learning and/or experiences?
12. Are there any examples of best practices/learning cities/learning maps within your partner country?

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## Youth work in Italy and the conditions of youngsters.

Youth work in Italy concretises in a series of activities of socio educational nature usually managed, organised and promoted by third sector organisations. A standard definition for youth work does not exist in the Country: translated literally in Italian as “social-educational animation”, the concept gathers a wide variety of different activities always implemented outside the boundaries of formal education.

The activities falling under the definition of youth work are different and cover diverse themes: culture and artistic heritage, education, welfare, environment, peace, immigration and international cooperation. The third sector, usually in cooperation with the State and private entities, is the main actor in terms of youth work activities implementation: common feature of those activities is that the ultimate goal of Youth work is to facilitate and support the inclusion and integration of young people in civil society and to increase solidarity and mutual comprehension among generations, generating overall social cohesion and sense of citizenship among the participants.

Youth workers in Italy do not need to have a specific academic certification for working as educators and activities managers, tasks that they usually do on a voluntary basis: no formal recognition of the necessary set of skills exists and therefore the young people who work in youth centres have very different educational backgrounds, ranging from Social Sciences, to Education Sciences, Sports and Psychology. Some youth workers do not even have a studies path aligned with the usual topics dealt by youth work’s projects: every Italian Region, in fact, set the rules and excluding Lombardy and Piedmont -whose laws foresee minimum standard requirements for the profile of the youth worker- in fact no common requirements are set at National level. Thus, the situation and state of arts of youth work in Italy is quite uneven: no homogeneity exists from a legal point of view and no shared definition of the nature, related tasks, characteristics of youth work and the profile and certification of youth workers emerges.

The young people, that is to say the Italians aged between 15 and 29 years old, are around 9, 28 million: the youngsters represent around 20% of the total population of the country, with a gender ratio of 51% males and 49% females. The majority of young people live in the North of the country, followed respectively by Central regions and South and Islands after. In terms of civic and social engagement, of those 9, 28 million, a 20%, take part in voluntary activities while a 14% participate actively in youth organisations, youth related activities and social projects related to that field (<https://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/italy/>).

The majority of Italian youngsters (almost 80%) completed upper secondary education. It has been noticed that the achievement of study goals, certification and education licenses and the completion of educational paths of the average Italian is heavily influenced by her/his familiar background: more precisely, the academic attainment of youngsters mainly depends by the parental upbringing and education. Statistics point out clearly the existence of such correlation: 65 % of students from graduate parents achieve a tertiary degree, and only 6% never progress past lower secondary; while the majority – more than 50%- of

students belonging to families with at most lower secondary education finish just lower secondary school and just a small 8% of them reach tertiary education institutions. No surprise, therefore, that

“... In 2016, 75 % of new university entrants came from general upper secondary schools (the so called *licei*).” ([https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-italy\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-italy_en.pdf))

The drop-out rate is quite high in Italy: official data report a percentage of 15% of young Italian who do not finish even high school. The students qualifying as Early School Leavers are mainly male (17, 7%) than female (12, 3%) with again the South and Insular regions representing the areas where this worrisome phenomenon hits more significantly.

Nevertheless, the unemployment rate is as well tremendously high in the country. In April 2019, in fact, the data reported one third of young citizens, 31, 1%, being unemployed. In recent years the issue of young people and work has been representing a real plague for the Country, with peaks of the unemployment rate at 43, 40%, as in March 2014. Particularly severe the situation of Southern and Insular regions, less the one of Northern and Central parts. The young people who in Italy are not employed, not in education or training(s) and not proactively looking for an occupation – the so called NEETs- account for a 20,1% of the total, one of the highest rate in the European Union.

Even in this case the majority of non-engaged youngsters live in the South and Islands – about 37% of the totality of NEETs: such difference goes together with the particularly problematic labour market condition for young people and is moreover exacerbated by the difference in the degree and diffusion of digitalisation. The last one is spreading very fast in the North, mainly because of the more capillary broadband penetration, while it goes slower in the other parts of the Country: such factor undoubtedly is contributing, among others, to the widening of the digital (and therefore developmental) gap within Italian regions.

### ***Digital education: non-formal and formal. Providers and activities.***

Non-formal digital education is offered in Italy by a plethora of organisations, consultancy firms, private education institutions and training centres and schools. Those organised educational activity taking place outside and a part from the established formal educational system usually take the form of extracurricular activities, complementary courses to the traditional academic lessons and/or proper trainings followed by competences’ assessments and relative certifications production.

Some of those non-formal digital education providers are actually proper networks of different institutions, sometimes operating transnationally, with a common devotion to innovation’s infusion and digitalisation’s propagation. The biggest and more extended providers have physically real campuses and gather agencies, start-ups, freelance workers, investors, students, businesses of different sizes and entrepreneurs. The campuses are made of meeting rooms, working spaces, laboratories and so on: see for instance “Talent Garden” (<https://talentgarden.org/it/scopri-talent-garden/>).

Some others are small-medium businesses owned by private entrepreneurs or by holdings.

The non-formal providers normally offer training programmes and Master courses to private and enterprises: the courses can be either part time or full time, as well as shaped as masterclasses. The providers with an extended capacity in terms of space, contacts and relationships with private companies and public institutions are almost always offering a post-studies service as well; meaning the students are directly inserted in internships and work experiences propedeutical to their (future) career once the courses are over.

The non-formal education providers are private companies, therefore, their educational offer is not free of charge: depending from the type of Master, the length, the kind of facilities it is comprehensive of, and ultimately the provider itself – for example how well known the institution is in the Country, how many offices it has, if it offers long lasting placements afterwards, etc.- costs for learners could greatly vary, but they can easily reach amounts of 5000/7000 euros for a full time Master of 12 weeks. Special price arrangements are normally foreseen for the trainings of big companies' staff: the employees enrolled in non-formal courses are financed – totally or partially- by their employers.

The variety of trainings, courses and classes provided as educational offer of non-formal digital education providers is massive: given that such kind of education is extracurricular and parallel or additive to the main one offered by formal education institutions, the focus on digital, innovation and entrepreneurship is particularly strong. It derives that the first aim of these forms of education is to equip the learners with skills, competences, knowledge and abilities extremely useful for professional growth and career development: the educational offer of non-formal providers is oriented heavily on employability and bridging the gap between students and the jobs market, offering them certificates and badges which testify the attendance and academic results they achieved.

Digital Marketing, Data Science and Artificial Intelligence, Digital Design, Digital Human Resources Management, Digital Business, Digital Product Management, Digital Energy Management are all examples of the type of offered trainings and courses. Dealing broadly with digitalisation and relative skills and features, the courses are often supported by the use of smart digital devices and online platforms dedicated to the learners: therefore it is not just in the content the difference between non-formal digital education and formal one, but also in the tools and appliances in use...the shape.

In terms of location, non-formal providers are widespread in the national territory, not surprisingly the majority of those institutions are in the main cities – Rome, Milan, Florence, Turin, Naples- with a prevalence of centres in the Northern regions and less availability in the Southern and Insular ones: such discrepancy is again the result of many, complex, long-rooted factors among whom surely impact difference in the broadband diffusion and in the economic wellbeing and development of the areas.

### ***Marginalised communities and their learning.***

In Italy live different ethnic groups and communities and some of those are in a situation of marginalisation, economical and/or social deprivation and exclusion.

The one composed by Roma people, for instance, is among the largest ethnic minority in the Country, accounting for an estimation of 120,000 and 180,000 people. The Roma communities in Italy almost always experience harsh ostracization from public life and forced evictions by local police forces: many of them, above all the groups arrived in the 1990s from former Yugoslavia's territories, do not hold the Italian citizenship.

Moreover, Roma usually live in the peripheries of urban areas and informal settlements in the outskirts of the metropolises, with no access to clean water, sanitation facilities and healthcare. In such extremely difficult conditions it is usually thanks to Third Sector organisations –namely charities and ngos of different nature- that Roma in Italy are assisted and supported, even in terms of provision of educational services.

Taking into consideration the topic of education it follows naturally that the main activities are language courses, both for youngsters and adult learners. Practical education, the approach 'learn practical skill' is preferred. Nevertheless, the assistance offered is not enough- both economically and both number wise- to cover the needs of the Roma people and fill the gap in terms of social inclusion and integration within the Italian population. Many complex and variegated issues affect the relationship between Italians and Roma people.

Another marginalised community is the one made of newly arrived immigrants and foreigners, especially the one from non-European countries: again, the role of the Third Sector- represented in this case by religious organisations, non-governmental and no profit associations, cultural circles and secular and Church sponsored campaigns- results crucial in assuring a minimum support to those people and their human needs.

Governmental laws are highly unfavourable towards minorities and immigrants and the rise, in the last years, of populist and far right parties and movements has been making the challenge for such cohorts of population and for all the entities fighting for their inclusion in the Italian society even harder.

### Types of formal learner (FL) digital education providers.

Digital education is implemented by formal education providers – public institutions, schools from lower secondary to higher tertiary level, on a national basis.

The Government of the Country in fact, through its ministry of education and research, whose acronym is MIUR, has designed and launched a national plan for introducing the digital element in schools since the year 2011. The plan, "Piano Nazionale per la Scuola Digitale" (National Plan for the Digital School), is one aspect of a broader initiative promulgated by the law "La Buona Scuola" (The Good School). This law promotes the reformation of the educative public system and stresses the importance of technologies and digital devices both for students and teachers and highlights: the underlying assumption is the tools listed above should help educators to teach innovatively and learners to acquire their knowledge and

competencies in an active, innovative, creative way boosting their competitive advantage in the society.

The plan, consisting of 35 actions to digitalise the Italian school up to the year 2020, is aligned with a wider national programme which aims at promoting digitalisation at all level and domain in the Country, the Italian digital agenda strategy.

More in details, the Italian National plan for digital schools, pushes for and supports the adoption of ICT devices and tools in the daily educational activities, both for students and teachers, and therefore promote the modernisation of methods and activities through the adoption of the so called 'classroom 2.0' and 'school 2.0'. It means that schools are equipped with ICT, multimedia devices such as interactive whiteboards, tablets, smartphones, pcs, and facilities such as broadband internet connection and Wi-Fi.

The plan is quite ambitious but, it has been noticed and commented, it lacks of coordination in its implementation at regional and national level and does not foresee a preliminary training for teachers and school staff, who in many cases are the first one who should have the necessary skills to implement the digital projects, skills they lack of.

Fast internet connection is also quite an issue, considering that 53% of classroom does not have any kind of internet connection at all. The implementation of the plan is running late in the Country and the penetration of digital education is therefore sensitively slowed down: again differences persist within the areas and regions, making the situation uneven and confuse at national level and the need of a stronger coordination and centralisation of governance a fundamental aspect to tackle.

At Universities level, the teaching is usually organised based on the specialisation and sector of the subjects in question. This sectorialisation of knowledge makes difficult – or better almost impossible- the inter and multidisciplinary of digitalisation. In other words, the digital education takes place within those courses, classes, curricula which already deal with and imply digital tools, devices, technologies. Universities do offer courses of Digital Media, Digital Marketing, Digital Knowledge and Humanities, Robotics and EI, Engineering (in all its declinations), Maths, Informatics and Communications, Design, Architecture, Fashion Studies, Journalism and so on. The infusion of digital skills and knowledge is less pervasive in the other subjects and curricula because of the 'silos' described above.

*Accreditation given for Formal (FL) and Non-Formal (NFL) digital Learning and digital competencies frameworks used for young people to accredit their skills, learning and/or experiences.*

Formal education promoting digitalisation and using it as basis and part of its methodology and approach is not a homogenously spread phenomenon in Italy, as highlighted in the previous paragraphs.

Formal education provided by the State has its own accreditation system which is common for the whole country. The elementary school has duration of five years, followed by the so called middle schools -3 years- and the high school (technical, professional or 'liceo') of 5

years. The license (“*diploma*”) is widely recognised by employers and represents a prerequisite to enter University. University level courses are organised in bachelor degrees - 3 years-followed by Masters (“*Specializzazioni*”) for a total length of 5 years of studies.

Digital learning is foreseen in all those curricula with specific reference to digital skills and competencies. Non-formal education providers in terms of digital matters also have their specific system of accreditation and recognition of acquired skills by the learners, usually done through a document which certifies the reached educational achievements. The institutions with bigger dimensions and major capacities usually offer the possibility of starting internships within their partner enterprises and companies, bridging automatically the gap between the student and the potential employer.

Some non -formal digital learning is also provided through online courses: percentages of almost 20% for what concerns ICT courses are delivered as e-learning courses.

Accredited education centres offer masters, executive programmes and learning products recognised at national level and therefore fully accepted by employers.

*State of play regarding digital skills and competencies: gaps in the job market and national strategy*

The framework of competences used as reference for digital skills is the one redacted by the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre, the DigiComp 2.1 (2017).

The Italian Government, through its dedicated body, the Agency for Digital Italy, has been the first European Government to officially translate and promote the DigiComp model among the Italian citizens.

Nevertheless, the general state of play regarding digital skills and competencies in the country is worrisome: in fact, the available data show that only 44% of the population possesses basic digital skills, against an EU average of 56%.

Taking into account the five areas of competence identified by the DigiComp, the Italian citizens result differently proficient in the different areas: specifically, 72% of the population is competent in communication and collaboration through digital technologies; while 65% in information and data literacy.

It emerges that the citizens showing relevant proficiency in terms of digital skills have less than 55 years old: the youngsters are more acquainted with ICT tools and their usage and therefore perform better in terms of digital skills. The advantage of younger generations towards the ones of people aged 55 years old and more does not unfortunately impinge their choice in terms of educational path.

In fact, only 47% of Italians aged 18-34 years old, has a degree in STEM subjects, qualifying for a total of just 9% of Italians graduated in such areas.

The gap therefore exists between the employers’ requests for professionals highly skilled in ITC and the numbers of graduate students in such subjects. The skills mismatch is a reality

and the governmental initiatives, projects and plans such as “buona scuola” are trying to tackle it from their very fundamentals.

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