

# A Decent Work Policy for Youth

In the emerging sectors  
of the Blue and Green Economy

Project co-financed by



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CIES operates through the implementation of social and economic inclusion programs and contributes to the development of territories with activities and projects of Education and Training, Intercultural and Social Mediation, International Cooperation and co-development in Italy, Europe, the Mediterranean, Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans.

It builds pathways of dignity and life projects with youth, women, migrants, children, creating and activating supportive and enabling environments for such pathways with operators and actors from civil society and institutions.

## MYSEA Project

*MYSEA - Mediterranean Youth, NEETs and women advancing Skills, Employment and Awareness in the blue and green economy* is a 3.6 million euros project co-funded by the European Union (90% contribution) under the ENI CBC MED programme, implemented by CIES (Centro Informazione e Educazione allo Sviluppo Onlus) as lead partner, in cooperation with the University of Palermo and the international partners Lebanese Development Network (LDN) in Lebanon, the Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST) in Jordan, the Greek training organisation Eurotraining and the Tunisian Union of Social Solidarity (UTSS) in Tunisia.

MYSEA aims to enhance the employability of youth and women in the blue and green economy sectors, particularly in the agrifood and waste management sectors, where the demand for new professional profiles capable of managing innovative, sustainable, and eco-responsible technologies is on the rise. The European Union cares deeply about the issues of Social inclusion and Sustainability: in the South Mediterranean, one in four young people is unemployed and not engaged in training, and this framework worsens when referring to the situation of women, who are increasingly underrepresented in the workforce.

For this reason, MYSEA connects businesses in the blue and green economy, especially companies in the agrifood and waste management sectors, with the world of education and training, benefiting the youth and women of the Mediterranean who are seeking employment. The project takes on the task of providing training for new professional profiles that align with the market demands.

The project started with a in-depth analysis of the employment situation of young people and women in the 5 Mediterranean countries through a survey that collected 2365 questionnaires and interviews, which made it possible to know the current condition of NEETs, to map the stakeholders and to discover the characteristics of the economic actors in the agrifood sector and the waste management industry and to outline the situation of the education and training institutions in each country.

Based on the analysis of international research conducted in each country, and considering the information gathered on the needs of youth and women on one side, and companies and the educational system on the other, high-quality training paths have been developed to address the skills mismatch between the skills demanded by the job market in the agrifood and waste management sectors and the skills that young individuals need to acquire. This is achieved through careful coaching, mentoring, and on-the-job training.

Training, therefore, serves as a tool to help youth and women acquire sector-specific, cross-cutting, digital, and entrepreneurial skills, enabling them to become part of corporate entities with profiles aligned to the real sectoral needs.

CIES wants to play a leading role in this philosophy, which in the national and international projects it manages, promoting social, economic and cultural inclusion, with education, training, orientation and job placement paths.





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# Decent Work Policy for Youth

0. Introduction	4
1. The European and Mediterranean policy context	5
2. The Italian context and critical issues in the labor market	9
2.1 Some indicators on the Italian employment situation	9
2.2 Apprenticeships, internships and hiring incentives	13
3. The specifics of the agri-food and waste management sectors	15
3.1. A definition of the sectors under analysis	15
3.2. Specific critical issues in the sectors under analysis	18
3.3. Potential factors affecting employment trends	22
3.4. Young people and investment in employment services	25
4. An analysis of findings from MYSEA Project	27
5. Cross-cutting recommendations	32
FOCUS: National policies and regional powers for decent work - a possible coordinated action	35
Annex 1 - Summary of the main results	38

## 0. Introduction

In April 2023, in the framework of the ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin 2014-2020 program, the coordinators of MYSEA Project "Mediterranean Youth, NEETs and women advancing Skills, Employment and Awareness in the blue and green economy" published a notice for the selection of an independent third party for the implementation of a dedicated "Decent Work Policy for Youth". Prospecto Srl proposed an intervention methodology and created a working group coordinated by Dr.Fabio Croci, with the scientific and content support of Prof. Fabio Bracci and Dr.Rachele Michelacci.

This report constitutes a policy proposal document that considers the activities and results that emerged from the previous WP3, WP4 and WP5 of the project. The document includes the data obtained during the the activities and the training best practices, together with other national and European sources, as well as the results that emerged during some in-depth working groups held in collaboration with specially selected stakeholders from July to September 2023. The aim of the paper is to constitute a policy proposal that collects and provides innovative programs and recommendations to institutions and policy makers in order to contribute to the development and implementation of public policies for decent work for young people, thus fostering sustainable job placement processes and career paths.

In this regard, it is worth recalling the objectives of the project itself:

*As a medium-term goal, MYSEA Project intends to stimulate stakeholders and civil society actors, policy makers, companies and training institutions to reduce the gap ("skills gap") between the skills required by the labor market and those offered by training centers by providing solutions in terms of innovative training curricula for the agri-food and waste management sectors, adopting methodologies, training plans and strategies useful for this purpose and emerging from the vocational training experience of MYSEA Project.*

The first paragraph provides a thematic insight into the European and Mediterranean context regarding labor policies and their dynamics with respect to the main contemporary critical issues.

The second section discusses these relevant questions in more detail in relation to the Italian context, which shows some matters of concern with respect to young people and female employment.

After the European and Italian frames have been clarified, the specifics of the agri-food and waste management sectors are addressed in the third section, which also defines the main characteristics of these relevant sectors.

The fourth section summarizes some of the findings that emerged from MYSEA Project, including feedback collected from selected stakeholders.

In the fifth section, the findings from the previous sections are reworked into some specific recommendations to be implemented at the local and regional levels.

The conclusion of the paper is a final annex summarizing the main findings that have emerged, which can also serve as a quick and easy reference for policy makers and stakeholders to whom the project itself is addressed.

Finally, it is important to note that this paper is closely related to the *Skills Development Agenda* report, which was developed in the framework of the same project in order to explore specific criticalities and challenges of vocational training in the agri-food and waste management sectors. Together, the two documents are intended to offer an updated and comprehensive view with respect to the issues of training and employability in the Italian context, proposing specific recommendations and points of attention to stakeholders and policy makers.

# 1. The European and Mediterranean policy context

The European labor law regulates basic transnational standards of employment and business partnership both in the European Union and in countries that signed the European Convention on Human Rights. By establishing a level playing field for job-creating investments within the Union and promoting a degree of worker consultation in the workplace, the European labor law is considered a pillar of the "European social model". Pursuant to Article 153(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the EU can use the ordinary legislative procedure for a list of areas of labor law. The four main areas of labor rights regulation by the EU include individual labor rights, anti-discrimination standards, rights to information, consultation and participation at work, and labor security rights. The fundamental principle of labor law is that the unequal bargaining power of workers justifies replacing property and contract rules with positive social rights so that people can earn a living to participate fully in a democratic society. EU competencies generally follow the principles codified in the 1989 Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, introduced in the "social chapter" of the Maastricht Treaty.

Unlike policies on training, however, there are wide differences among member states in employment protection and related social benefits. In fact, since its establishment, the European Union has historically been dedicated to transnational mobility of workers, focusing on transnational recognition of qualifications and respect for workers' fundamental rights. The result is that the Union has historically influenced the issue of employability mainly through indirect actions, which we can simplify as follows:

1. An ongoing effort to benchmark the effectiveness of labor policies in each member state
2. A specific State Aid regulation with exemption clauses on employment incentives and continuing training for worker
3. The financing of active labor policies through structural funds (e.g. the European Social Fund), and to a lesser but still significant extent through direct funds (in particular, EaSI funds - Employment and Social Innovation Program and REC - Rights, Equality and Citizenship).

The abovementioned areas also find correspondence with the organizational structures of the Union, with particular reference to the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion<sup>1</sup>, whose responsibilities include:

- Workers' mobility
- Strategies for the disabled
- The "European Employment Strategy," in particular: Employment Package; Inclusion of migrants from non-EU countries; Youth employment; Support for entrepreneurs and the self-employed; Long-term unemployment; Rights at work
- Social rights (Rights at work, Occupational health and safety, Fighting discrimination at work)
- Social protection and social integration
- Competences and qualifications
- Social dialogue
- Analysis of employment and social situation
- Fundings

The Union has also equipped itself with numerous support bodies for analyzing and monitoring these issues:

- Social Situation Monitor<sup>2</sup>
- EEPO - European Employment Policy Observatory
- Eurofund<sup>3</sup> - European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
- Cedefop<sup>4</sup> - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

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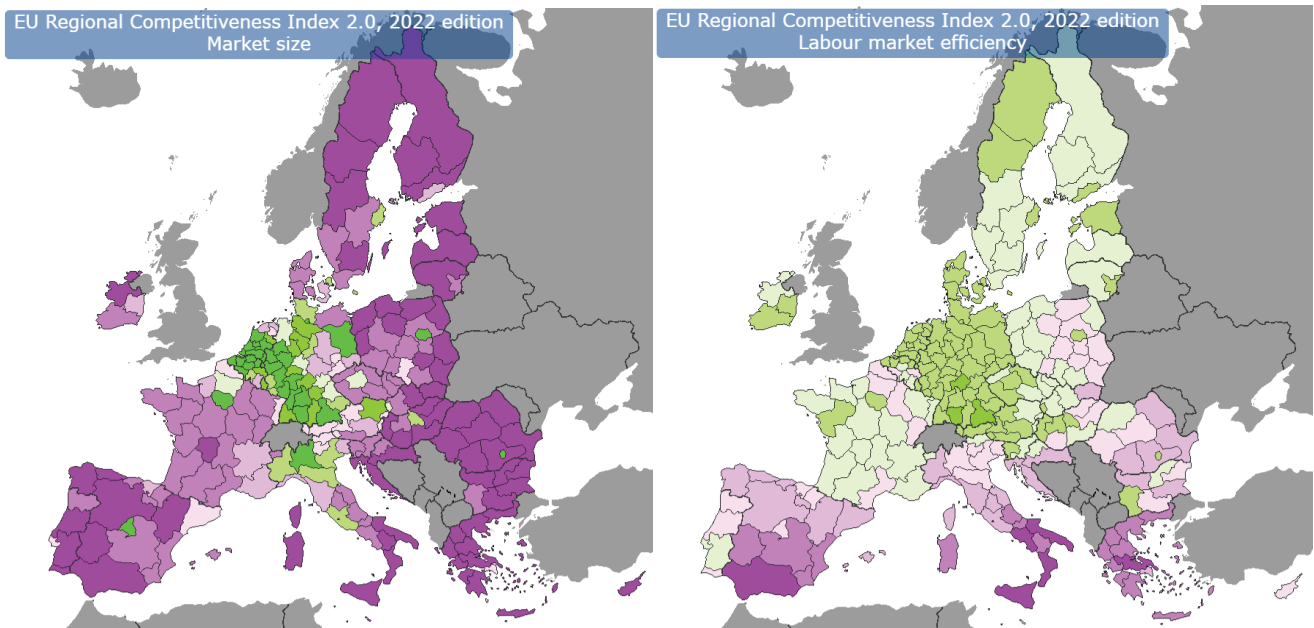
1. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/home.jsp>

2. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1049>

3. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/home>

4. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu>

Consistent with the powers given to European institutions, the Union is particularly concerned with aspects of active labor policies, especially from a transnational perspective. There are, of course, numerous analyses and statistics related to the employment systems adopted by various European countries. Among them, the following two are the aggregate indicators of regional competitiveness<sup>5</sup>, related to the economic environment (market size) and labor market efficiency



Thus, the European internal cohesion goals are still highly relevant to current employment and labor policies. Many of the European goals on this issue have already been covered in depth in the *Skills Development Agenda* report, which we recommend reading for completeness purposes. As for the youth, the European Pillar of Social Rights identifies specific and relevant issues regarding this target group:

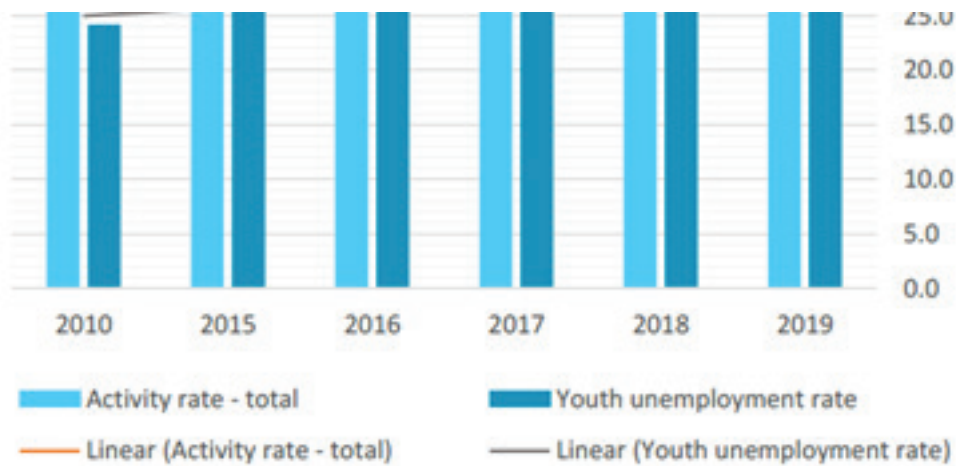
*“Special attention needs to be devoted to young people and the low skilled, who are more vulnerable to the fluctuations in the labour market. They need additional support because: many worked in the sectors most affected by the pandemic such as tourism; others, after finishing their studies, had fewer opportunities to enter the labour market for the first time; and others had to interrupt their education or training and could not obtain their qualifications as planned”.*

Attention is also paid to the issue of gender discrimination at the work:

*“Efforts are particularly urgent to address gender-based stereotypes and discrimination. Despite progress in the last decade, the employment rate and pay levels of women still lag behind those of men. Women continue to be seriously underrepresented in decision-making positions, especially in senior management functions and in corporate boardrooms [...] Alongside this Action Plan, the Commission is proposing a Directive to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency measures and enforcement mechanisms”.*

Extending the scenario to SEMED (Southern and Eastern Mediterranean) countries, ETF's 2022 policy report offers a concerning representation of NEET employment through 2019. The most up-to-date indicators are not available to date, but various studies suggest further aggravation of these indicators due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/information-sources/maps/regional-competitiveness\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/maps/regional-competitiveness_en)



With respect to the ENI CBC Med cooperation area, all countries (except Israel) are found to have NEET rates stably above 25 percent (and in the case of Tunisia and Jordan above 30 percent) from 2015 onward.

*In general, SEMED countries are middle-income countries with challenging socioeconomic contexts, characterised by high demographic pressure (a significant share of young people in the total population) and modest economic growth with very high volatility and large regional variations. Global competitiveness, innovation capacity, technological readiness and export diversification remain limited in the region. [...] Despite all the efforts deployed by governments, the labour market in the Arab Mediterranean countries (AMCs3) is characterised by low levels of activity and employment rates, especially for young people, limited participation of women, a large and expanding informal sector, a relatively high level of emigration in general and of educated persons in particular (brain drain), and an influx of refugees and foreign workers (mainly, though not exclusively, in Lebanon and Jordan). This situation (inactivity, unemployment, migration and the informal sector) increases the risk of human capital depletion. While this risk covers all AMCs, its level varies among countries and population groups: young people, women and rural populations are the most exposed.<sup>6</sup>*

*Returning to European policies, it is important to recall the recent initiative in support of the minimum wage, implementing Principle 6 of the European Pillar of Social Rights in Chapter II, according to which workers are entitled to a fair wage that provides a decent standard of living. By means of a Council Directive dated October 4, 2022, the European Union established new rules that promote the adequacy of legal minimum wages and help improve living and working conditions for workers in Europe. Indeed, there are large differences among member states in the percentage of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements and the level of minimum wages, in part because of the very different labor market patterns and income levels in member states. The directive introduced new EU rules on:<sup>7</sup>*

- procedures for setting and updating the adequacy of legal minimum wages
- promotion of collective bargaining on wage determination
- effective access to the protection provided by the minimum wage for workers who are entitled to it under national law.

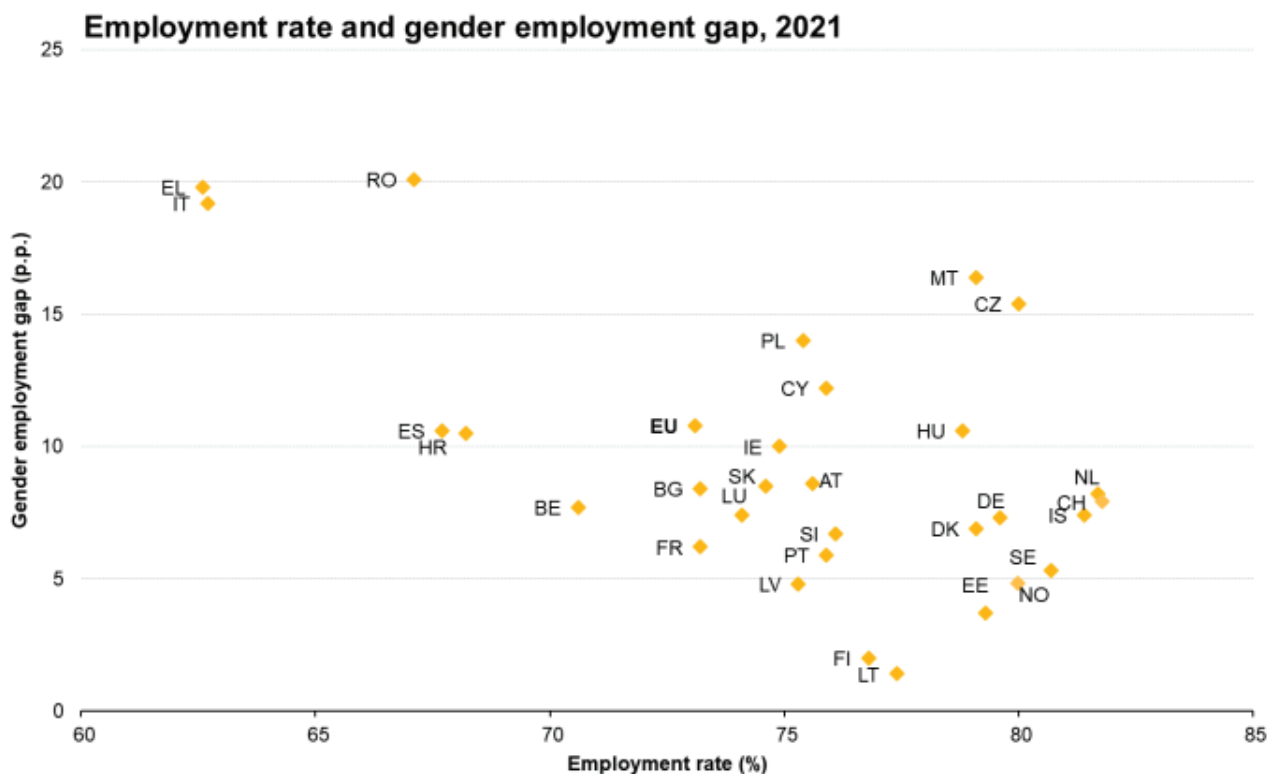
6. ETF: *Human Capital Development in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean: an Imperative for Vocational Education and Training*, 2021  
 7. See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/adequate-minimum-wages/>



Specifically, the directive calls on member states where legal minimum wages are required to establish a framework for setting and updating them according to clear and predefined criteria. Legal minimum wages shall be updated at least every two years (or at most every four years for countries using an automatic indexation mechanism). Of course, the directive does not prescribe a specific minimum wage level that member states must achieve, as it aims to strengthen the role of collective bargaining.

Finally, a complementary theme concerns gender policies to protect women's employment. At the European level, women remain underrepresented in the labor market. In 2021, 67.7 percent of women were employed, while male employment stood at 78.5 percent. Thus, there is still a gender employment gap of 10.8 percent, which has decreased only slightly over the past 10 years (-1.9 percent)<sup>8</sup>. Although more women are participating in the labor market, most of them are still bearing the burden of private and caring responsibilities and unpaid work. Increased working hours for women usually do not lead to a more balanced sharing of domestic and care work between women and men. As a result, when combining the amount of time spent on unpaid work (daily and domestic work, including caregiving), overall women work more. At the same time, women are becoming more qualified: more women than men have a university degree in Europe. However, because of care responsibilities, many women do not feel free in their choice of work or do not get the same job opportunities as men. For the same reason, women are more likely than men to work part-time.<sup>9</sup>

Overall, women earn on average less than men per hour. The gender pay gap stood at 13.0 percent in the EU-27 in 2020 and has only decreased by 2.8 percentage points since 2010. Several factors contribute to this gap: women's different work patterns, often related to their career breaks or changing working arrangements to take care of a child or other relatives, gender segregation in low-paid sectors, part-time employment, etc. Some women are even paid less than men for the same work.<sup>10</sup> Among the countries with the largest gender employment gaps (i.e. greater than or equal to 15 percentage points) the employment rates in Greece (62.6 percent), Italy (62.7 percent) and Romania (67.1 percent) are lower than the EU average.



Source: Eurostat (online data code: lfsi\_emp\_a)



8. OECD's data on gender equality: <https://www.oecd.org/gender/>

9. Eurostat gender statistics web page: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_statistics)

10. See Eurostat statistics as periodically revised by the European Commission:

## 2. The Italian context and critical issues in the labor market

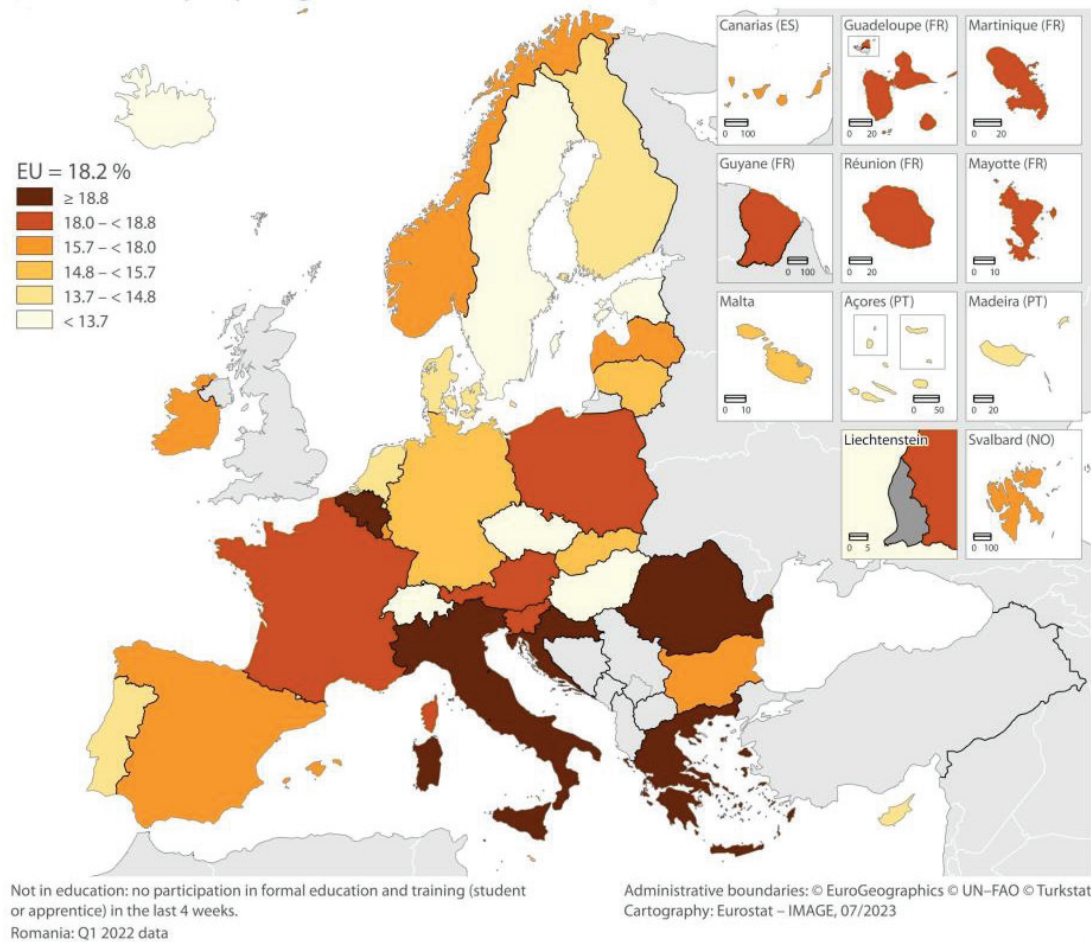
### 2.1 Some indicators on the Italian employment situation

Nowadays, Italy constitutes one of the countries of greatest concern in employment and training, especially in comparison to the economic weight the country maintains in the European context. Some indicators can help to represent these critical issues effectively.

Among EU countries, Romania and Italy had the highest share of people not in education and outside the labor force in the first quarter of 2023, with 25.8 percent and **25.6 percent** respectively. This was followed by Greece (22.8 percent), Croatia (21.8 percent) and Belgium (19.6 percent)<sup>11</sup>.

#### People not in education and outside the labour force, Q1 2023

(in % of total people aged 15-64 not in education)

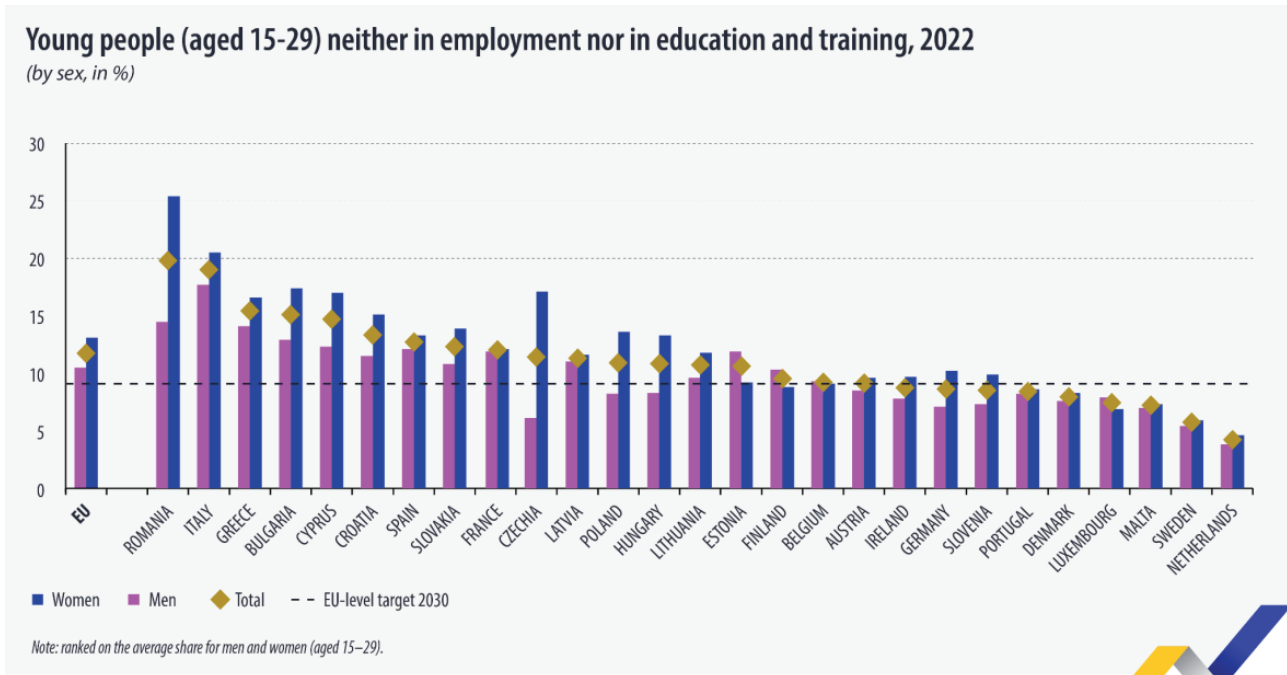


As for NEETs (Young people neither in employment nor in education and training, reference age: 15-29) Italy ranks second<sup>12</sup> with 19 percent, and it also recorded the highest NEET rate for men<sup>13</sup> (17.70 percent).

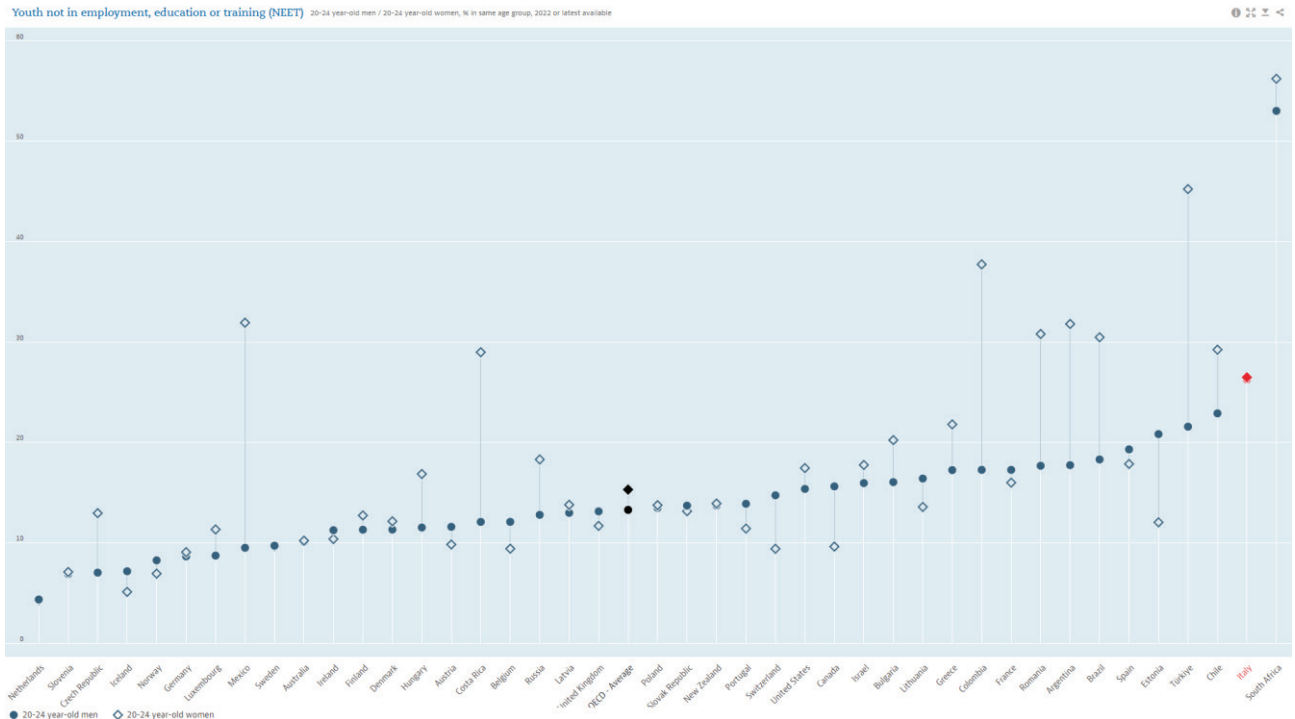
11. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230705-1>

12. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230526-3>

13. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDAT\\_LFSE\\_20\\_\\_custom\\_6147662/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=2d6514f8-8bbb-44a9-b9bd-79cf36ae6d39](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDAT_LFSE_20__custom_6147662/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=2d6514f8-8bbb-44a9-b9bd-79cf36ae6d39)

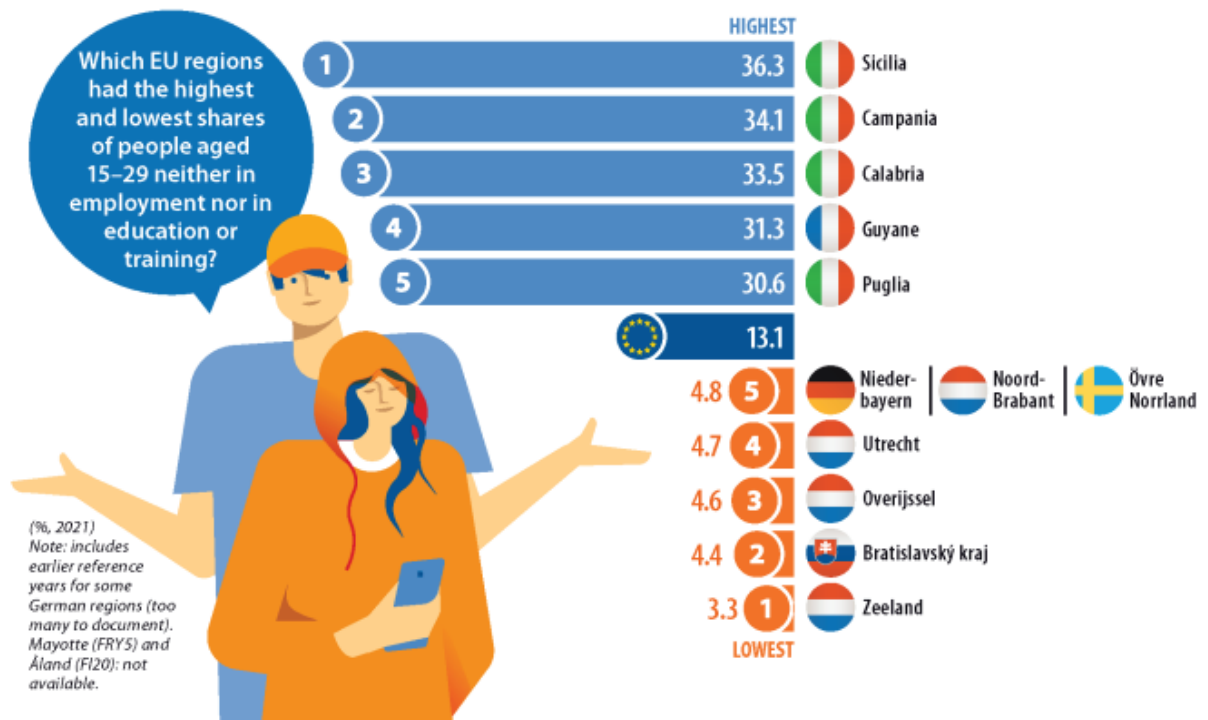


Another clear insight<sup>14</sup> is provided by OECD statistics, which disaggregated the data on the 20-24 age group and revealed how Italy is by far the country with the worst indicator not only from a European perspective, but also in comparison with most of the countries surveyed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.



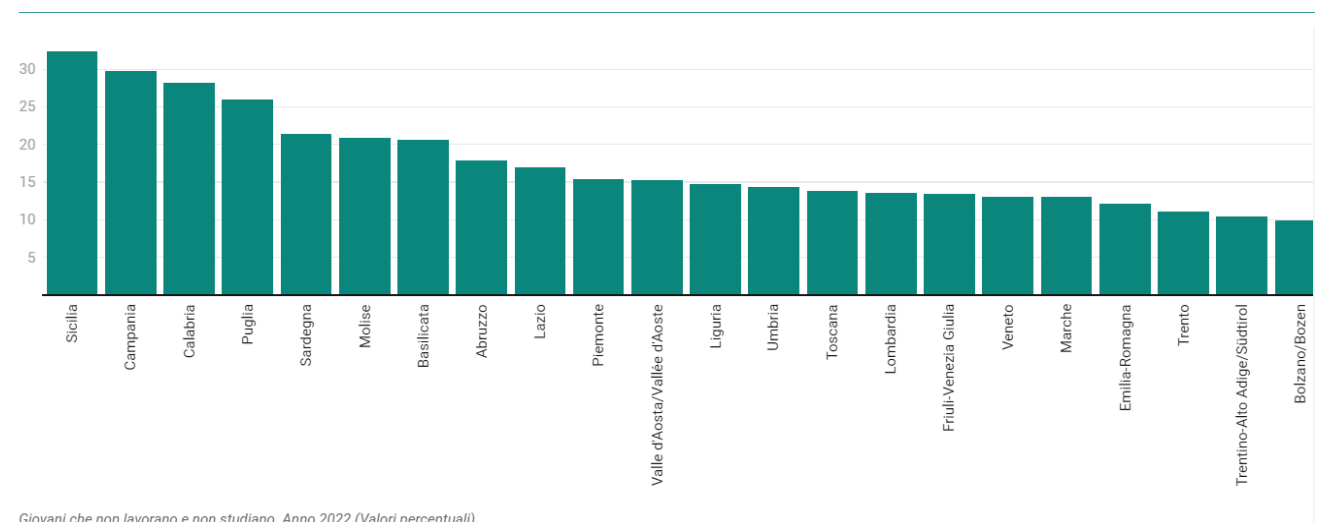
14. <https://data.oecd.org/youthinac/youth-not-in-employment-education-or-training-neet.htm>

Further disaggregation of regional data shows the country's internal differences, a situation which has no equal in the European context. If we take the NUTS 2 territorial level as a reference, we will find Sicily, Campania, Calabria and Puglia<sup>15</sup> among the top 5 European regions with the highest percentage of NEETs.



Although the data show substantial improvements in 2022, the domestic gap continues to range from a 26.4 percent NEETs rate in Sicily to 8.7 percent in the Autonomous Province of Trento (Lazio region is at 13.7 percent). With a national NEET average of 15.9 percent, Italy shows differences between the south (21.5 percent) and the north (11.2 percent for the northeast and 12.5 percent for the northwest), while still remaining above the EU-27 average of 9.6 percent. Indeed, these indicators are challenging in view of the EU-2030 goal of reducing the NEETs' rate below 9 percent.

· GIOVANI CHE NON LAVORANO E NON STUDIANO. ANNO 2022 (VALORI PERCENTUALI)

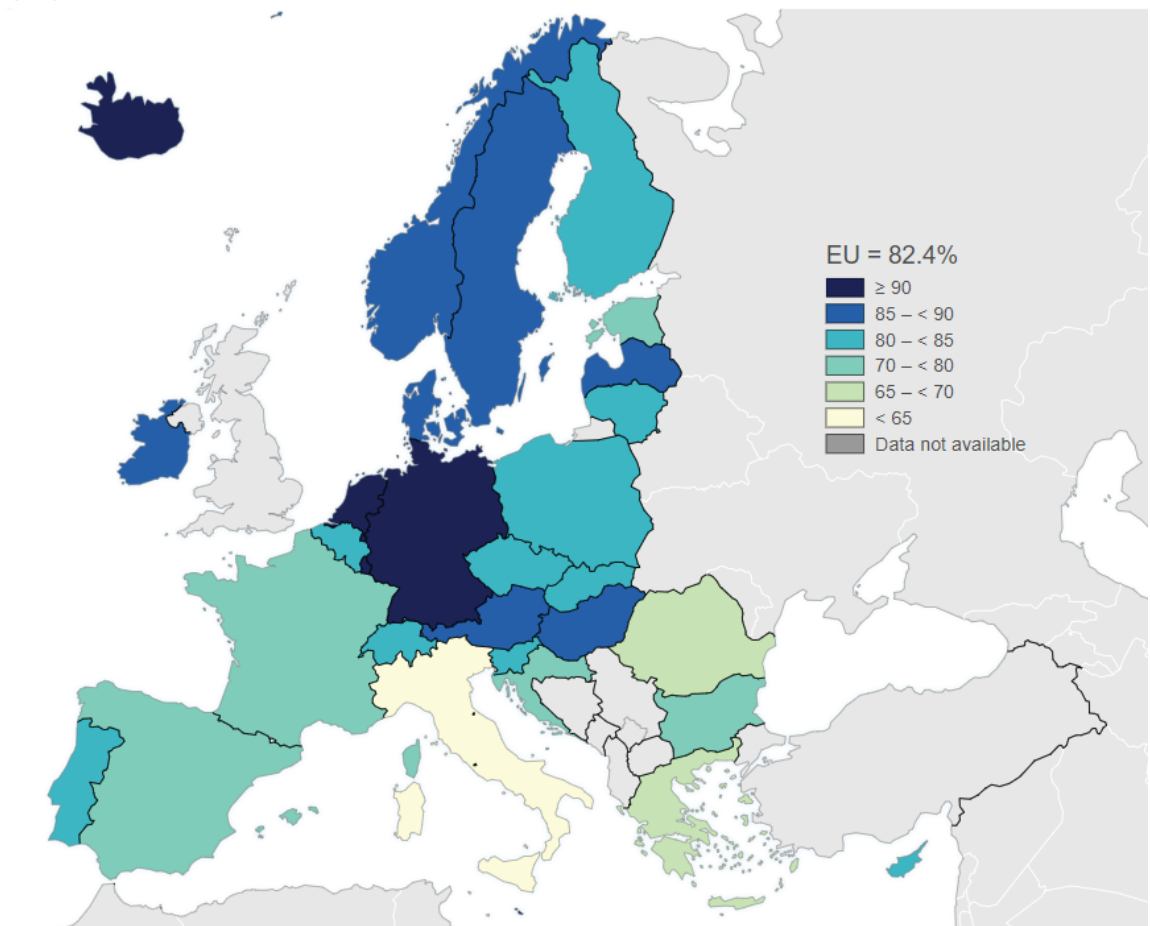


15. Data regarding 2021.

In order to provide a complete Italian scenario, people outside the labor market should also be taken into consideration. The Italian case is emblematic, as people who are not actively looking for work, (despite declaring themselves available for employment) total nearly 2.3 million in 2022, compared with a European total of nearly 5.7 million. In other words, in the age group of 20 to 64, more than 40 percent of Europeans that are in this situation are Italians (consider that the Italian population is just over 13 percent of the European total). If we go deeper into the NEETs case, we find that in the 15-29 age group, those who are not actively looking for a job (despite declaring themselves available for employment) are 6.8 percent of the total population (compared to an EU 27 average of 2.9 percent).

It is useful to recall how the country’s critical situation also affects people with high qualifications, as shown by statistics regarding employment rates of recent graduates: Italy stands at 65.2 percent, compared with the European average of 82.4 percent and Germany’s result at 92.2 percent.

### Employment rates of recent graduates aged 20–34, 2022 (%)



Recent graduates: people who completed their highest education level (at least ISCED 3) 1-3 years ago and are not in further studies. Spain and France: definition differs.

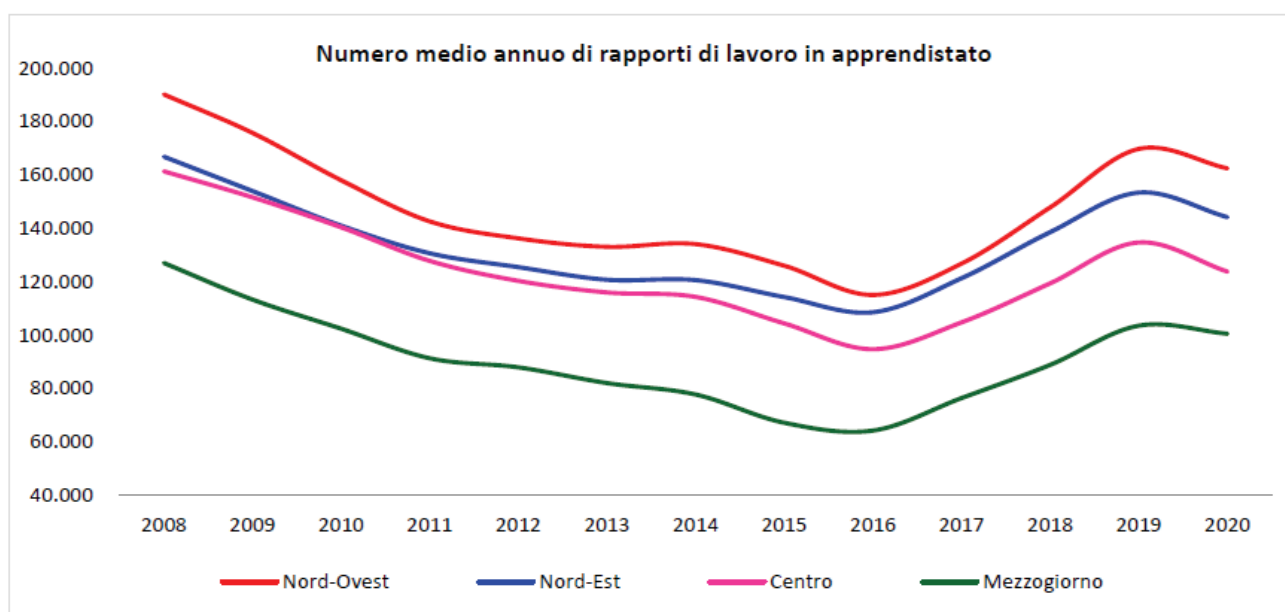
Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © Turksta  
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 06/2023



## 2.2. Apprenticeships, internships and hiring incentives

In the critical employment context described so far, however, there are some important tools aimed at fostering youth employment.

An **apprenticeship** contract is an open-ended employment contract aimed at youth training and employment (thus, a “mixed” contract) with a duration of not less than six months. The apprenticeship contract provides for a mandatory period of training, and in Italy the use of this instrument is encouraged through important economic and contribution benefits for companies. Therefore, it appears to be the ideal tool for fostering youth employment, although its cost-effectiveness may not meet its training value. Evaluating the effectiveness of the apprenticeship is thus an extremely complex issue, especially if one shifts the focus beyond immediate hiring, and delves into how this contractual arrangement succeeds in providing recipients with the appropriate skills for lasting, quality employment. There are not many comparative assessments at the European level<sup>16</sup> at least from a systematic point of view, primarily because of the different interpretation and implementation that apprenticeship has in each country<sup>17</sup>. This is also due to the different initiatives that each state takes in the area of incentives<sup>18</sup>. Finally, the scope of application of apprenticeship contracts is variable, even within the same country, as it happens in Italy, where there are three different types of apprenticeships, which in turn can provide for different levels of institutional involvement (e.g., in case of Level I apprenticeships, regions can provide policy guidance and incentive systems, and external training is offered as part of vocational apprenticeships). From an employment perspective, statistics show that Italian apprenticeships are strongly linked to incentive schemes, which have seen a growth since 2017, after parallel incentive schemes were reduced in favor of permanent contracts<sup>19</sup>.



The **internship training**<sup>20</sup> is a labor policy tool that has seen greater differentiation on a regional basis, largely due to the different incentive schemes adopted in each local context<sup>21</sup>.

16. Cedefop, *Apprenticeship schemes in European countries*, 2018.

17. See Markowitsch and Wittig, *Understanding differences between apprenticeship programmes in Europe: towards a new conceptual framework for the changing notion of apprenticeship*, 2020.

18. See Cedefop, Database on financing apprenticeships in the EU: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/financing-apprenticeships>

19. INAPP, *L'andamento dell'apprendistato nella crisi pandemica. XX Rapporto di monitoraggio*. 2022.

20. Reference is made here to the so-called "extracurricular internship," which is a period of training in a work setting. This type of internship is regulated by the regions and autonomous provinces; however, common minimum standards are defined at the national level, which are described in the "Guidelines on internships."

21. It should be recalled here that regional competencies in vocational training derive from the constitutional reform of Title V, which identifies a shared competence between the state and the regions in the matter (Art. 117 Const.). At the same time, regional resources for internships derive largely from the European Social Fund, with respect to which each region constitutes itself as a managing authority independent of the others, with its own operational programs and related choices.

On a national basis, the three-year period 2019-2021 saw a total of more than 780,000 people involved in internship activities, reflecting the scope of the tool especially with respect to the youth target audience, as nearly 77 percent of interns were under the age of 30.

National guidelines of 2017 provide for a minimum expenditure reimbursement of 300 euros per month, but as ANPAL (the Italian National Agency for Active Employment Policies) argues, *"most regions have considered a minimum monthly amount of between 400 and 500 euros to be fair, but there are cases of lower or higher allowances: on the one hand, Sicily and the Province of Trento have chosen to adopt the minimum amount of 300 euros established by the Guidelines; on the other hand, Abruzzo and Piedmont have set a minimum of 600 euros per month. The Lazio Region has established a minimum allowance of 800 euros per month, becoming a unique case in Italy. Given the legitimate right of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces to set the minimum amount they deem most appropriate, it appears clear that such sharp differences still pose a problem: for example, for the same training project, a trainee doing an internship in Sicily will receive an allowance that is as much as 500 euros less than a trainee doing the same activities in the Lazio Region."* More generally, *"what emerges from the analysis of regional legislation is an overall picture in which inhomogeneity on some particularly important issues still remains, such as on the distinction between types of internships, the maximum duration of internships and the amount of the attendance allowance"*.

There are further differences with respect to the possible incentive forms of the various regions, which in many cases provide a partial or total reimbursement. The schemes vary considerably from region to region and are not continuous, due to the fact that they are mainly financed by the European Social Fund<sup>22</sup>.

**Hiring incentives** are also relevant, as they are the object of both national and regional programs. Through the National Directory of Employment Incentives, ANPAL requested to streamline the information available on this matter, however, there is still much uncertainty regarding the effectiveness and the employment impact of the various forms of incentives with respect to their targets. An evident weakness is identified in a fragmented evaluation system, which is predominantly linked to the evaluations of individual ROPs and NOPs of the Structural Funds, making it difficult to give a complete picture representing the results achieved by individual instruments. According to recent studies conducted by INAPP<sup>23</sup>, *"public policies based on tax incentives designed erga omnes or with weak eligibility criteria may not meet the economic and social outcomes for which they are designed,"* since *"even if 59-60% of companies took advantage of incentive schemes, these policies ended up causing a loss from the point of view of the public budget, since they financed hirings and investments that would have been made anyway."*

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22. These and the following data are taken from INAPP, *Terzo rapporto di monitoraggio nazionale in materia di tirocini extracurriculari*, 2022.

23. INAPP, *Competitività e mercato del lavoro: alcune evidenze per le politiche pubbliche*. 2022

### 3. The specifics of the agri-food and waste management sectors

#### 3.1. A definition of the sectors under analysis

The Italian National Institute for Public Policy Analysis (INAPP) analyzes employment dynamics and future prospects in each economic sectors in Italy. This work also provides a foresight of occupational needs in various sectors, which is a very useful tool for investigation and assessment. In the case of the topics covered by MYSEA Project, however, it is essential to identify the relevant sectors by comparing the Italian ATECO coding system with occupation classifications. As a matter of fact, INAPP proposes a clear separation between the agricultural sector and the food and beverage sector, which are also examined in two different reports. As for agriculture, a total of 12 ATECO sectors are identified:

Code	Description
<b>1</b>	<b>Crop and animal production, hunting and related service activities</b>
1.1	Cultivation of non-food agricultural crops
1.2	Growing of perennial crops
1.3	Plant propagation
1.4	Animal production
1.5	Mixed farming
1.6	Support activities to agriculture and post-harvest crop activities
1.7	Hunting, trapping and related service activities
<b>2</b>	<b>Forestry and logging</b>
2.1	Silviculture and other forestry activities
2.2	Logging
2.3	Gathering of wild growing non-wood products
2.4	Support services to forestry
<b>3</b>	<b>Fishing and aquaculture</b>
3.2	Aquaculture

INAPP then identifies a separate list of ATECO codes in the food sector:

Code	Description
<b>10</b>	<b>Manufacture of food products</b>
10.1	Processing and preserving of meat and production of meat products
10.2	Processing and preserving of fish, crustaceans and molluscs
10.3	Processing and preserving of fruit and vegetables
10.4	Manufacture of vegetable and animal oils and fats
10.5	Manufacture of dairy products
10.6	Manufacture of grain mill products, starches and starch products
10.7	Manufacture of bakery and farinaceous products
10.8	Manufacture of other food products
10.9	Manufacture of prepared animal feeds
<b>11</b>	<b>Manufacture of beverages</b>
11.1	Distilling, rectifying and blending of spirits
11.2	Manufacture of wine from grape
11.3	Manufacture of cider and other fruit wines
11.4	Manufacture of other non-distilled fermented beverages
11.5	Manufacture of beer
11.6	Manufacture of malt
11.7	Manufacture of soft drinks; production of mineral waters and other bottled waters
<b>12</b>	<b>Manufacture of tobacco products</b>
12.1	Manufacture of tobacco products



In its analyses of employment dynamics<sup>24</sup>, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) proposes indicators that aggregate both agriculture and the processing of agricultural products, in some cases even identifying the micro-sectors of logistics and transportation specifically dedicated to the food sector:

Categories	ISIC divisions	ISIC codes – Rev.4	ISIC codes – Rev.3
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	Agriculture	01	01
	Forestry and logging	02	02
	Fishing	03	05
Food processing and services	Manufacture of food products	10	15
	Manufacture of beverages	11	
	Food and beverage service activities	56	
	Undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of private households for own use	98	96
Manufacture of non-food agricultural products	Manufacture of tobacco products	12	16
	Manufacture of textiles	13	17
	Manufacture of leather and related products	15	19
	Manufacture of wood and of products from wood and cork, except furniture	16	20
	Manufacture of paper and paper products	17	21

Further differences can be noticed in the occupational profiles under analysis with respect to labor market dynamics and training needs.

With respect to its own skills forecast analyses, CEDEFOP proposes a rather broad definition:

*“The agri-food sector is the combination of activities undertaken in the agriculture and food manufacturing sectors with links to the wholesale and retail distribution of food and drink. The sector includes agriculture, horticulture, and food and drink processing and also activities in their value chains, ranging from agricultural production to food manufacture and consumption. Wholesale and retail trade of food and drink, although more loosely connected, are sometimes viewed as part of agri-food.”<sup>25</sup>*

The economic sector of waste management and recycling deserves a different focus, as it ranges from collection, treatment and recycling preparation activities to the demand aspect, which includes the marketing of used products and the manufacture of recycled materials. In 2018, INAPP proposed a definition of this sector, taking as a reference the classification used by Fondazione Symbola in the 2015 Waste End Report<sup>26</sup> and then presenting a cross-sector reclassification by ATECO sectors. In general, the following supply chains are identified:

- WASTE COLLECTION AND TREATMENT SECTOR (ATECO 38.11 and 38.21)
- RECYCLING PREPARATION SECTOR (ATECO 38.3 and 46.77)
- REUSE INDUSTRY AND RECYCLING INDUSTRY (for the purposes of their classification, these activities are taken in consideration in the same way as the ATECO codes for the production, processing and marketing of raw materials)

Due to the difficulties in giving a specific definition of the last supply chain, INAPP focused its analysis only on the first two "traditional" supply chains, for which it has identified the most common occupations and their impact on the sector:

CP 2011	Description	Empl. rate in the sector
<b>Waste Collection, Treatment and Disposal Sector (Ateco 38.11 +38.21)</b>		
8145	Sanitation workers and other waste collectors and separators	52%
7423	Drivers of heavy vehicles and trucks	12%
7162	Operators of waste recovery and recycling and water treatment and distribution facilities	4%
4112	General affairs officers	3%
7421	Taxi drivers, drivers of cars, vans and other vehicles	2%
3312	Accountants and related professions	2%
3183	Environmental control and remediation technicians	2%
4114	Personnel -management workers	2%
<b>Recycling Preparation Sector (Ateco 38.31 +38.32+46.77)</b>		
8145	Sanitation workers and other waste collectors and separators	17%
7423	Drivers of heavy vehicles and trucks	12%
8431	Unskilled personnel in industrial and related occupations	10%
7162	Operators of waste recovery and recycling and water treatment and distribution facilities	6%
3312	Accountants and related professions	4%
1312	Firms and managers of small businesses engaged in mineral extraction, manufacturing, production and distribution of electricity, gas and water, and waste management activities	4%
7443	Crane and lifting equipment drivers	3%
7233	Operators of machinery for the manufacture of plastic and assimilated articles	3%
4112	General affairs officers	3%
4312	Warehouse management workers and assimilated professions	3%

This preliminary examination of the complexities of the sectors under analysis shows the critical issues that may arise when data and results are aggregated by the various research institutions that are mentioned in this document.

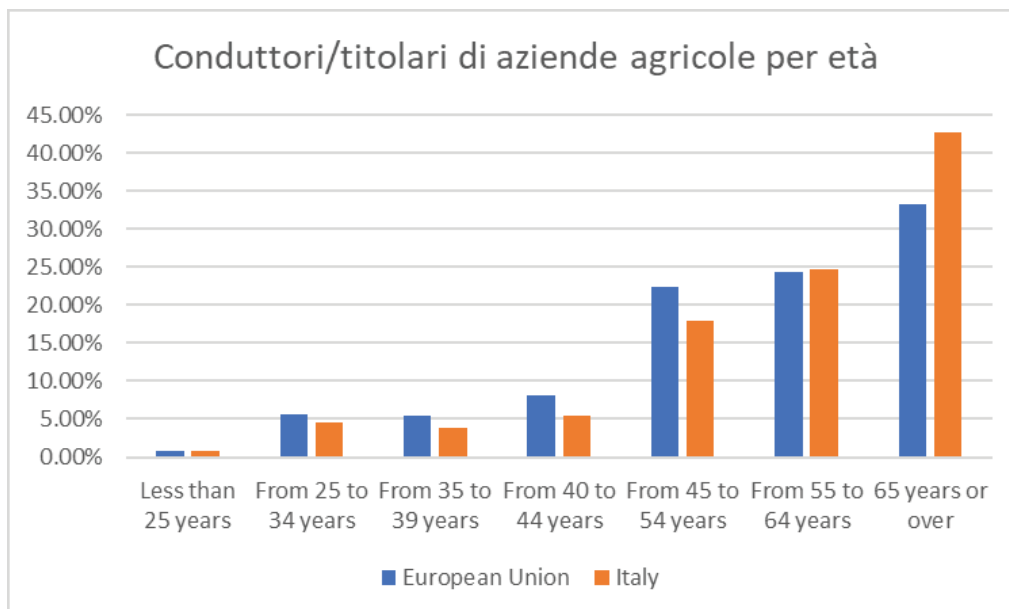
24. See as an example: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Estimating Global And Country-Level Employment In Agrifood Systems*, 2023

25. CEDEFOP. *Growing green. How vocational education and training can drive the green transition in agri-food*. Policy Brief. 2023.

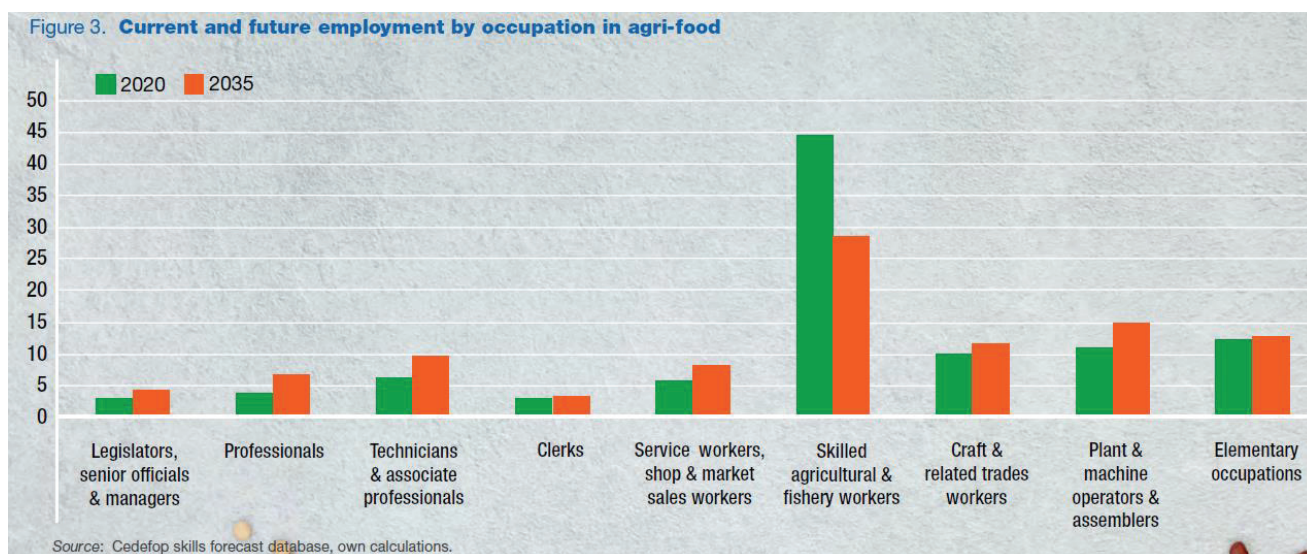
26. Fondazione Symbola (2015), "Waste End. Economia circolare, nuova frontiera del made in Italy", I Quaderni di Symbola

## 3.2. Specific critical issues in the sectors under analysis

Having regard to Eurostat data, CEDEFOP proposed an aggregation of agri-food sectors, also pointing out that the sector provided employment for about 13.6 million people in the EU-27 in 2019, accounting for about 7 percent of EU employment. It is also worth mentioning how, over the past 30 years, Europe's position in the world food production has increasingly changed in favor of high value-added products (wine, cheese, highly processed products, etc.). Generational turnover is also a main critical issue, as in 2020 only one in three business leaders was 40 years old or younger.<sup>27</sup>



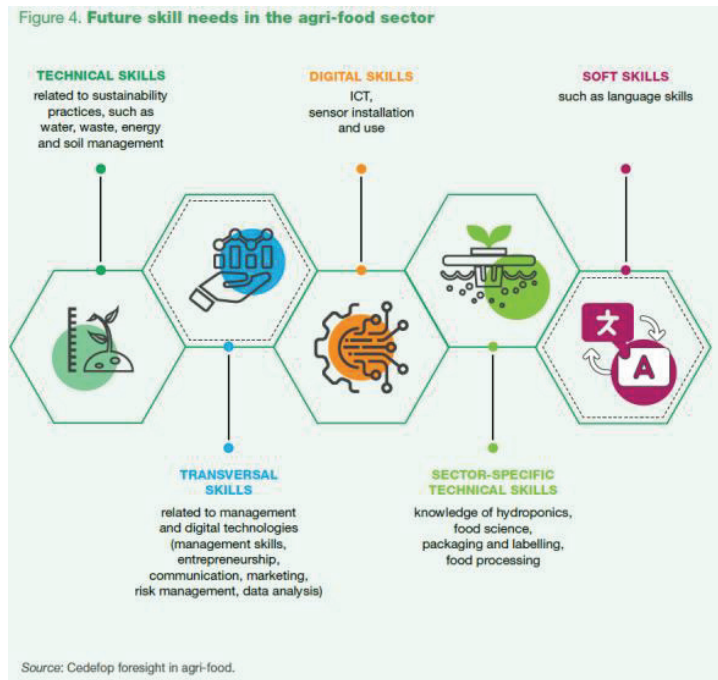
The recent crises related to Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine have further stressed the entire industry, moreover accelerating trends that were already underway in terms of, for example, innovations to reduce energy costs and the introduction of advanced technologies to increase efficiency and reduce environmental impacts. Previous automation of routine activities such as fruit picking and crop surveying have had a negative impact on employment, mainly replacing low-skilled jobs. Employment is expected to continue to decline, despite increases in some occupations<sup>28</sup>.



27. Source: internal study of Eurostat's data (ef\_m\_farmang)

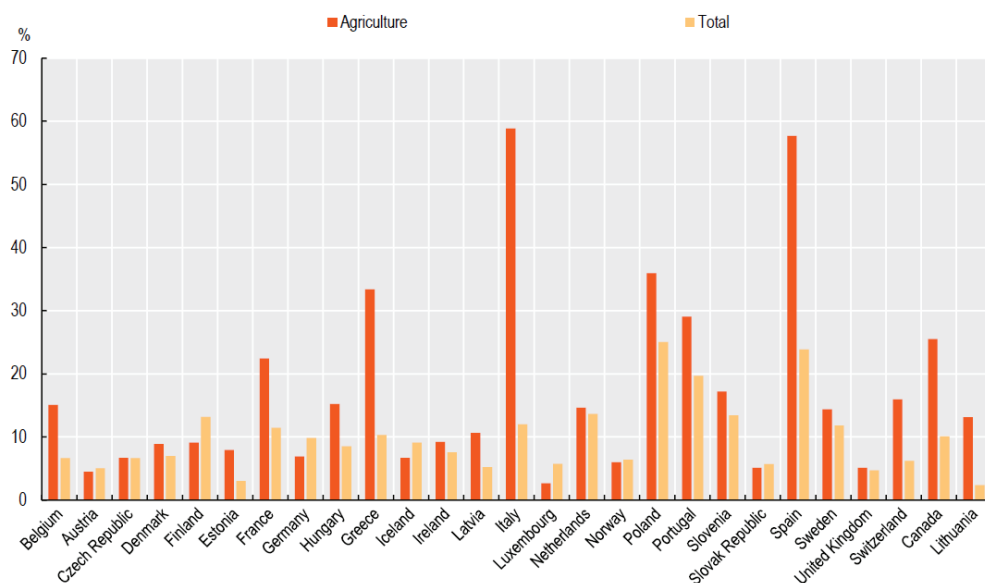
28. This is a forecast by Cedefop. The full report on agri-food sector skills foresight is now being prepared.

The adoption of new technologies in the agribusiness sector will result in increased demand for advanced digital and technological skills. The challenges faced by this sector require a multidisciplinary response from training systems. The demand for people qualified in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) will increase, with a specific focus on biology, biochemistry, and chemistry; engineering and IT skills for Agriculture 4.0 and continuous-flow processes in food production will also increase. Many of these skills will be high-level and deployed in managerial and professional occupations. Not only technical professionals (such as engineers, computer and data scientists, agronomists, biochemists, meteorologists, and statisticians), but also sales and export-related professions will become increasingly important in shaping the future of the industry.



A further critical issue in relation to the agri-food sector is due to the high rate of seasonality of processing, with Italy and Spain recording the highest values. A recent OECD publication<sup>29</sup> found that nearly 60 percent of the agricultural labor force in Italy and Spain is temporary, compared to less than 25 percent in the total of all sectors.

Percentage of all employees in each industry



29. OECD, *Labour and Skills Shortages in the Agro-Food Sector*. 2023

The sector of agriculture continues to see a gradual decrease in the number of active farms and the labor force employed. While confirming the predominance of family labor force, as opposed to non-family workers, the ISTAT Census of 2020<sup>30</sup> highlights that Italian agriculture is adopting more structured forms of management, including salaried labor. Compared to 2010, the total labor force in 2020 decreased by 28.8 percent in terms of people and 14.4 percent in terms of standard workdays. Over the decade, the incidence of work performed by non-family labor force increased significantly: in 2020, it accounted for 47.0 percent of the total number of people engaged in agricultural activities (nearly 2.8 million), compared with 24.2 percent in 2010, accounting for 32.0 percent of total standard workdays (about 214 million), a 37.5% increase over 2010. The amount of family workforce halved from 2010 to 2020, while the number of farms decreased by about 30 percent. In contrast, the amount of time dedicated to work increased significantly: the number of standard workdays per capita increased from 68, in 2010, to 100 in 2020. The most common type of non-family labor is occasional and constitutes 32% of the entire labor force. Seasonal workers and those who are involved in a single stage of the production make a small contribution in terms of standard workdays per capita, amounting to 41 nationwide. In contrast, employed labor force (which accounts for only 26.8 percent of non-family labor) provides the largest contribution of annual workdays per capita (90), even though it does not reach the level reported for family labor (100).

The agriculture sector in Italy also shows specificities regarding company size. Only 3.2 percent of companies in this economic sector are established as business corporations<sup>31</sup>, who employ just over 10 percent of the total workforce. The remaining 90 percent refers to sole proprietorships or micro-sized businesses. At the same time, 82 percent of enterprises have no employees, 18 percent are micro-enterprises with fewer than ten employees, and only 0.1 percent of enterprises have more than ten employees. In fact, active farm workers in enterprises with between two and nine employees account for 35 percent of the total labor force. Looking at the data in a broader sense, as many as three-quarters of employment is concentrated in small and very small businesses with fewer than 49 employees. These data provide a clear picture when considered together with the permanent employment rate, which is 15 percent. Regarding the age profile, there are few women (33.5 percent), and young people up to 34 years old constitute 32 percent of the total workers. The presence of foreigners is higher than in other sectors of the Italian economy, as it reaches 16 percent of the employed. Finally, the serious problem of labor irregularity remains unsolved. The share of job placement that does not comply with labor regulations is 24 percent.

From a geographical point of view, 39.4 percent of agriculture employment is in the south of the country, while Sicily and Sardinia account for 17.4 percent of the total. Apulia is the region with the highest number of people employed in the sector (14.5 percent), followed by Sicily (12.9 percent), Calabria (10.5 percent) and Campania (8.3 percent)<sup>32</sup>.

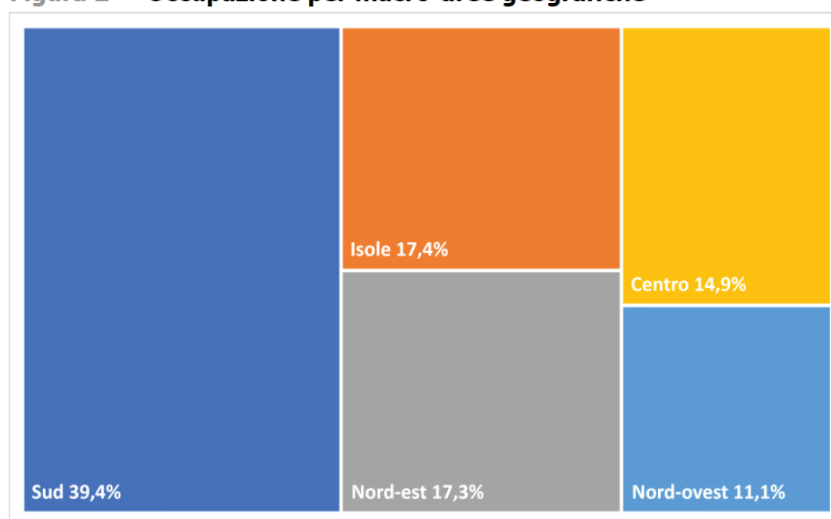
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30. ISTAT. *7th General Census of Agriculture: first results, Statistical report*. 2022.

31. This paragraph's information is based on the elaboration of Istat's data by Inapp-Ares 2.0, which was also published in INAPP, *Anticipazione dei fabbisogni professionali nel settore dell'agricoltura e silvicoltura*. 2021.

32. INAPP. *Anticipazione dei fabbisogni professionali nel settore dell'agricoltura e silvicoltura*. 2021.

**Figura 2 Occupazione per macro-aree geografiche**



Fonte: elaborazione Inapp-Ares 2.0 su dati Istat

As mentioned above, it is also important to remember that undeclared work remains a significant problem of the agriculture sector. As underlined by the 2022 Country Report<sup>33</sup> about Italy: “*despite recent improvements, undeclared work is still a significant challenge, notably in agriculture, construction and domestic services.*”

Regarding the waste management sector, and with respect to employment trends, back in 2012 the Italian Sustainable Development Foundation and Enea observed how in Italy, compared to the average of other European countries, employees in waste collection were more than those in the material management and recovery phase, thus noting an interesting room for growth of employees in the recycling sector. In 2020, percentages of waste recyclers showed 72 percent business corporations (compared to a 56 percent share in 2010), followed by sole proprietorships with 13 percent (21 percent in 2010) and partnerships with 12 percent (21 percent in 2010)<sup>34</sup>. Thus, a remarkable transformation in the waste recovery sector can be observed over the past decade, with an increase in business corporations (+7 percent) and a sharp decrease in sole proprietorships and partnerships, both of which halved between 2010 and 2020. In 2020, 62 percent of companies engaged in recycling activities had fewer than 10 employees, just over 30 percent between 10 and 49 employees, 5 percent between 50 and 249, and 2 percent 250 employees and above; in terms of employees, however, it was precisely the smaller entities that weighed the most, employing 66 percent of the total workforce. Over the past 10 years, the number of employees of waste recovery enterprises is reported to have increased by 6 percent overall. This trend further confirms the structuring process of the industry, which sees the role of large companies growing, to the detriment of the small ones. Finally, from a geographic perspective, in 2020 more than 70 percent of recycling was concentrated in northern Italy, followed by the south with 16 percent, and the center, which stood at 13 percent.<sup>35</sup>

Waste recyclers: **employees** of core and non-core businesses by size (no.), 2020

Class of employees	Core employees	Non-core employees	Total
1-9	10,341	1,669	12,010
10-49	22,028	9,075	31,103
50-249	17,622	20,269	37,891
250 and more	78,590	76,771	155,361
<b>Total</b>	<b>128,581</b>	<b>107,784</b>	<b>236,365</b>

33. European Commission. 2022 Country Report - Italy Accompanying the document Recommendation for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on the 2022 National Reform Programme of Italy and delivering a Council opinion on the Stability Programme of Italy. 2022

34. These and the following data in the paragraph are taken from Foundation for Sustainable Development and Enea (2022), *Recycling in Italy*, report 2022, which in turn are an Ecocerved elaboration based on data from the Single Environmental Declaration Forms collected by Chambers of Commerce.

35. Fondazione per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile ed Enea (2012), “*Green Economy per uscire dalle due crisi*”, (a cura di Ronchi, E. e Morbito, R.), Edizioni Ambiente

### 3.3. Potential factors affecting employment trends

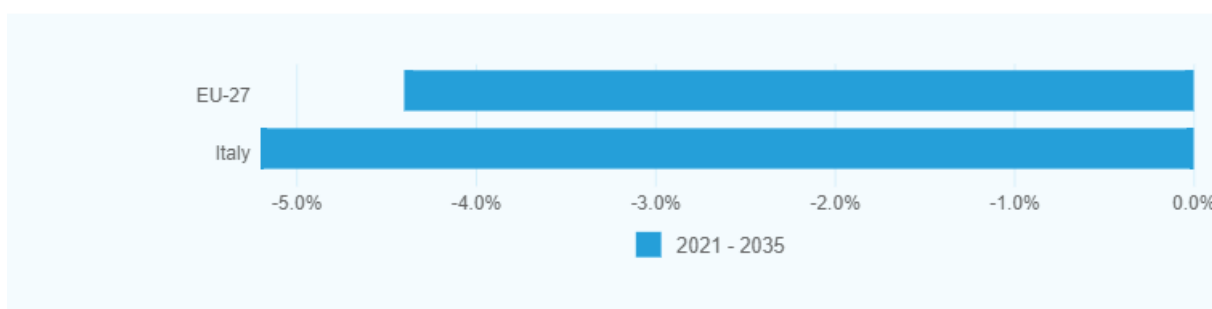
Given the reference framework, some potential future prospects can be depicted. For some years now, CEDEFOP has done a *skill forecast*<sup>36</sup> analysis indicating possible future scenarios based on current trends. By disaggregating the available data, it is possible, for example, to identify significant variables that will systematically influence employment trends. In the Italian agriculture sector, we will see a significant decrease in jobs, with a negative balance between 2021 and 2035 of -444,898, which will correspond to a -5.2 percent (while the European average for the agriculture sector is estimated to be -4.4 percent). The most significant element concerns the loss of jobs according to the level of qualification attained, with values of -337,682 units for the lowest profiles, -102,991 units for medium-skilled profiles, and only -4,224 for the highest profiles.

■ CEDEFOP

#### | Skills Forecast

##### Employment growth (% annual rate) by country

Sector: Agriculture | Country: Italy | From year: 2021 | To year: 2035

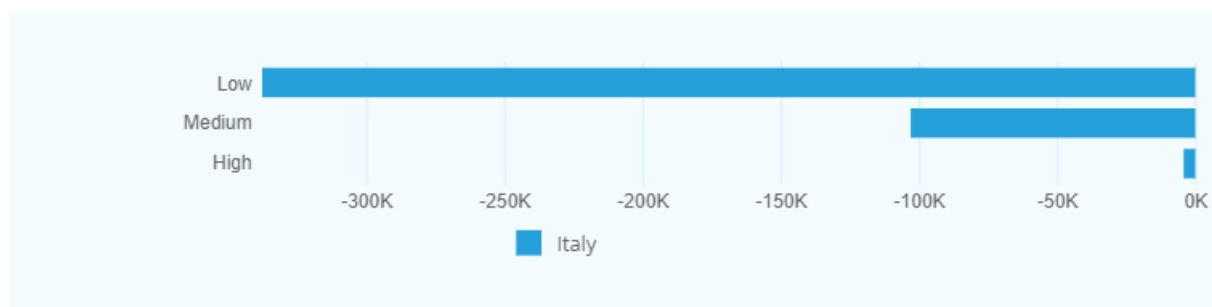


■ CEDEFOP

#### | Skills Forecast

##### Employment (absolute numbers) by qualification

Sector: Agriculture | Country: Italy | From year: 2021 | To year: 2035

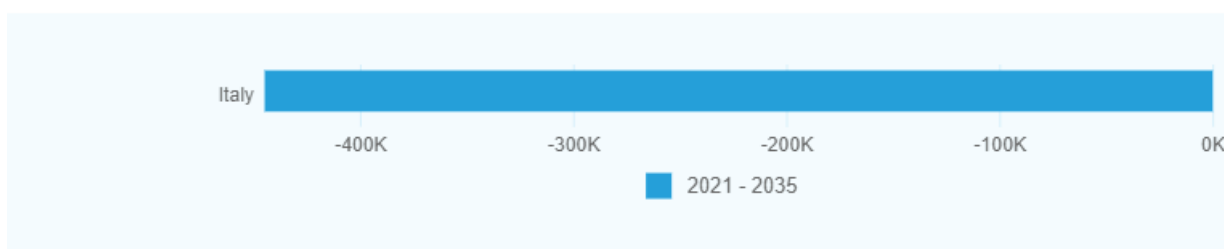


■ CEDEFOP

#### | Skills Forecast

##### Employment change (absolute numbers) by country

Sector: Agriculture | Country: Italy | From year: 2021 | To year: 2035



36. In this case, CEDEFOP maintains the disaggregation of sectors, as argued at the beginning of this section.

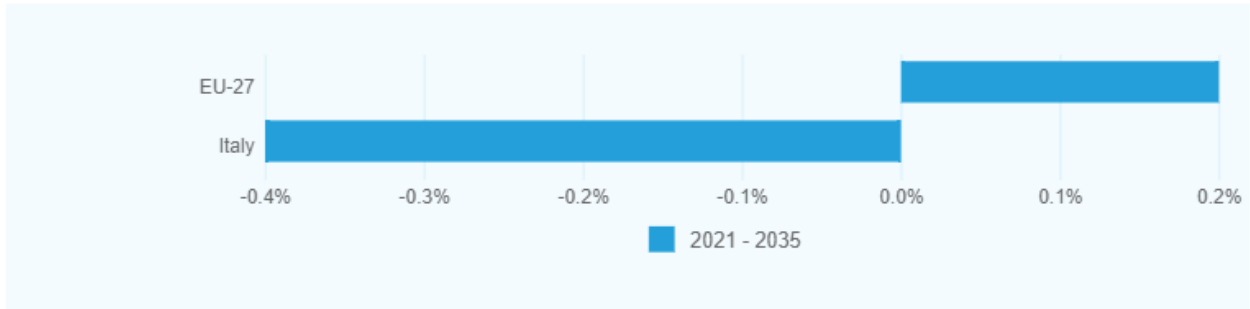
Similar data in the case of food processing indicate that educational attainment will have an even greater influence, from -90,000 jobs for lower profiles to +40,000 for higher profiles.

CEDEFOP

### Skills Forecast

#### Employment growth (% annual rate) by country

Sector: Food, Drink & Tobacco | Country: Italy | From year: 2021 | To year: 2035

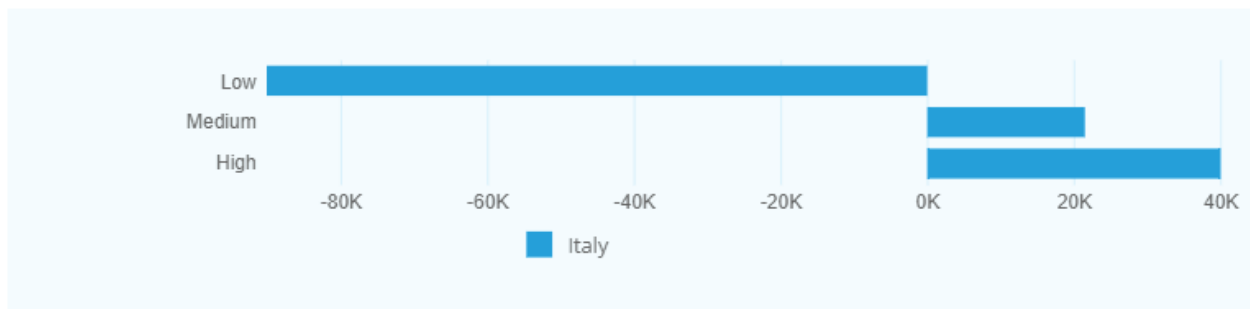


CEDEFOP

### Skills Forecast

#### Employment (absolute numbers) by qualification

Sector: Food, Drink & Tobacco | Country: Italy | From year: 2021 | To year: 2035

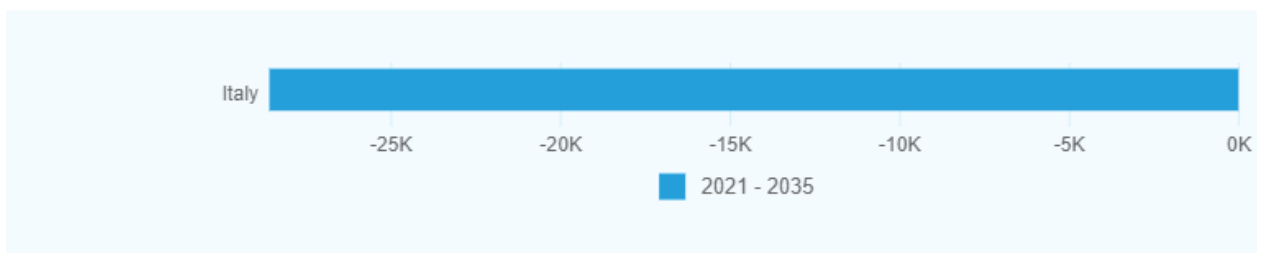


CEDEFOP

### Skills Forecast

#### Employment change (absolute numbers) by country

Sector: Food, Drink & Tobacco | Country: Italy | From year: 2021 | To year: 2035





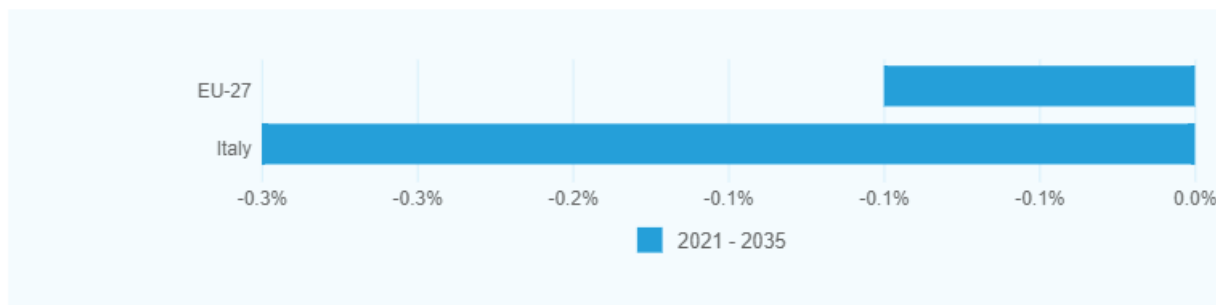
The Italian waste management sector also presents similar future scenarios: among a fall of 8,770 positions, a fall of 18,633 is expected for low-skilled workers, while +9,543 for higher-skilled profiles.

CEDEFOP

### Skills Forecast

#### Employment growth (% annual rate) by country

Sector: Sewerage and waste | Country: Italy | From year: 2021 | To year: 2035

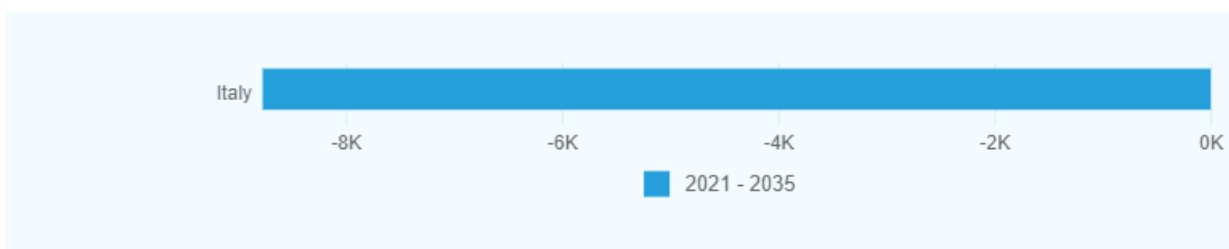


CEDEFOP

### Skills Forecast

#### Employment change (absolute numbers) by country

Sector: Sewerage and waste | Country: Italy | From year: 2021 | To year: 2035

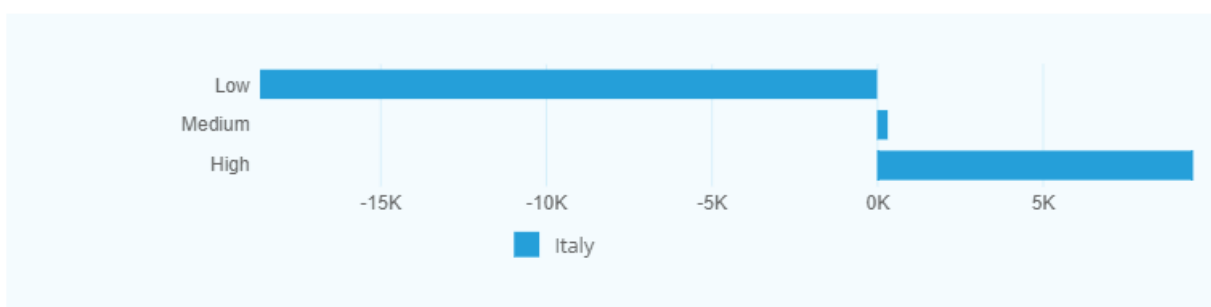


CEDEFOP

### Skills Forecast

#### Employment (absolute numbers) by qualification

Sector: Sewerage and waste | Country: Italy | From year: 2021 | To year: 2035



### 3.4. Young people and investment in employment services

The above mentioned are the most likely scenarios in the Italian context with respect to MYSEA's economic sectors of interest. There are strong reasons for concern regarding the ability of the country's education system to foster a transition towards qualifications of greater depth and complexity. As better argued in the Skills Development Agenda report, numerous data indicate that the training emergency primarily concerns the youth; and only through a massive investment in the skills of this target group will it be possible to reduce the training gaps with other European countries.

A study of the "NEET" phenomenon can be a preliminary element for setting effective actions and policies, including at the employment level. Among the various studies available on the subject, it is interesting here to recall the recent work of the Toniolo Institute of the Catholic University<sup>37</sup> carried out on behalf of the Italian Department for Youth Policy, according to which we can distinguish NEETs into 3 main categories:

1. Young people looking (more or less actively) for work, those who have recently graduated from high school or college. They are the most dynamic and employable. A significant part of them has high human capital and placement aspirations that do not always find immediate correspondence in the production system.
2. Young people who are in a gray area between precarious work and unemployment: they have low skills but good willingness to retrain.
3. Young people who have lost their hopes, often stuck in problematic family situations, or discouraged by negative experiences that may also lead to depression, not only economically but also emotionally and relationally. This category is the most difficult to deal with, as it is the least visible and the most difficult to engage, except through outreach interventions and new tools that, beyond employability, can benefit their self-confidence and the desire to actively take back control of their life.

This categorization shows that, without specific interception strategies, young people who are most in need of reactivation programs are often ignored by public policies. According to the aforementioned research: *"These are the most vulnerable and discouraged youth, with weak family support, inadequate education, absent or negative experiences with the world of work, and low trust in institutions and public policies. Such young people cannot be expected to turn to a national portal or public offices: it is therefore necessary to identify and engage them, often with proposals that are able to draw their attention, not only by pushing them and saying, for example, "I'll help you get out of a bad condition" (which many do not clearly perceive as such), but also by providing them with attractive offers that help them enter virtuous pathways for improving their condition."*

These considerations are in line with the observations presented by an active policy manager of a leading labor administration company involved in one of the focus groups conducted as part of MYSEA Project:

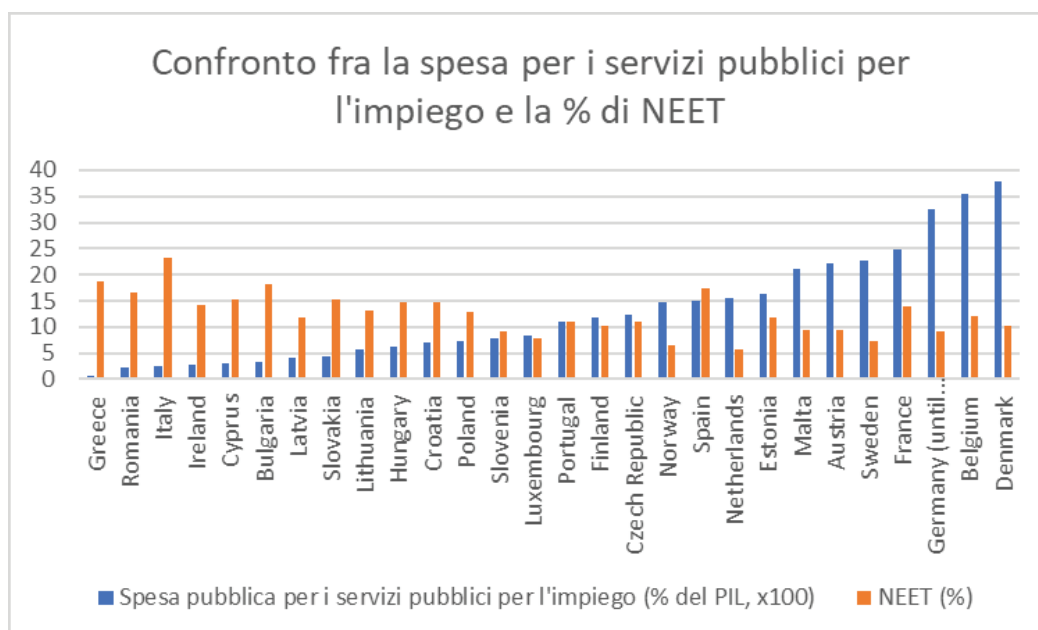
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37. The Youth Observatory – Department for Youth Policy and Universal Civil Service: *"Intercettare i Neet: strategie di prossimità"*, 2021.

As for Emilia Romagna, which is a very virtuous region, [...] not only does it include labor policies in its investments but is also at the same level as the first European regions from an economic point of view. Yet there are so many problems in spending funds for the youth because reaching NEETs is not easy. Oftentimes, NEETs just stay at home and don't have human relationships. That is why it is impossible to get in touch with them. Many round tables about this topic have already been held, which shows the seriousness of this problem.

Additional data suggest that countries with more efficient job centers can collect more information on registered NEETs (either directly or in collaboration with the school system) in order to offer them targeted programs. According to INAPP, Italy ranks among the weakest of European countries on active labor policies, with an expenditure rate of 0.22 percent of its GDP, about one-third compared to a European average of 0.61 percent. Spain (one of the countries allocating the most spending) stands at 1.03 percent of GDP, almost five times Italy's. Over the years, Italy has increasingly de-powered investment in these measures, so much so that from 2008 to 2020 the negative balance was -39%. This figure is partly mitigated only by the increase in investments made at the beginning of the pandemic crisis (+8% from 2019 to 2020), as indeed was done in almost all European countries.

It may be interesting to compare the percentage of NEETs with public spending on employment services and active policies. Elaborating on the available Eurostat data (latest consolidated data for Italy of 2020), the high percentage of NEETs in Italy finds correspondence with the few resources allocated to active labor policies. In particular, all countries that spend less than 0.075 percent of GDP on public employment services are characterized by a NEET rate well above 10 percent. Some anomalies do exist, most notably that of Spain, which still has a very high percentage of NEETs in 2020 (17.3 percent) despite a public expenditure on employment services of 0.149 percent, but it should be noted that, in the following years, the percentage of Spanish NEETs drops dramatically (14.1 percent in 2021 and 12.7 percent in 2022), thus reinforcing the hypothesis of a cause and effect relationship between these two variables.



Internal elaboration on Eurostat's data<sup>38</sup>

38. The following indexes were considered: "Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and labor status (NEET rates)" e "Public expenditure on labor market policies".

## 4. An analysis of findings from MYSEA Project

With respect to the overall purpose of this report, and in light of what has been discussed so far, it is crucial to reconsider the initial points that gave rise to MYSEA Project. Is there an employment emergency with particular reference to the youth and female target audience? If so, does this criticality also directly affect the agri-food and waste management sectors? And finally, can investing in the skills of young people and women in these areas help trigger a virtuous circle, increasing employability especially for new or retrained workers?

A clear answer to the first question can be given, with particular reference to the youth target audience. Yes, there is a real employment emergency with respect to young people. This emergency is dramatically evident in a comparative European and sectoral perspective: in Italy, young people find serious problems related to job opportunities, particularly in the agri-food sector. Women's employment is also a critical issue, while the waste management sector, which also shows the general criticalities of the Italian labor system, has less clear and defined dynamics, partly due to the problems of defining the specific activities of the sector.

As clearly stated in the *Skills Development Agenda* report, employers tend to identify the lack of skills possessed by young people among the main causes of difficulty in finding a job. At the same time, as already argued in the aforementioned report and further investigated in this paper, the structural deficiencies in Italian educational and training systems are accompanied by additional structural criticalities in Italian companies, which in turn fail to trigger virtuous mechanisms of attractiveness and growth of human resources. It is precisely on this aspect, therefore, that we need to focus our attention to release youth potential in the areas addressed by MYSEA.

MYSEA Project carried out important preliminary work regarding the economic and employment dynamics of the agrifood and waste management sectors in the target countries.<sup>39</sup> Analyses on the Italian context went into particular detail on the situation of youth, women and NEETs, as well as the education and training system with particular reference to the provision of training by TVET (technical and vocational education and training) institutions. This preliminary analytical work was then deepened through qualitative research work conducted in the two regions of Sicily and Lazio, through an articulated plan of questionnaires and interviews aimed at each of the three identified targets: a) youth, women and NEETs; b) economic actors; and c) TVET institutions. Thus, the input elements examined within the scope of this report were as follows:

1. WP3 - Output 3.4 - Surveys - Italian Report
2. WP3 - Output 3.5 - Existing situation analysis - Italy
3. WP3 - Output 3.6 - Statistical Report - Cross-border analysis
4. WP4 - Activity 4.1.1: Designing the Curricula Methodology
5. MYSEA Interim Report - Profile of those enrolled in MYSEA's courses.
6. No. 4 workshops organized online between July and September 2023

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39. See the two official publications of the project: “*Cross Border Analysis among Italy, Greece Libanon, Jordan and Tunisia. A common strategy of young skills development in the Mediterranean Area*”, and “*Analisi Territoriale Italia. La situazione occupazionale e il fabbisogno di competenze nei settori dell’agroalimentare e della gestione dei rifiuti in Lazio e Sicilia*”.

The first of these documents is an overview of the quantitative results presented in October 2021 and related to questionnaires administered to 257 young people, 111 companies and business operators, and 30 training agencies and schools. The questionnaires were also complemented by 26 interviews conducted with stakeholders selected from both business operators and training and educational agencies. The outcomes of the questionnaires are later analyzed in depth as part of the second document mentioned above. The field survey allowed validating a significant number of instances already identified at the European and Mediterranean cooperation area level, such as the urgent need to invest in not only technical but also transversal skills. From the perspective of employment policies, one of the cornerstones of the findings that emerged across all targets concerns the importance of training experience to be carried out directly at companies.

Pursuant to these indications, MYSEA Project offered a comprehensive training program in Lazio and Sicily involving a total of 194 participants with an average age of 23. Vocational training was structured in 3 courses of 100 hours each, plus an optional course on entrepreneurial skills. Each course contained five specific teaching modules of 20 hours each and was supported by specific guidance and tutoring services, as well as an e-learning platform. The duration of theoretical training was about 3 months, followed by the opportunity of doing an internship at the company.

While MYSEA Project has achieved satisfactory results in Italy in the short-term, it is now a matter of understanding whether its intervention methodology can constitute a good practice for greater dissemination and capitalization. To this end, the **focus groups** conducted with stakeholders and experts in the field<sup>40</sup> proposed a reworking of the various critical issues that emerged around some themes that seem fundamental to the development of future strategies: attractiveness, career guidance, and a work-based learning approach. At the same time, the issues of "aging" and the gender component on the employer side were addressed.

Throughout the analyses conducted, it has been difficult to clearly identify institutional actors that may be relevant to the issue of employability and the improvement of employment quality. Of course, in Italy, government and state competencies in labor and active policies are central, so the influence exerted by the state is primary and fundamental. The role and importance of local and regional actors were also considered in the framework of MYSEA Project, analyzing their formal competencies and influence on local and regional dynamics.

In this regard, many interesting aspects emerged during the focus tables conducted between July and September 2023, which we can reclassify by the following main themes:

1. The systematic lack of practical skills, resulting from a general failure of work-based learning approach in the setting of vocational education and training
2. Poor ability to continuously analyze the specific needs of each supply chain or geographic area and provide timely training responses
3. The need to work more on the attractiveness of the industry and business environments to the younger generation, as well as on the adequacy of the training and education system with respect to the expectations of young people.
4. The inadequacy of guidance systems and the fragmented nature of employment services and active labor policies, together with the problem of fragmented regional and state competencies.

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40. In this regard, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the various contact persons from the Ministry of Labor, ANPAL, Abaco Consortium, Metes Foundation, Manpower, CGIL, Slow Food, ConsumerLab - Future Respect, as well as the various farms, training agencies, and labor market consultants and orientators involved in the various tables.

It is also important to note that the issue of contracting, which is systematically addressed by most stakeholders and discussion tables, is not highlighted, however, as a critical or determinant variable with respect to NEETs and/or skills mismatch issues. Relevant topics were addressed considering several issues, such as apprenticeship, precariousness, flexibility, illegal recruitment, labor costs, minimum wage, etc. Of course, there were many remarks and discussions regarding the current Italian situation concerning contracting and labor market conditions. However, it is important to note that these elements are not identified as a barrier to entering the labor market. Therefore, there are other elements and dynamics at the root of the NEET phenomenon, which is so evident in Italy.

With respect to the first topic, two main tools are systematically referred to: internships and Transversal Skills and Orientation Pathways (in Italian known as PCTO, *Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e per l'Orientamento*, which replaced the former work-school program). In both cases, there is evidence of the importance of concrete experiences in the world of work as a complement to training and acquisition of directly expendable skills. However, numerous flaws and critical issues are highlighted. One of the most debated points is whether it is the tools themselves that incorporate structural flaws, or whether it is the training and business systems that fail to take full advantage of them. In this regard, one of the school directors involved in the working tables argued:

*"There is a great mismatch between school and the world of work. However, it is also true that relations with the various trade associations are quite dormant (and I represent here a quite small reality). More specifically, I am referring to the fact that most of the companies that contract young people for work-school activities and PCTO periods, do so because of prior personal relationships and contacts. It is not easy to give 200-250 students the possibility to have some work experience over a one-year period, as there are not many companies available. When employers give their availability, oftentimes they do this as a personal favor. There is also another thing to be said, ours is a country of small and medium-sized industries, among which there are also many artisanal enterprises. The conditions of the internship would also provide the presence of a mentor who follows the student and accompanies him or her during the time they spend at the company."*

Criticalities are also noted by other types of stakeholders, such as private entities involved in worker administration and delivering active policies:

*"The work-school project can be successful if it involves schoolteachers. As a matter of fact, the whole planification of these activities - whose objective is both developing students' soft skills and increasing their work experience - falls within the school responsibilities, so it is clear that teachers and coordinators should play an essential role in this. [...] Unfortunately, there is a huge gap to bridge on the experience of the average teacher. [...] Then, the first thing to be done is precisely improving this aspect. On the other hand, however, the issue of internships is also affected by the fact that there are so many difficulties from a point of view of the training capacity of companies. This is due to a cultural component, but, in my opinion, also to a structural one, as Italian companies are usually very small entities. As for the projects, there are so many companies that carry out wonderful initiatives, however, they can count on dedicated resources, such as HR offices, training, etc. that have a design and organizational capacity. Our case is different. When it comes to small provinces, there may be up to 50 employees at most; the internal staff is mainly operational, and this applies to work-school programs, internships, apprenticeships. These policies would be great tools for preventing school dropout as well, because a kid on a vocational path prefers to work and not be in the classroom. The main problem is the offer, which is not adequately exploited."*

However, the perspective of a small entrepreneur highlights how, even in a context characterized by micro-enterprises, culture and will do exist, but perhaps there is a lack of functional support structures and methodologies to trigger virtuous mechanisms. For example, the owner of a farm stated:

*"The moment I look for a person to come and work for me, I don't search for a worker to whom I say, 'you have to do this and that'. On the contrary, I aim for young people to create a kind of relationship where we can grow together. Growing together doesn't mean sharing the ownership of small business with the person who pays your salary. My goal as an employer is not just to pay your salary and have the fields the way they should be; my goal is to make you grow. That is why I usually turn to schools, but students do not have any training at all. I am not saying that they have to specialize in what I do, however, I find that young people are not given the proper knowledge that can be useful for possible job opportunities. Therefore, it becomes difficult to give these kids a solid foundation in the two weeks of the PCTO. Once it happened to me that, at the end of a PCTO, I was told, "wait until next year: if you need me, I'll come back." So there is this thing of retention; but it becomes difficult for the entrepreneur to be able to do a meaningful training in just two weeks, also because they don't have the skills to do it professionally. On the other hand, trade associations like Coldiretti and Confagricoltura should offer a range of opportunity from the training point of view instead of just giving plant protection licenses or providing courses for use the tractor and the four farm machines that are generally used".*

Another essential aspect lies in the fragmented nature of the Italian approach to the guidance and active policy system. A former director of a job center highlighted how:

*"...active policies are a key resource; the problem is that in Italy they are being organized with difficulty and depending on the priority for the moment; thus leaving the process weak and unstructured. Today we have some money: let's implement an employability program, tomorrow we won't have it and the plan will be left unfinished. Today we are launching an initiative for the youth because we have some money; tomorrow the money will be gone and we will cancel it. Today we are doing some vocational training because the programming of the social fund has been reactivated. We still do not know what will happen to this money or we only know it in part. [...] In Italy we also have another problem that was also mentioned previously, that is our regionalized system. Even though an attempt has been made to make them homogeneous, there are currently 20 different systems for managing the Labor Market, especially vocational training, which is an essential part of it. This implies that, even if much progress has been made, skills that are related very much to local markets, but also to international and national trends, find it difficult to be recognized."*

Another expert engaged on national policies also noted how the current regional system leads to evident territorial heterogeneity and discontinuity:

*Because of the way the labor market is organized in Italy, skills are classified regionally [...] so that within national programs like Garanzia Giovani, you can start an internship in one region, but not in another, because they have run out of available quotas. So the opportunities are fragmented, and let's say that one of the main issues is precisely the regional competence of the labor market, which fragments the system and prevents users from having access to the same opportunities throughout the country. Even national programs have a local implementation that may vary, which clearly has a strong impact on the actual opportunities that a young person has.*

According to other speakers, there is also a problem regarding how orientation tools are intended and used. Nowadays it is possible to observe how job orientation is highly fragmented

and irregular. School guidance does not appear to be structured in relation to the labor market, as it is predominantly related to choices within the school paths themselves. Furthermore, schools do not seem to be coordinated with vocational training systems. Job orientation, therefore, remains mostly the prerogative of employment services, which, in addition to being characterized by regional fragmentation and a temporal discontinuity in their activities, must also deal with the difficulties of systematically relating to local citizen support networks and the economic and productive entities. A field expert argued:

*We are used to linear orientation, as in Italy we think that job orientation consists of saying that the person is entitled to one hour of information, one hour of orientation, and so on. As if the issue of orientation for workers or those who are looking for a job was only about accessing information. Instead, the theme of job orientation should be about the construction of one's self and include counseling and mentoring actions. Unlike other countries like Germany, Italy has just one type of orientation, which consists in providing information. So it goes: "you want to join this program? go and register at the job center and have an orientation interview." What will they tell you at this interview? "You have these rights and duties, plus you have to apply for the vacancies that are posted, we'll give you some information about the job market," and then you are told "just start doing something." So, this is the total failure of orientation because after the first time a person goes to an employment center, they will not see why they should even go back there for a second time.*

Returning to the initial problem, it can be argued that the main issue is the failure to attract young people (NEETs) into training and guidance that can give them concrete career prospects and life satisfaction. Job orientation is also inefficient due to the lack of solid and convincing parameters on which to base its function:

*"One of the reasons why people become NEET is that they struggle with study and education. If we do not provide vocational training as an alternative to traditional education, we will continue to make the same mistake and cause the same problem. [...] What's more, the NEET phenomenon still exists because we don't have a system for analyzing training and vocational needs, which are two things that need to be linked. What we do are always ex-post analyses, not forecasts. The Excelsior system attempts to do forecast analysis; however, it is little considered and should also be refined. Still, it is the only serious tool that exists on forecasting. If we could have a predictive system, then vocational training, and not just education, would be a key element in helping NEETs, as well as graduates from high school or university, to enter the labor market. [...] Job orientation cannot be done only at school, but it must be intended as a network system, involving associations, families, professors, employers and other stakeholders. If this interdependence that creates a network is not created, orientation will never be effective. It takes various aspects to activate the orientation process, and one cannot think of orientation being limited to specific stages of one's life or career. By now, orientation should be constant as if it were continuing education. We have organized the system of continuing education, now we have to organize the system of continuing job orientation because if we don't have the tools to make decisions, we will find ourselves unprepared all the time. Just think about the transition from school to work: there is an orientation process that needs to be built. As we enter the labor market, we discover a whole world of endless changes. We should think of this transition and be able to support those who enter and leave the world of work, becoming employed/unemployed. And we should also consider the final phase of working life, when we have to leave and retire, and we start to have identity crises, because people's roles no longer exist and we don't know how to build new things. So, I agree that job orientation is a central element in establishing decent work.*



## 5. Cross-cutting recommendations

Perhaps one of the most valuable elements that emerged from MYSEA Project concerns the importance of local job orientation and the consequent continuous planning and redesign of educational offerings (both in terms of school education and vocational training). In fact, since the skills required are increasingly transversal and modular (as well as flexible and constantly evolving), the most urgent problem does not concern a national planning of institutional study paths (job profiles of multi-year duration), but rather the capacity of local areas to provide immediate responses to local needs, nurturing continuous dialogues between training systems, companies and the actors that provide services (career advice, matching supply/demand, active policies, etc.) in the labor market. At first glance, possible actions to counter the NEET phenomenon (as well as that of gender discrimination at work, or exploitation of migrants, etc.) must be addressed by national policies and interventions, however, regional and local initiatives are necessary to meet the demands of individual users, as emerged from the reflections of the project stakeholders.

Starting from these considerations, some specific recommendations addressed to local and regional actors can be made in order to facilitate sustainable job placement processes and career paths for young people.

A first group of recommendations concerns the production sector and its attractiveness. Indeed, it is essential to establish integrated and comprehensive strategies to ensure **the attractiveness of the sector to young people**. Although the challenge is posed to the entire European context, local actors are those who usually deal with this issue directly. Attractiveness means equipping oneself with medium/long-term integrated territorial strategies capable of setting specific goals on a variety of areas, but also of being able to continually readjust them through the definition and monitoring of concrete and measurable indicators. The point here is not to propose awareness campaigns, but to work precisely on the characteristics of the local sector and its ability to adopt a long-term vision and to be able to communicate it clearly. For example, enterprise innovation, green practices and technological transition should be fostered, also with a view to organizational growth, technology readiness and open mindset, in order to attract the youth. Moreover, young people's instances should be monitored and investigated through frequent **survey campaigns on their professional and life expectations**, as well as on their motivations and opinions about educational offerings, the labor market and possible job opportunities of local production systems. Consistently with this approach, it is therefore important to foster the **creation and consolidation of geographic and supply chain clusters** of the sectors examined in order to nurture career dynamics and labor mobility in contexts consisting mainly of small and micro enterprises. It is also important to invest in consortial and associative forms, including public/private, for the **creation of suitable places and contexts for educational experimentation and technology transfer**, such as in the case of territorial laboratories (already mentioned in the Skills Development Agenda report) or other functional forms of bringing together businesses, young people and innovation strategies. At the same time, it is crucial to **encourage business start-ups and facilitate youth entrepreneurship**, both by increasing public investments and promoting a system in which local services (both public

and private) have the right expertise to support businesses, with particular reference to their establishment and start-up phase. It is essential to invest in the quality of working conditions by encouraging flexibility and remote work, incentivizing services to support parenthood and new working arrangements. **Transnational job opportunities should also be offered** by enhancing international internship and work experiences, thus supporting both local young people in gaining experience abroad and providing incentives to companies for welcoming foreign young people. Finally, continued efforts to **eradicate all forms of tax evasion, undeclared work and irregularities are indispensable**. Systematic actions are needed not only to eliminate illegal recruiting, but also against all forms of undeclared work, irregular use of training contractual forms such as apprenticeship, as well as actual employment peddled as internships or other forms of on-the-job training.

Increasing and consolidating a systematic approach to ensuring on-the-job training is also crucial, especially by **increasing the quantity and quality of work-based learning opportunities**. This aspect has already been addressed in the Skills Development Agenda report, and is highlighted here not only for its implementation in training and education, but also for its ability to contribute to a system that employers can refer to. Awareness-raising, local and sectoral agreements and memoranda of understanding, capacity-building actions and the consolidation of an ongoing dialogue among all the actors involved (schools, training agencies, local authorities, chambers of commerce, trade associations, trade unions, professional organizations, etc.) are some examples of actions to be conducted systematically at the local level. A policy consistent with this approach should also **stimulate and incentivize the use of apprenticeship contracts and raise awareness among companies for the proper use of apprenticeships**, so that the purpose of this instrument is respected, also by adopting procedures and equipping operators with appropriate skills for the recognition and enhancement of skills acquired. The programming of incentive forms should be as targeted as possible and based on ongoing analyses that ensure close integration between vocational training and labor policies. In this regard, it would be recommendable to identify an overall strategy capable of making the adoption of the various possible tools organic and continuous, with particular reference to curricular internships, extracurricular apprenticeships, dual apprenticeships, vocational apprenticeships, advanced training and research apprenticeships. Organic planning of local policies and related forms of incentives, differentiated according to targets and sectors, would enable greater oversight and monitoring of concrete employment effects, including through systematic collaboration among all the actors involved. In fact, it is a matter of **ensuring impact evaluation of local employment and labor market policies**, both at the level of individual interventions and territorial planning. In this regard, it seems essential not only to focus on the spending capacity by regional and national authorities with respect to European structural funds, or on the immediate outcomes of matching actions by the various stakeholders, but also on indirect indicators that can provide useful elements for the evaluation of local policies and the definition of future strategies.

A third and final recommendation is to work at the local level to ensure a **systematic function of an integrated job orientation that relies on data and is fact-based**. Reference is made here to a very broad notion of guidance, which is in fact carried out by a multiplicity of actors that do not always dialogue on a continuous basis: employment centers, schools, training agencies,

labor supply companies, trade associations, chambers of commerce, provincial adult education centers, etc. A territory that is able to organically network the resources of these actors will also be able to ensure success and measurability of its actions, contributing concretely to labor market effectiveness in each sector. An expanded guidance function also relies on the ability to build and consolidate **bridges and forms of collaboration between school and vocational training**. In many cases, this dialogue already exists, even though in regionally differentiated forms, nevertheless it is capable of fostering cooperation and mutual understanding of virtuous mechanisms and opportunities for co-design and shared management.<sup>41</sup>

In fact, it is not just a matter of ensuring a formal recognition of qualifications and job requirements, but actually giving the possibility to achieve them, first and foremost by investing in the skills and tools available to practitioners, counselors, teachers at all levels and education centers (school, TVET, employment services, universities, provincial centers for education to adults). Finally, with respect to the broad function of guidance, and as demonstrated precisely by MYSEA Project, a systematic enhancement and incentive for the **acquisition of technical and transversal skills at every level of schooling and vocational training** should be recommended, adopting specific measures to reach young people who are less qualified or with predominantly manual skills. The future of training is believed to be increasingly modular and aimed at the acquisition of micro-credentials, therefore it will be essential to have actors that are external to training institutions, and who can ensure an impartial function in the area of skills assessment, description, validation and certification of skills.

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41. In this regard, the Skills Development Agenda report has already addressed the issue of Technical High Schools, which provide an excellent example, but here we also refer to territorial initiatives that are often different in each regional context. It is necessary to focus on these specificities, which often reflect the characteristics of a production industry, without imposing pre-set models that are not in compliance with local needs.

## **FOCUS: National policies and regional powers for decent work - a possible coordinated action**

The concurrent state/region competence in labor and vocational training policies presents several critical aspects; therefore, technical and strategic solutions capable to change many of the indicators analyzed in this paper and in the parallel Skills Development Agenda report are still needed. It is well known that the work of linking national and regional policies is carried out in a structured way through the State-Regions Conference, in which the proposals of the Commission for Labor and Vocational Training of the Conference of Regions and Autonomous Provinces are made. The institutional work carried out by the Conference over the past 20 years has enabled valuable coordination, standard-setting work and reference guidelines, including on vocational training, active labor policies and employment services. The critical issues thus appear to be more related to the effective exercise by regional authorities of their competencies, which contribute to a very strong territorial inhomogeneity. According to specific analyses conducted as part of MYSEA Project, Italy shows to have poor indicators especially for youth and women, with particular reference to the agricultural sector. In addition to the recommendations to local actors expressed in the previous paragraph, it seems appropriate to recall some of the issues that emerged in the context of MYSEA and that, by their nature, address a higher institutional level, with an implicit recommendation for active and ongoing cooperation between regions and national institutions.

**National Directory of Employment Incentives.** Probably among the best-known services made available by ANPAL, the National Directory of Employment Incentives constitutes a reference point to offer citizens and companies an information service that can ensure the transparency and coordination of national and regional incentives, as required by Legislative Decree No. 150/2015. A general call for reorganization of the entire employment incentive sector is known and widespread, particularly with respect to the goals of greater continuity and harmonization on a territorial basis. MYSEA's findings seem to indicate two additional aspects that should be given more consideration. Firstly, the effective dissemination and awareness of the Directory among companies and workers still seem limited. Secondly, there is a lack of information regarding incentives being planned and are not active yet. Considering that incentive forms often involve an active role of the various regional ESF authorities, forward-looking business planning results to be difficult, giving priority to short-term planning.

**Labor Force Surveys and the National Compulsory Reporting Registry: toward an open data approach** In 2018, on its official Labour Force Survey report<sup>42</sup>, ISTAT pointed out how, in its analyses on the consistency between workers' skills and job classifications, it preferred to use data on educational qualifications from ISTAT sources and not from the National Compulsory Reporting Registry, because *"from analyses carried out by the Technical Working Group<sup>43</sup>, in which the educational qualifications provided in the "Compulsory Reporting" and in the Labor Force Survey were compared, it emerged that the information reported in the Compulsory Reporting has some critical issues.*

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42. ISTAT, *Il mercato del lavoro 2018. Verso una lettura integrata*. 2019.

43. Working group consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Istat, Inps, Inail and Anpal.

These include the employer's tendency to report an educational qualification deduced from the occupation and the lack of obligation to report the educational qualification for the foreign population. For this reason, at the moment, it is preferable to refer to qualifications provided by other sources such as the Italian Ministry of Education, which are then reported by Istat, as this information appears to be more relevant." Furthermore, data from the labor registry<sup>44</sup> is not made available in open data format, which makes other parallel tools necessary, first and foremost Unioncamere's Excelsior tool. The enormous predictive potential of a national database such as the labor registry is now blocked by a political/institutional impasse, which makes timely access to real labor market data impossible. Making this source available would acquire immense and functional value for many objectives that MYSEA also set: monitoring indicators for combating undeclared work and irregular forms of work, continuous skills forecast, more effective matching of labor supply and demand, more information sources in favor of guidance functions, better decision of active labor policies, etc.

**Employment services and active labor policies.** As indicated in ANPAL's latest official report on employment services, "[...] on the whole, there is evidence of the persistence of problematic elements related to the organizational flaws of the Employment Centers, resulting in difficulties for organizational and operational models in codifying, standardizing and making transparent the functional offer towards users. Considering also the volume of activities and the demand for services by the territories, personnel is not able to adequately exploit the skills and the number of human resources available. [...] Job Centers in the South are those reporting the highest levels of staffing criticality, with values more than double, sometimes triple, those observed in the North Center, regardless of the functional area considered. [...] With the exception of administrative procedures alone, Job Centers report difficulties in almost all functional areas. [...] The most critical areas in terms of adequacy of staff skills at Job Centers are those of Specialized Orientation and Job Fostering, as well as that of Business Creation, which are considered negatively in the whole country." If this is the objective snapshot of Italy's employment services, one can well understand the various critical issues that have emerged at every level within the scope of this report. Therefore, there is the need of strong national and regional investments aimed at the structural strengthening of public and private services, so that their financing can be less linked to extraordinary European funds.<sup>45</sup>

**The fight against illegal recruiting** in 2020, the National Strategy to Combat Illegal Recruiting and Labor Exploitation in Agriculture was formally launched. The Interinstitutional Table that coordinates the strategy is chaired by the Minister of Labor and Social Policy and has adopted a three-year plan to combat exploitation in agriculture and corporal farming, providing for in-depth analysis of the phenomenon and initiatives to protect victims ensure their reintegration into the workforce, including the National Guidelines on Identification, Protection and Assistance for Victims of Labor Exploitation in Agriculture. Following law 199/2016, data<sup>46</sup> show a general growth in indicators from 2016 to 2019 at the level of law enforcement interventions and judicial investigations, with a subsequent decline in the following years.

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44. These data are an aggregation of regional databases.

45. ANPAL, *Servizi Per l'impiego. Rapporto di monitoraggio 2020*.

46. FLAI-CGIL, *IV Rapporto del Laboratorio "Altro Diritto"/Flai-Cgil sullo sfruttamento lavorativo e sulla protezione delle sue vittime, 2022*

However, from the data analyses it remains clear that monitoring to date is based primarily on enforcement initiatives, investigations conducted and prosecutions started. As pointed out by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy's Directorate General of Immigration and Integration Policies: *"No official data are available on the phenomenon, but, according to ISTAT estimates, irregular labor in agriculture has been growing steadily over the past decade, standing at 24.4 percent, almost twice as high as the economy as a whole (12 percent) [ISTAT - 2020] According to estimates in the VI Report of the FLAI-CGIL's Placido Rizzotto Observatory (November 2022), in 2021 there were about 230,000 illegally employed workers in agriculture, and of these 55,000 were women. Non-regular subordinate agricultural labor is particularly common in Apulia, Sicily, Campania, Calabria and Lazio, with rates exceeding 40 percent, but widespread irregularities are also found in the North-Center, where the phenomenon of irregular labor in the fields is shown to be growing further from the 180,000 indicated in the previous report based on a conservative estimate<sup>47</sup>." On several occasion, the same Table has emphasized the importance of monitoring, which cannot take place without the structural presence of the stakeholders who are most involved in the issue, moreover broadening the vision not only to actual caporalism but also to the exploitation of irregular immigration, undeclared work, mafia infiltration and organized crime, etc. This reflection led to the establishment, in March 2022, of the Technical Table that led to the elaboration of the National Plan for Combating Undeclared Work, a cross-cutting strategy that is intertwined with the fight against "caporalato" and concerns, in general, all phenomena of irregular labor, in all economic sectors.*

**Minimum wage and labor costs.** There is much debate about this topic both at the European level (as mentioned in section 1) and nationally, which cannot be reported here due to issues of space and complexity. As for the theme of the attractiveness of the agribusiness sector to young people, it is hereby emphasized that the issue cannot be only that of minimum and decent wages, but rather the need to have more and more attractive wages and working conditions. As argued in the previous pages, the agribusiness sector will also see a systematic and progressive reduction of the low-skilled and lower-educated workforce, in favor of higher profiles or at least those possessing different technical and transversal skills. However, as geographic mobility will be more facilitated and sectors that are seemingly far apart will get closer, wages will play an increasingly important role in attracting young talent to invest in the agrifood sector.

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47. <https://integrazioneimmigranti.gov.it/it-it/Dettaglio-approfondimento/id/18/Caporalato-e-sfruttamento-in-agricoltura>

## Annex 1 - Summary of the main results

Nowadays, Italy is one of the countries of greatest concern in employment and training, especially in comparison to the economic weight the country maintains in the European context. In particular, available data indicate the existence of a **real employment emergency with respect to young people**. This emergency is dramatically evident in a comparative European and sectoral perspective: in Italy, young people find serious problems related to job opportunities, particularly in the agri-food sector. Employers tend to identify the lack of skills possessed by young people among the main causes of difficulty in finding and entering employment. At the same time, the structural deficiencies in Italian educational and training systems are substantially accompanied by additional structural criticalities in Italian companies, which in turn fail to trigger virtuous mechanisms of attractiveness and growth of human resources.

Meanwhile, the adoption of new technologies in the agribusiness sector will result in **increased demand for advanced digital and technological skills**. The challenges faced by the agribusiness sector require a **multidisciplinary** response from training systems. The demand for people qualified in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) will increase, with a specific focus on biology, biochemistry, and chemistry; engineering and IT skills for Agriculture 4.0 and continuous-flow processes in food production will also increase. The Italian scenario clearly indicates how the jobs most at risk in the agribusiness sector will involve the lowest profiles, while the highest profiles will benefit.

Within the framework of MYSEA Project, a number of specific features emerged with regard to the critical issues in the target sectors, which we can summarize as follows:

- The systematic lack of **practical skills**, resulting from a general failure of **work-based learning** approach in the setting of vocational education and training.
- Poor ability to **continuously analyze the specific needs of each supply chain or geographic area** and provide timely training responses.
- The need to work more on the **attractiveness of the industry** and business environments to the younger generation, as well as in general on the adequacy of the training and education system with respect to the expectations of young people.
- The inadequacy of **guidance** systems and the fragmented nature of employment services and active labor policies, together with the problem of fragmented regional and state competencies.

Perhaps one of the most valuable elements that emerged from MYSEA Project concerns

precisely the importance of local job orientation and the consequent continuous planning and redesign of educational offerings (both in terms of school education and vocational training). In fact, since the skills required are increasingly transversal and modular (as well as flexible and constantly evolving), the most urgent problem does not concern a national planning of institutional study paths (job profiles of multi-year duration), but rather **the capacity of local areas to provide immediate responses to local needs**, nurturing continuous dialogues between training systems, companies and the actors that provide services (guidance, matching supply/demand, active policies, etc.) in the labor market. At first glance, possible actions to counter the NEET phenomenon (as well as that of gender discrimination at work, or exploitation of migrants, etc.) must be addressed by national policies and interventions, however, regional and local initiatives are necessary to meet the demands of individual users, as emerged from the reflections of the project stakeholders. The following sections then define proposals that policy makers and stakeholders can pursue with respect to local employment service systems and labor supply/demand matching, with a view to broad public-private collaboration.

A first group of recommendations concerns the production sector and its attractiveness. Indeed, it is essential to establish integrated and wide-ranging strategies to ensure **the attractiveness of the sector with respect to young people**, i.e., the ability to have medium/long-term integrated territorial strategies capable of setting specific goals on a variety of areas, but also to be able to continually readjust them through the definition and monitoring of concrete and measurable indicators. For example, enterprise innovation, green practices and technological transition should be fostered, also with a view to organizational growth, technology readiness and open mindset, in order to attract the youth. Moreover, young people's instances should be monitored and investigated through frequent **survey campaigns on their professional and life expectations**, as well as on their motivations and opinions about educational offerings, the labor market and possible job opportunities of local production systems. Consistently with this approach, it is therefore important to foster the **creation and consolidation of geographic and supply chain clusters** of the sectors examined in order to nurture career dynamics and labor mobility in contexts consisting mainly of small and micro enterprises. It is also important to invest in consortial and associative forms, including public/private, for the **creation of suitable places and contexts for educational experimentation and technology transfer**, or other functional forms of bringing together businesses, young people and innovation. Similarly, it is crucial to **encourage business start-ups and facilitate youth entrepreneurship**, working both on public investments and on "systemic" simplification and facilitation. It is essential to invest in the quality of working conditions by **encouraging flexibility and remote work, incentivizing services to support parenthood** and new working arrangements. - as well as facilitating and offering active support in job receptivity from a transnational perspective, enhancing international internship and work experiences. Finally, continued efforts **to eradicate all forms of tax evasion, undeclared work and irregularities are indispensable.**



Increasing and consolidating a systematic approach to ensuring on-the-job training is also crucial, especially by **increasing the quantity and quality of work-based learning opportunities**. A policy consistent with this approach should also **stimulate and incentivize the use of apprenticeship contracts and raise awareness among companies for the proper use of apprenticeships**, so that the purpose of this instrument is respected, as well as by adopting procedures and equipping operators with appropriate skills for the recognition and enhancement of skills acquired. Organic planning of local policies and related forms of incentives, also differentiated according to targets and sectors, would enable greater oversight and monitoring of concrete employment effects, including through systematic collaboration among all the actors involved. In fact, it is a matter of **ensuring impact evaluation of local employment and labor market policies**, both at the level of individual interventions and at the macro level of territorial planning.

A third and final recommendation is to work at the local level to ensure a **systematic function of an integrated guidance that relies on data and is fact-based**. Reference is made here to a very broad notion of guidance, which is carried out by a multiplicity of actors that do not always dialogue on a continuous basis: employment centers, schools, training agencies, labor supply companies, trade associations, chambers of commerce, provincial adult education centers, etc. An expanded guidance function also relies on the ability to build and consolidate **bridges and forms of collaboration between schools and vocational training**. Finally, a systematic enhancement and incentive for the **acquisition of technical and transversal skills at every level of schooling and vocational training** should be recommended, adopting specific measures to reach young people who are less qualified or with predominantly manual skills. The future of training is believed to be increasingly modular and aimed at the acquisition of microcredentials, therefore it will be essential to have oversight and guidance functions carried out by individuals who are external to educational institutions.



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