

Limits and perspectives of apprenticeship in Italy

By Francesco Lauria Cisl National Confederation – Cisl National Study Center

1) The contents of the presentation

- Summary/recap of how apprenticeship is regulated and developed in Italy
- The main open issues
- Recent and ongoing reforms

One preliminary remark: as often happens in Italy, we have to distinguish theory and practice.

2) How apprenticeship is regulated in Italy

Apprenticeship in Italy has a long story: it was first regulated in 1955. Apprenticeship schemes were reformed and substantially innovated in 2003, 2011 and in 2015 with the aim of promoting the integration of young people into the labour market.

In 2021 (last official data) apprenticeships in Italy were 544.366 with more contracts in the Center-North of the country.

The average age of the workers is 25 years.

3) The three types of apprenticeship

As many of you may know: There are three apprenticeship schemes in Italy:

Type 1: Apprenticeship for Vocational Qualification and Diploma, Upper Secondary Education Diploma and High Technical Specialisation Certificate, which are qualifications at upper-secondary and post-secondary levels (*Apprendistato per la qualifica e il diploma professionale, il diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore e il certificato di specializzazione tecnica superiore*).

Type 2: Professional apprenticeship (*Apprendistato professionalizzante*), which is for occupational qualification with no relevant educational value. For this reason it is not covered in the Cedefop database

Type 3: Higher Training/Education and Research apprenticeship, for qualifications at tertiary level (*Apprendistato di alta formazione e ricerca*).

4) A short overview of the three types of apprenticeship

4.1 APPRENTICESHIP FOR VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION AND DIPLOMA

To allow young people aged between 15 and 25, hired with an apprenticeship contract, to obtain a qualification or a vocational diploma during their work experience.

Around 10.000 employed in 2022.

The apprenticeship for the vocational qualification and diploma (first level apprenticeship) is intended for young people aged between 15 and 25, which can potentially be activated in all sectors of work.

Young people hired with this type of contract will continue to attend school to obtain a regional certificate of vocational qualification or diploma corresponding to Level 3 and 4 of EQF.

Duration

The duration of the contract ranges from a minimum of six months up to a maximum of four years in case the young person attends a course for obtaining a vocational qualification.

The regional guidelines provide for the apprenticeship to be included and structured in the VET (Vocational Education and Training) programmes starting from the second year. Therefore, potential apprentice students may attend upon the possession of the skills required for admission to a third or fourth year of a VET programme.

Below is the allocation of training hours in the contractual hours of a level I apprentice attending the second, third and fourth year of a VET programme.

4.2 Vocational/Professional apprenticeship

If you are 18-29 years old, this kind of apprenticeship allows you to learn a profession through work-based training. It also allows you to achieve a professional qualification as determined by CCNL, Italian National Collective Bargaining Agreement.

It represents the 98% of apprenticeships in Italy, 533.000 employed in 2022.

The apprenticeship is a permanent employment contract aimed at training and hiring young people.

The vocational apprenticeship is intended for young people aged between 18 and 29 (or for 17-year-old people if they hold a vocational qualification).

The vocational qualification to which the contract is aimed at shall be defined by the parties to the contract in compliance with the provisions regulating the sector of reference set by the staff grading systems referred to in the collective agreements concluded by the most representative trade unions at the national level.

The apprenticeship contract shall last not less than six months.

The inter-confederal agreements and national collective labour agreements concluded by the most representative trade unions at the national level shall establish, depending on the type of vocational qualification to be achieved for contractual purposes, the duration and methods of training to ensure the acquisition of the technical-vocational and specialist skills, as well as the minimum duration of the apprenticeship period, which may not be longer than three years or five years for the professional profiles characterizing the role of the craftsman (*artigiano*), identified by the reference collective bargaining.

For the purposes of their vocational training or re-training, workers benefiting from mobility allowances or unemployment benefits may be hired as a professional apprenticeship, without age limits.

Only one third of the sectoral collective agreement at national level regulates this type of apprenticeship.

4.3 Higher education and research apprenticeship

Intended for young people aged between 18 and 29, for the achievement of university degrees and higher education, including PhDs, for research activities, as well as for the apprenticeship for access to the regulated professions.

Around 1.000 employed in 2022.

Description and duration

The apprenticeship is a permanent employment contract aimed at training and hiring young people.

The advanced training and research apprenticeship is intended for young people aged between 18 and 29 and allows:

- obtaining the following qualifications:
 - bachelor's degree
 - master's degree and five-year master's degree (unified course of studies)
 - university master
 - PhD
- joining courses relating to:
 - research
 - training of the roles provided for by the regulated professional orders and collective bargaining

This type of apprenticeship allows companies to benefit from highly specialised skills and provides young people with the opportunity to improve their skills and their employability in the job market.

The advanced training and research apprenticeship contract have a minimum duration of 6 months, while the maximum duration:

- for advanced training apprenticeship contracts, it corresponds to the standard duration of the related courses;

- for apprenticeship contracts for research activities, it is defined in relation to the duration of the research project and cannot exceed three years, although it can be extended up to one year where specific needs related to the research project arise;
- for the apprenticeship to join regulated professions, it is defined in relation to the achievement of the certificate of completed practice for admission to the state exam.

5. The main open issues

It is possible to speak of a lack of affirmation of apprenticeship in Italy as a tool for building professions from the integration of training and work.

Apprenticeship in Italy is 98% represented by professional apprenticeship.

Almost completely missing is the dual apprenticeship introduced in 2003 and never really established.

First-level apprenticeship has never emerged from its experimental phase and is only widespread in a few Italian regions in relation to vocational education and training systems.

Third-level apprenticeship, or high-level training and research apprenticeship, hovers around a thousand contracts throughout the country and often sees little involvement of the social partners and in particular the trade unions.

It must also be remembered that the training part of second-level apprenticeship has been greatly reduced in terms of number of hours and public funding and absolutely must be relaunched.

There are some good practices in collective bargaining: for example there is a national observatory in the metalworkers sector and in agricultural sector has been introduced the regulation of the third level apprenticeship.

We risk that in Italy, despite the Pnrr (NPR) resources concentrated on dual apprenticeships, we see a predominant apprenticeship with little training capacity. The risk, also in view of the high number of Neet in our country, is that apprenticeship will be reduced to a mere incentive entry contract for young people.

To prevent this, collaboration between the regions and social partners is crucial.

Without training there is no apprenticeship!

6. Apprenticeship in the public sector and an ongoing reform

At the end of 2023 the green light was given for apprenticeships in the public administration, at every level, also thanks to the resources of the NRP.

Until 31 December 2026, through apprenticeships, administrations will be able to recruit young graduates up to 10 per cent of their hiring capacity, 20 per cent for municipalities, unions of municipalities, provinces and metropolitan cities.

The contract, with a maximum duration of 36 months, provides for grading in the area of civil servants. At the end of the term, permanent employment is envisaged for those who have received, with a justified report, a positive evaluation of their service.

There is also an **ongoing reform**.

Article 18 of DDL 1532- bis A under consideration in the Chamber of Deputies 'Labour Dispositions' amends the discipline of Article 43 of Legislative Decree 81/2015, which regulates first-level apprenticeship. It adds to the possibility of transforming this contract, once the apprentice has obtained the qualification, diploma or specialisation qualification, into a professional apprenticeship, also into a third-level apprenticeship to give students continuing in the tertiary training chain the possibility of obtaining the ITS diploma or degree in apprenticeship in continuity with the previous path.

This measure is part of the new Italian legislation that has established the 4+2 professionalising training chain and has launched from this training year 2024- 2025 an experiment that allows students attending the institutes that have joined the experiment to graduate in four years and then be able to directly access the two years to obtain a specialised technician diploma at a higher technological institute (ITS Academy).