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# EDUCATION AND TRAINING GOVERNANCE THROUGH LEARNING OUTCOMES: POSSIBILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS IN ITALY

## *Gobernanza de la educación y formación a través de los resultados de aprendizaje: posibilidades y limitaciones en Italia*

SARA FRONTINI  
Noviter S.r.l. (Italy)  
IRENE PSIFIDOU  
Cedefop (Greece)

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Autor de contacto / Corresponding Author: Irene Psifidou. Email: rena.psifidou@cedefop.europa.eu

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**INTRODUCTION.**In the last years, the shift to learning outcomes, within the European lifelong learning strategies has represented a policy priority for many countries in Europe. Both governments and key stakeholders agree on the importance of learning outcomes as a part of an innovative and effective approach to teaching and learning emphasizing the knowledge, skills and competences acquired at the end of a learning process. **METHOD.** The present paper discusses the development of policies on learning outcomes within the European scenario, focusing mainly on the Italian case. Specifically, it has a twofold aim: first, to provide a general overview of the European political consensus on the learning outcomes approach and to present the diverse interpretations of European policies at national level; and second, to reflect upon possibilities and constraints connected to the implementation of learning outcomes in Italy. **RESULTS.** Taking into account characteristics of the current Italian education and training system being discussed in the present paper, the introduction of a learning outcomes approach in the design of curricula, qualifications and certification system reveals its strengths and weaknesses during the implementation process. The findings show that Italy is an example of merge combinations of new ambitions and old constraints, where new positive effects derived from a learning outcomes approach have to face previous structural, methodological and political issues. The regional diversities, the complicated relation between the State and the Regions, and the different stages of development of the last are some representative examples of the drawbacks which have complicated the successful implementation of the planned goals. **DISCUSSION.** The Italian case can thus be useful to reflect upon general differences and particular issues that characterize member states in the fulfilment of common objectives and European initiatives in education and training.

**Keywords:** *vocational education and training, learning outcomes, Italy, curriculum, certification, qualification.*

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## Introduction

The shift to learning outcomes, as a part of general European life long learning strategies, has represented the priority for many European countries. European governments and stakeholders share a common agreement on the importance of learning outcomes as a “part of an innovative approach to teaching and learning” (Cedefop, 2009a: 9). Two important European policy developments, endorsed with the Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning (2006) and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (European Commission/Parliament, 2008), have influenced significantly the adoption of national education and training policies emphasizing learning outcome-oriented approaches. While the former recommendation defines eight key competences that all young people should develop at the end of their initial education to a level that equips them for further learning and working through out their life, the latter establishes eight qualifications levels describing the knowledge, skills and competences acquired at the end of a learning process.

Since then, numerous European policy documents (within ET 2020) underlined that learning outcome-oriented approaches in lifelong learning are important means for making education and training systems more relevant to the knowledge-based Europe of the future. The Commission Communication “Europe 2020” on the European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth puts forward seven flagship initiatives, two out of which are highly interrelated with modernising qualifications and curricula on the basis of learning outcomes and stress the need for further developing the key competences approach beyond the schools sector, into adult learning and into vocational education and training (VET): the “Innovation Union” and an “Agenda for new skills and jobs”.

Evidence collected by Cedefop (2013) shows that the principle of learning outcomes has been broadly accepted across Europe and that national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) have contributed actively to this shift. In a number of countries, for example Belgium, Croatia, Iceland, Norway and Poland, NQFs have supported the implementation of learning outcomes, notably by identifying areas where learning outcomes have not been previously applied or where these have been used in an inconsistent way. Furthermore, the process of designing learning outcome-based national qualifications frameworks across Europe has been accompanied by redefinition and rewriting of VET standards and curricula; and yet this happens at varying speeds as national developments are in different stages of progress (Cedefop, 2012). However, key questions to this learning outcome approach remain open and evidence of what works and what’s not still remains scarce. While intensive reforms are taken place by national authorities to redesign qualifications, standards and curricula with an outcome-orientation, the impact of these reforms to the individual learners is not always yet visible nor measurable (Psifidou, 2012).

Italy, as other European countries, copes with the challenge of introducing in its education and training system a learning outcomes approach at the national and regional level, although its subsystems have specific characteristics. Two main aspects characterize the Italian system in the sphere of learning outcomes. The first one refers to the relation between NQF and EQF. Italy indeed represents a peculiar case for its decision to directly link the national qualifications levels to the EQF, without the development of an NQF. While, in principle, this is possible, almost all European countries (with the exception of Italy) see the development of an NQF as necessary to relate national qualifications levels to the EQF in a transparent and trustful manner. The second particular aspect for the Italian case is related to the current implementation of the national Law

on Labour Market, which delineates a national index of qualifications based on learning outcomes, a national register of qualifications and a national certification system.

The present paper has a twofold aim. The first one is to provide a general overview of the European political consensus on learning outcomes through the definition of the concept in relation to several interpretations of European policies at the national level. The second aim is to reflect upon possibilities and constraints connected to the political will of implementing learning outcomes as a form of governance in Italy. In relation to the aforementioned particular aspects which characterize the current Italian system, the introduction of a leaning outcome approach has thus shown the improvements and the difficulties related to its implementation process. The Mediterranean country is indeed an example of merged combinations of new ambitions and old constraints, where new positive effects derived from a learning outcomes approach have to face previous structural, methodological and political issues.

### **Understanding learning outcomes- Interpreting European policy initiatives to national reforms**

In the recent European initiative to develop and implement a common European meta-framework for referencing national qualifications, the so called European Qualifications Framework (EQF), learning outcomes are defined as *statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process* (European Parliament/Council, 2008). In this definition, the form of learning is not specified and it can take place either in formal or non-formal education arrangements, or informally through experience gained in the community or at the work place.

In spite of the apparent simplicity of this definition, previous research unravelled a huge

diversity of possible use and understandings of learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2009a). Learning outcomes are defined at different levels:

- at the systemic level (e.g. in qualification frameworks);
- at the level of qualifications (e.g. qualification standards);
- at the level of curricula and learning programmes.

Furthermore, according to the level on which they are defined, they may fulfil different functions: “recognition of prior learning, award of credit, quality assurance, learning plans, key competences for life, credibility for employers as well as modernisation of the governance of education and training as systems are reformed to encompass lifelong learning” (Cedefop, 2009a). Finally, learning outcomes are formulated on the basis of different concepts of competence existing at national level. These concepts influence the form of learning outcomes specifications and can be expected to have also an impact on the relationship between learning outcomes and curricula and learning programmes (European Commission and Cedefop, 2011; Cedefop, 2012).

Learning outcomes are best understood as a collection of useful processes and tools that can be applied in diverse ways in different policy, teaching and learning settings. It follows that there is no single correct or appropriate way of approaching them. The term can have a range of connotations and denotations, precisely because it is used in different contexts. The evidence collected in Cedefop studies (2010 and 2012) strongly suggests the need to be sensitive to the particular context in which learning outcomes are brought into use. Although the concept of learning outcomes is not a new aspect in the teaching and learning context, especially for VET where its origin may be traced back to previous centuries (Cedefop, 2010), the current focus on traversal key competences and holistic learning outcomes is

discussed as a “shift of paradigm” underpinning a different mental model of valuing outcomes for all those involved in the education and training process. Increasingly, outcome approaches to qualifications and curricula seem to be more aligned to constructivist learning theories according to which the learner must play an active role in the construction of meaningful relationships between cognitive, functional, emotional and social skills to be competent in a particular situation (Cedefop, 2010). Past experiences have shown that too detailed and narrowly defined learning outcomes oriented solely on functional performance have imposed limitations to the learning process (Psifidou, 2011a). In the contrary, the way learning outcomes are understood in recent European tools is seen as a useful way of bringing education and training programmes closer to learners’ “real life” and the needs of the market (Cedefop, 2011 and Psifidou, 2011b).

Additionally to the learning outcomes approach underpinning the EQF, learning theories and social and cultural values shape the definition of the distinctive features of national qualifications and curricula; as knowledge, skills and competences are differently understood in each country and education and training subsystem, the learning outcomes approach varies accordingly. Finally, the legal framework endorsing the education and training system in each country influences the design and value of qualifications as the law defines rights, duties, and the possibilities educational institutions have in these contexts (Psifidou, 2011a).

These different factors influencing the definition and development of qualifications and curricula raise many challenges to policy-makers and practitioners. Traditional processes on the design of qualifications (specification of knowledge and skills the students need to learn) is not sufficient anymore to meet new employment needs. According to Cedefop (2013), new qualifications should:

- be in alignment with the EQF context (national developments with regard to the establishment of national qualifications frameworks and/or the introduction of the Dublin descriptors in higher education, etc.);
- define learning outcomes in such a way that allow comparability, transparency and mutual trust at sectoral, national and international level; and
- take on board the experience and views of all actors concerned, and especially these of learners.

The present paper examines in continuation how Italy has applied the concept of learning outcomes to define and describe national curricula and qualifications. With regard to the lack of a consensual and unified definition of learning outcomes across countries, the above-mentioned definition of the EQF will be used as the conceptual basis for the present paper.

### **The recognition and the validation of learning outcomes and the certification processes at the European level**

As learning outcomes based qualification systems increasingly allow qualifications to be acquired through different learning pathways, the quality assurance of learning provision cannot be the only element underpinning the award of qualifications. To safeguard the reliability, credibility and relevance of qualifications, the processes and methods involved in awarding a qualification (the certification process) need to be looked at and more specifically, to the extent they are underpinned by systematic quality assurance. The definition of qualification in the EQF recommendation draws attention to the elements of certification which determine trust. These are:

- learning outcomes;
- standards;

- assessment and validation;
- the competent body.

Standards are the result of interaction between the worlds of work (e.g. social partners, professional associations, employment services) and education and training (e.g. VET institutions/schools, teachers/trainers, awarding bodies, education ministries, etc.). They serve as a reference point for the certification process and describe what the labour market can expect from the education and training system and —eventually— the individual learner. As mentioned above, Cedefop studies (2009b and 2012) show that the majority of countries have adopted outcome-oriented standards or are in the process of doing so, defining a set of knowledge, skills and competences to be obtained by the learners. Learning outcomes-based standards play a key role in defining and describing the focus and orientation of the education and training process and can inevitably influence the resulting qualifications. However, the extent to which the formulation, improvement and renewal of learning outcome-based standards is subject to systematic quality assurance is not yet clear.

Similarly, the learning outcomes approach increasingly influences VET certification across Europe. Reforms in IVET have been/are being implemented in e.g. Czech Republic, Estonia, Malta, Slovenia, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Finland. For instance, in the Netherlands assessment includes a combination of methods: written test with open questions, presentation, assessment of products made, assessment interview, criterion-based interview, observation in a simulated situation, observation in the workplace, portfolio and proof of competence. In doing this, education and training institutions try to use the right methods to match the performance of learners against the assessment standards and to understand it in terms of learning outcomes.

Participation of different stakeholders in the different stages of a certification process - from the setting of standards to assessment of the

individual learner and awarding of qualification - forms an important part of quality assurance. These national developments are triggered by European initiatives and in particular, the EQAVET Recommendation (2009) which calls countries to devise quality assurance in IVET, defining standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences of individuals based on learning outcomes and reflecting their national political and cultural contexts. It refers to the importance of ensuring the participation of social partners, VET providers, teachers, local and regional actors and other relevant stakeholders in setting VET goals and objectives as well as to their involvement in monitoring and evaluating processes. The systematic involvement of labour market representatives in the certification process makes it possible to judge whether there is a real value attached to the qualification. For example, in some countries tripartite committees are used; this strengthens the confidence in the awarded qualification.

As relatively little systematic evidence exists on the way different countries address these issues, the current paper explores in a more systematic way how these arrangements have been designed and implemented in Italy.

## **The Italian approach to learning outcomes**

In the latest years, Italy has introduced diverse changes in order to support the shift to a learning outcomes approach. The transformations, which have involved diverse parts of the system, have represented a challenge for an education and vocational training system traditionally based on programmes<sup>1</sup>, where formal qualifications are ruled by the principle of 'legal value of the qualification'<sup>2</sup> (*valore legale del titolo di studio*) (Cedefop-ReferNet, 2012). In Italy, the designation of new qualification in the national qualification systems is controlled by the two authorities responsible for them: The

Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Regions. It thus means that any qualification has to be officially recognized as formal qualification by the public body in charge for the specific educational and vocational training section.

The progressive shift from programmes to learning outcomes in curriculum development aims to create a learner-centred system. The first step of this process took place thanks to Law 53/2003, which introduced both the expected learning outcomes in relation to knowledge, skills and competences (Cedefop, 2009a; Cedefop-ReferNet, 2012) and the “personalized study plan” for all educational levels (Cedefop, 2009a). Another important step concerns the field of IVET, which is, according to the Italian constitutional reform (National Law No 3, October 2001), under regional responsibility. The introduction of learning outcomes in IVET curricula has been indeed introduced thanks to the national index of vocational and training qualifications (*Repertorio nazionale dell’offerta di istruzione e formazione*). The national index of vocational and training qualifications includes all qualifications under regional responsibility and represents an important space of negotiation between the national and the regional administrations (Cedefop-ReferNet, 2012). This process took place in 2011, but it is important to underline how several Regions (Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna, etc.) had already created their own regional index of vocational and training qualifications, anticipating the national processes. The development of a learning outcomes approach in a lifelong learning perspective currently attempts to promote the correlation between national qualifications levels and EQF, the development of a national index of qualifications, the recognition of informal and non-formal learning and the delineation of a certification system.

Italy, as other European countries, considers the EQF an important opportunity to rethink and develop its education and training system.

In the Italian context, the main actors involved in the EQF implementation are the Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies in line with the Regions, the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano and the social partners. According to the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR, 2012), the employ of EQF permits to concentrate on three main aspects: a correlation between all the qualifications and the eight EQF levels; the description of each qualification in terms of learning outcomes; a framework for quality assurance. The three elements thus represent a cultural shift in relation to the twofold necessity to define both a national framework and a national certification system for knowledge, skills and competences recognition. The most significant step for the implementation of EQF at the national level is represented by the “First Italian Report on the referencing of the national qualifications to the EQF” (*Primo rapporto italiano di referenziamento delle qualificazioni al quadro europeo EQF*). The Report identifies three main aspects:

- a) the definition of common rules and criteria which do not threaten, on the other hand, regional autonomy and flexibility;
- b) the creation of a clear structure;
- c) general governance where responsibilities and tasks are well defined (MIUR, 2012).

The adoption of the Report through the Agreement signed by the State/Regions Conference in December 2012 represents a first significant step for the correlation between the qualifications and the EQF levels. Indeed, thanks to the Report, all the qualifications, certifications, professional qualifications and Europass documents issued in Italy, up to the highest levels of education and training will have a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level.

According to Cedefop (2013), the creation of an NQF brings several benefits reflecting particular needs, such as, the integration of diverse



systems, and especially of different regional VET systems; the necessity to reinforce the dialogue between education systems and the labour market; the promotion of geographical and professional mobility; and the recognition of individual experiences favouring social inclusion, especially for those ones who do not have regular qualifications and competences required by the labour market. Despite this positive evidence, Italy lacks a political support for developing an NQF. Unlike other European countries, which have developed an NQF as a first step for a successive link between national qualifications levels and EQF, Italy has opted for a direct connection of its qualifications levels to the EQF. The EQF recommendation allows this possibility and Italy has thus decided to refer to “the learning outcomes descriptions and definitions already in place for the most of its education and training systems” (Cedefop, 2013: 129). The country has thus applied national methodology and criteria to realize the correlation process. Notwithstanding the consistent improvements, the Advisory Group<sup>3</sup> on the ‘First Italian Report on the referencing of the national qualifications to the EQF’, next to positive comments, has pointed out some unclear elements. In particular, the Advisory Group has revealed concern about the correlation between qualifications and the EQF. More specifically, the Group has underlined the difficulty for external actors (other European Countries, international stakeholders, etc.) comprehending and evaluating the direct correlation between qualifications and EQF, asking how Italy intends to guaranty quality assurance in a mutual trust perspective.

### **The development of a national certification system**

In Italy, the employ of the EQF also plays an important role in the development of the national standards for a certification system, which is essential for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning. Although the

national standards for the certification process have been recently identified, Regions are officially responsible for the definition and implementation of a certification system. Moreover, since skills and competences which can be certified are the ones included in regional indexes of professional qualifications, the delineation of indexes at the regional level represents another key element for the certification process. The ambition to create a national certification system, in respect of regional responsibilities, has been central in many debates in the field of education, training and labour market at both the national and regional level. The Italian determination to introduce significant transformations finds a concrete application through two new fundamental legislations. The first one is Law 92/2012 “Provisions for Reforming the Labour Market and Fostering Growth” (*Disposizioni in materia di riforma del mercato del lavoro in un’ prospetiva di crescita*) delineated by the Ministry of Labour. The second one is Legislative Decree 13/2013 “Definition of general norms and essential levels of performance for the recognition and validation of informal and non formal learning and minimum standards for a national certification system” (*Definizione delle norme generali e dei livelli essenziali delle prestazioni per l’individuazione e validazione degli apprendimenti non formali e informali e degli standard minimi di servizio del sistema nazionale di certificazione delle competenze*).

In line with a lifelong learning approach, Law 92/2012 aims to create a dynamic and flexible labour market and to develop human capital. The Law has a twofold agenda. The first one is to promote lifelong learning; while the second one is to delineate a national certification system. In accordance with European guidelines, the legislation lists diverse principles for learning recognition:

- The recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning.
- The definition of the essential levels of performance related to the service supply.



- The recognition of informal and non-formal learning as credits for partial exemption of studies.
- The delineation of procedures for recognizing informal and non-formal learning, credits.
- The possibility to compare competences certified within the national territory.
- Certifications are public acts and the concept 'competence' refers to a structured set of skills and knowledge acquired in different context.
- The delineation of a national system of competence certification based on minimum standards which are homogeneous and reflect the principle of transparency, objectivity, accessibility, confidentiality and traceability.
- The development of a national index of qualifications, as a reference for each regional index, in order to guarantee the comparability of certified competences across Regions.

Legislative Decree 13/13 instead sets both the formal introduction of national certification system and the essential levels of performance which rule the certification process. In particular, the Decree has two main goals: the first one is the delineation of a national index of qualifications as a reference index for each regional index; while the second one is the definition of minimum national standards for the certification system (process, certification, procedures). As a consequence, Regions which already have both a regional competence system and a regional index have to update them according to the national legislations; while Regions without a defined certification system and an index of professional qualifications are boosted to introduce them within their regional education and training systems.

The national index of qualifications will be composed by the index of education qualifications, the index of vocational and training qualifications (IVET), the index of professional

qualifications, and the index of apprenticeship qualifications. At the moment, the national index of qualifications is constituted by the ones of educational qualifications, vocational and training qualifications, higher technical education and training qualifications. The indexes of professional qualifications and the one of apprenticeship qualifications are under construction. Two working groups have been set up and they are simultaneously working on the same economic sectors (real estate, mechanic, tourism), and sharing a common methodological structure. At the moment, there is also an ongoing discussion on the possibility to use a same index for both professional and apprenticeship qualifications. The main issue is a disconnection between the professional qualifications included in regional indexes and the professional qualifications defined in diverse employment contracts. Indeed, professional profiles delineated in regional indexes and in employment contracts differ. In 2012, the province of Milan has, for example, started an ongoing project (Cert'App Project) to promote the certification of apprentices' competences through an effective use of the regional index of professional qualifications<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the project has also attempted to connect the professional qualifications described in several employment contracts and the ones defined in the regional index.

In order to implement the Legislative Decree, a technical working group has defined the principal phases of the implementation process. The working programme has also been approved at the political level and is focused on the national index of qualifications implementation and the definition of the standards for the certification system. In addition, it has been politically approved the possibility for Regions lacking of regional indexes of professional qualifications to adopt those ones from Regions which have already implemented them. The opportunity to borrow the indexes from other Regions is considered an advantage to optimize good practices and finance resources and to

accelerate the implementation process where standards are completely missing. The presence within the national territory of different level of developments represents the Italian paradox. If a significant number of Regions have instituted their regional index of professional qualifications, only six Regions (Piemonte, Lombardia, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, Umbria) on twenty-one have a defined regional certification system. Many Regions are still defining their regional certification systems, while few Regions have not started yet.

The necessity to have both a structured certification system and an index of professional qualifications has become an essential requirement in relation to the beginning of Youth Guarantee (YG). YG, the new approach to tackling youth unemployment established by the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013, emphasizes the importance of boosting skills and competences to reduce mismatches and address labour-demand needs. “The Italian Programme on Youth Guarantee 2014-2020” (*Il Programma Italiano sulla Garanzia per i Giovani 2014-2020*) underlines how the certification of competences represents a key aspect for promoting quality and transparency of qualifications in a flexible and efficient labour market. In addition, the Italian National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (2014) also sets as aim the realization of both an operative system of certification and indexes of qualifications within 2018, addressing € 2.300.000. The heterogeneous Italian scenario in the field of competences’ certification is one of the weakest parts in connection with the Recommendation. The risk is in fact that Regions with well developed systems, which generally are also the ones with less youth unemployment, can provide their young people with more and better services and, consequently, raise youth employment; to the contrary, Regions with less developed systems, and maybe with more unemployment, could offer fewer opportunities to their youth, reproducing a vicious circle.

## **Conclusions: possibilities and constraints of the Italian case**

The complexity of the Italian case reveals several issues which can be extended to a general reflection about learning outcomes approach, NQF, EQF, etc.

National differences of education and training systems, the role of diverse actors involved in the processes, and various structures of the labour market are only some of the aspects which impact on the implementation and development processes. For example, the direct Italian correlation between qualifications and the EQF can be connected to a cultural heritage which attributes a high importance to formal qualifications and their legal values. In addition, the presence of twenty one education and training subsystems with different levels of development is surely another element which has negatively impacted on the delineation of an NQF. Each actor involved in the implementation of the EQF (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour Market, the Regions) tends to preserve its own sphere of control and peculiar interests rather than finding common solutions. Sometimes, the lack of both an active cooperation between the main actors and a significant political engagement can be considered one of the reasons related to unclear situations. As emphasized by Cedefop (2013), the link between national levels and EQF has been mainly a technical process without a political interest. Consequently, “real discussions on national learning outcomes based qualifications levels, how qualifications from different subsystems (VET, HE, general education) are aligned to the explicit learning outcomes based levels and how they related to each other” (p.132), the effective recognition of certifications of competences in the labour market and their availability in the education and training systems still need further debates and commitment.

The shift to learning outcomes as a form of national governance has represented a manifold occasion to improve the education and vocational training systems at the national and regional level. The introduction of the national index of qualifications, the recognition of informal and non formal learning and the creation of national standards for the certification system constitute some concrete opportunities to reform the whole system in line with both social and economic needs and European recommendations. In particular, Law 92/2012 and Legislative Decree 13/2013 represent two important milestones in the Italian change towards a learning outcome approach. Regardless of the legislations, Italy has to face some important constraints. The heterogeneity which characterizes the Italian context, the decentralization of VET systems—a high number of actors involved at different stage and sometimes too much autonomy without a significant leadership—have represented the main obstacles in the rapid definition and implementation of the reforms. In addition, Regions with more developed systems are usually averse to transform what they have already defined and implemented. Further, in diverse Regions some concepts, such as ‘competence’, mean different things, increasing the difficulty to agree on a common terminology at national level. The delineation of national objects through the agreement of twenty one heterogeneous Regions is certainly a challenge, representing one of the reasons related to the Italian lateness.

Furthermore, the competitiveness between the national and the regional level is another structural problem which affects the process of development and implementation in the Italian context. For example, as in the case of the national index of professional qualifications, which has a significant role in the certification process, Regions have preferred to provide general definitions of professional profiles included in the national index, leaving a significant leeway at the regional level. Consequently, although respecting the national professional

standards, the units of competence related to the same profile differ in each Region. In this perspective, European guidelines constitute fundamental tools to commonly develop a national system and share a common ‘language’. The creation of a national index of qualifications and national standards for the certification system are certainly active instruments that engage both the State and the Regions in negotiation and compromise. Also the YG represents a strong motivation to accelerate the delineation and implementation processes for those Regions which have not done sufficient progresses yet. Further, it is even an opportunity to improve tools and procedures for those Regions with more developed systems.

The Italian case reveals how too high diversity can lead to structural problems. To the contrary, the shift to learning outcomes can be seen as a way to increase transparency and quality assurance in spite of a common level of standardization. Next to the necessity to create a framework for the Italian diversity, a learning outcomes approach can help to solve some other open issues connected to the relation between education and vocational training and the labour market. Indeed concepts like EQF, competences, learning outcomes, etc. are still unknown and/or unclear for many companies which do not recognize yet the importance of these tools in the selection process of employees. In addition, this disconnection from the labour market is also worsened by the gap between qualifications delineated in regional indexes of qualifications and qualifications defined in employment contracts. This problem is particularly evident in the apprenticeship training system. Although there is no doubt that a learning outcomes approach necessitates a long and significant process of reform, it can also symbolize a good occasion to both solve the weakest parts of the national system and its subsystems and contribute to their significant improvement.

To conclude, if one categorizes European countries according to the classification centre,

semi-periphery and periphery<sup>3</sup> in an educational perspective (Frontini, 2009), Italy clearly represents an example of semi-periphery. Although the Mediterranean country is principally core-oriented in its policies, some peripheral conditions constrain the ambition to reach centre standards and objectives. Indeed, regional diversities, a complicate relation

between the State and the Regions and different developments of regional systems create a gap between goals and successful implementations. The Italian case can thus be useful to reflect upon general differences and issues that characterize the whole European Union in the realization of common objectives and European initiatives.

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## Notas

<sup>1</sup> The term 'programme' refers to "a prescriptive list of disciplinary contents to be taught to students in a specified period of time" (Cedefop-ReferNet, 2012: 39).

<sup>2</sup> The principle of 'legal value of a qualification' signifies that "any qualification —either newly established or pre-existent— should be formally recognised as official qualification by the public body responsible for the specific [educational and vocational training] segment involved" (ibidem).

<sup>3</sup> The Advisory Group on EQF is composed of all representatives from national authorities, social partners and other stakeholders to support the implementation of the framework. In particular, it aims to guarantee that there is a general coherence in, and transparency of, the process of relating qualifications systems to the EQF;

<sup>4</sup> The regional index of professional qualifications in Lombardy Region is called "Quadro Regionale degli Standard Professionali - QRSP".

<sup>5</sup> In an educational perspective, Frontini (2009) defines *centre* "those countries that are able to implement and interpret in effective ways policies promoted by the international community and to react quickly and positively to changes" (p. 6); *semi-periphery* are instead "those countries that are partially able to implement and realize those aims because of the presence of many peripheral conditions in their national realities" (ibidem); *periphery* are rather "those countries that experience difficulties in concretely actualizing the goals and directives, due to an altogether too strong focus on national issues" (ibidem).

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## Resumen

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### *Gobernanza de la educación y formación a través de los resultados de aprendizaje: posibilidades y limitaciones en Italia*

**INTRODUCCIÓN.** En los últimos años, el proceso de los resultados de aprendizaje, como parte de las estrategias europeas de aprendizaje permanente, ha sido una prioridad política para muchos países en Europa que han querido dar un énfasis innovador y eficaz en la enseñanza y en el aprendizaje. De hecho, dicho proceso hace hincapié en un enfoque en el conocimiento, las habilidades y las competencias adquiridas durante un proceso de aprendizaje. **MÉTODO.** El presente trabajo analiza el desarrollo de las políticas relacionadas con los resultados del aprendizaje en el escenario europeo, adoptando un enfoque específico en el caso italiano. En particular, tiene un doble objetivo: primero, proporcionar una visión general del consenso político europeo sobre el proceso de los resultados del aprendizaje y presentar las varias interpretaciones de las políticas europeas en el ámbito nacional; segundo, reflexionar sobre las posibilidades y las limitaciones relacionadas con la implementación del método de los resultados del aprendizaje en Italia. **RESULTADOS.** En el marco de las particularidades que caracterizan el sistema actual de educación y formación profesional italiano, el diseño de currícula, cualificaciones y sistema de certificación basado en resultados de aprendizaje ha mostrado sus puntos fuertes y débiles. Las conclusiones demuestran que en Italia los nuevos efectos positivos derivados de los resultados de aprendizaje tienen que afrontar problemas anteriores estructurales, metodológicos y políticos que persisten. Las diversidades regionales, la relación complicada entre el Estado y las regiones, y las diferentes etapas de desarrollo de los sistemas regionales son ejemplos representativos que han dificultado la exitosa implementación de las metas inicialmente planeadas. **DISCUSIÓN.** El caso italiano puede por lo tanto ser útil para reflexionar sobre las diferencias generales y los aspectos particulares que caracterizan a los países europeos en la realización de objetivos comunes en el ámbito de la educación y formación profesional.

**Palabras clave:** *Formación profesional, Resultados de aprendizaje, Italia, Currículum, Certificación, Cualificación.*



## Résumé

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### *Gouvernance de l'Éducation et la formation autour des résultats d'apprentissage: possibilités et limitations en Italie*

**INTRODUCTION.** Tout au long de ces dernières années, le processus des résultats de l'apprentissage, faisant partie des stratégies européennes relatives à l'apprentissage permanent, a été une priorité politique pour de nombreux pays européens qui voulaient mettre l'accent sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage innovateur et efficace. Les résultats d'apprentissage mettent en fait, l'accent sur une approche des connaissances, des aptitudes et compétences acquises tout au long du processus d'apprentissage. **MÉTHODE.** Le travail suivant analyse le développement des politiques relatives aux résultats de l'apprentissage dans le cadre européen, adoptant, dans le cas italien, une approche spécifique. En particulier, ce la poursuit deux objectifs: premièrement, offrir une vision générale du consensus politique européen sur le processus des résultats d'apprentissage et, d'un autre côté, présenter plusieurs interprétations des politiques européennes dans le cadre national; deuxièmement, réfléchir sur les possibilités et les limitations relatives à l'application de la méthode des résultats de l'apprentissage en Italie. **RÉSULTATS.** Dans le cadre des particularités qui caractérisent le système actuel de l'éducation et formation professionnelle italienne, la conception d'un programmes d'études, des qualifications et du système d'accréditation basée sur les résultats d'apprentissage, montrent ses points forts et ses limitations. Les conclusions montrent qu'en Italie les nouvelles incidences positives qui dérivent des résultats d'apprentissage doivent faire face à des difficultés structurelles, méthodologiques et politiques précédentes qui persistent encore. Les importantes diversités régionales, les rapports délicats entre l'État et les Régions, et les différentes étapes de développement des systèmes régionaux sont des exemples représentatifs qui rendent difficile une application qui réussie des objectifs prévus initialement. **DISCUSSION.** Le cas italien peut, par conséquence, être utile pour réfléchir sur les différences générales et sur les aspects particuliers qui caractérisent les pays européens, dans la mise en œuvre des objectifs communs dans le cadre de l'éducation et la formation professionnelle.

**Mots clés:** *Formation professionnelle, Résultats d'apprentissage, Italie, Programmes d'études, Accréditation, Qualification.*

## Perfil profesional de las autoras

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### **Sara Frontini**

Expert in education and vocational training and works as a consultant to develop policy on education and training at the Directorate of Education, Training and Employment of Lombardy Region. She also provides assistance and technical support to Italian public and private institutions for the submission of international and national calls for tenders and projects. Since 2004, Sara has taught "Cross Cultural and Comparative Education" at the Institution of General Education at ÅboAkademi University in Vasa, Finland. She is also a PhD candidate at ÅboAkademi with a thesis focused on vocational education and training in a comparative perspective.



**Irene Psifidou (autora de contacto)**

Expert in Education and Training Policy at the *European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training* (Cedefop). Before joining Cedefop in 2004, she was education consultant at the World Bank, in Washington DC. Irene has published in the fields of qualifications' comparability and transparency, learning outcomes, curriculum policy and practice, teaching methods, teachers and trainers, learners' assessment, inclusive education and early leaving from education and training. She holds two Master degrees and a PhD in Comparative Education Policy from the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (UAB) in Spain.

Correo electrónico de contacto: [rena.psifidou@cedefop.europa.eu](mailto:rena.psifidou@cedefop.europa.eu)

Dirección para la correspondencia: Irene Psifidou. Europe 123, Thessaloniki. Greece 0030.