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The state of continuing education in Italy

The low level of continuing education in Italy does not allow employees to keep up with the digitization of professions.

Technological progress has always had a profound impact on the labour market and **skills needs**. In this perspective, **continuing education** systems play a crucial role as they can help adults to develop and maintain relevant skills and to cope with technological changes.

However, according to the **OECD** (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) report entitled " Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems", the adult learning system in Italy seems to be poorly prepared to face these challenges.

In Italy, adult participation in training has increased considerably over the last ten years, with an increase of 133% in the period 2007-2016. Despite this progress, Italy continues to lag behind most **OECD countries**: today, only **two out of ten adults participate in vocational training** (about half the OECD average) and, although the low-skilled are likely to be those most in need of training, only 9.5% of them participate in training courses (the OECD average is about 20%). Moreover, 38% of adults have low levels of **language and/or numerical skills**.

As in other OECD countries, **SMEs** in Italy are less likely to train their workers than large companies. Only 60% of small enterprises offer a continuous training programme, compared to 93.3% of large enterprises (over 250 employees).

The low level of continuous training in Italy does not allow employees to keep up with the **digitisation of professions**. With the introduction of new digital technologies, if 15.2% of jobs could be fully automated, another 35.5% will be profoundly transformed compared to the tasks that workers will perform. Nevertheless, people who do jobs more at risk of digitisation also do less training (40%) than workers in low risk roles (59%).

Moreover, the alignment of continuous training to **market needs** leaves something to be desired: more than 30% of training hours in Italy focus on compulsory training, such as health and safety training. This training is certainly necessary, but it should be integrated with other opportunities that enable workers to keep up with the demands of the labour market.

Although a large proportion of companies with at least 10 employees claim to assess their skills needs, **Italy** is one of the OECD countries with the lowest correspondence between identified priorities and training activities provided. Only just over 3% of the activities aim at improving IT skills.

In this context, **renewing the continuous training system** is essential to allow adults to access training opportunities that are relevant and aligned to market needs. In what way? Here are some possible interventions suggested by the OECD:

- **Making training more inclusive and accessible**, for example by raising awareness of the importance of training, informing adults about available opportunities and encouraging companies - especially SMEs - to train their employees;
- **Align training with needs**, e.g. by ensuring that enterprises and adults make good use of existing information on skills needs;
- Improve the **quality of training**, by aligning the quality standards of regional accreditation systems, and by publishing information on the quality of training providers;
- Ensuring **adequate funding**, for example through public resources in addition to the contribution already paid by enterprises to the Interprofessional Funds.

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