

European Strategy Report [Lombardy]

Strengthening the path from education to employment

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Context

REPLAY-VET has been a 2-year project led by Prospektiker in Spain with partners across Europe. Europe has both a pressing need to tackle replacement demand caused by an ageing workforce in many sectors and persistent levels of low skilled workers, often outside of the workforce. The project has used a network of expert labour market analysts to explore what new policy and practices will need to exist if Europe is to tackle replacement demand by supporting people with low skill levels into these sectors.

In the Lombardy Region we have focussed on the Manufacturing Sector. The work has resulted in a series of major reports, events and a Toolkit with 'How To' guides. This report forms part of the project outputs and will be included within the Toolkit.

One of the problems of the educational institutions is that in the last ten years alone the Ministers of Education have all focused on change. A range of reforms was introduced, quickly replaced by new regulations implemented through application of circulars and addition of new articles in the Stability Law. However, this seems to have been at the cost of training and employment opportunities for young people and the school-work pathway.

The policy recommendations here have emerged from the meetings held with the 'triple helix' groups at regional and sub-regional levels and from analysis of national and international practices. These recommendations are designed specifically for policymakers at LEP (regional) and local authority (sub-regional) levels and are presented in no particular order. National and International/European policy recommendations will be the subject of a separate strategic report.

In particular, an important contribution emerged was the one given by the training school actors, that mentioning the best practices and the researches performed on the evaluation of training pointed out interesting aspects regarding the effectiveness of the paths from school to labour market.

It is therefore useful to recall four central and unavoidable points on the employability issue.

Policy recommendations at regional/sub-regional levels



Four key areas for improving employability of young people in Lombardy are transition from the curriculum to skills, territorial network, financing of the training courses and training companies. These areas require the following consideration:

1. TRANSITION FROM THE CURRICULUM TO SKILLS

The first change required is the **transition from the curriculum to skills**. These are the skills that must be certified. This transition requires a new approach and it is a precondition to move towards more flexible educational and training paths, more tailored to the needs of learners and businesses and, therefore, more effective both in reducing school dropouts and in raising the employability of trained children. The two operational implications, consistent with this innovation, are:

- the **Learning Unit (LU)** on the didactic level. The LU is the educational tool that allows to discover and evaluate a competence. It allows, in fact, to experience situations in which the student can act and put to good use the knowledge and skills acquired during the training course, with respect both to the area of basic subjects and to the professional technical area. It is necessary to bring back to the SO any real or simulated contexts that, aiming at the realization of a final product, allow, through the mandatory description the phases of the working process and the use of different teaching methods, the identification of authentic services and skills that can be assessed with a rubric built ad hoc. The Learning Unit could become the common language that any path can take as a translation of knowledge and skills into skills. In this sense, the various certification models must be accompanied by the portfolio with a description and evaluation of the ABAs that have allowed to reach certain skills.
- the **Training Portfolio** on the certification plan. The portfolio tells the progress, the difficulties and the successes obtained from time to time, serving the dual purpose of making it public and helping the student to make his own and retain the experience. With this in mind, the portfolio is the tool that identifies and helps the understanding of the maturity and growth of the student. The portfolio takes into account what the student knows and has learned, how he achieved this success and the path and motivation that allowed the achievement of certain objectives. The peculiar characteristic of the portfolio is for sure the plurality of people involved in its



composition: the trainers, the teachers and the students, in fact, are the one who, sometimes together, and sometimes in an alternate way, fill it out.

The training courses that have gone in this direction have shown greater appreciation from the world of work and have been followed by better insertions and full exploitation of the human resources

2. Territorial Network

The second change concerns the **territorial network**. Only a systemic approach that evokes the concept of 'educating community' can bear the fruits expected in terms of educational success, also remembering that conditions for the training success are systematic and continuous orientation paths to employability. Networking is first and foremost a 'conceiving with': educational institutions, training agencies, universities and companies are flanked and accompanied by offering an active contribution to educational and training paths oriented to employability. The territories that own these networks in action are those in which the educational success of the boys is more evident and the school-work path is more effective. The most important challenge in the Italian context is certainly that of 'putting together' the productive world and the scholastic-educational world, which very often train students on obsolete tools or topics. Each territory is characterized by specific modes of dialogue, integration, coordination and common planning. Innovations are urgently needed in this direction. The expansion of the internships will not be achievable without a targeted involvement of the companies themselves in the fields of manufacturing production, crafts, commercial services, service industries, in the field of tourist accommodation¹.

¹ MIUR (2014b), *Alleanze formative tra scuole, imprese e istituzioni, best practices e prospettive future*, Torino, Ufficio Scolastico regionale per il Piemonte, Maggio.



3. Funding for training courses
- The third change concerns the methods of **financing of the training courses**. The public, for its part, must rethink a system in which the resources follow the needs of children, which means they can be expended in a range of accredited facilities and recognised pathways as in models of 'dowry school' or 'dowry'. This is to ensure full freedom of choice and consolidate those territorial networks that are more able to ensure the efficient use of all resources. The private sector, on the other hand, can actively collaborate. There are at least three levels of interventions:
- i) involvement of users (that is, the young people) in training because beyond the compulsory school it is right for the families to participate in the training investment giving feedbacks and having the possibility to shape the training offer, for instance proposing or choosing new subjects;
 - ii) involvement of individual companies (beyond the financial input) in ensuring quality of training;
 - iii) involvement of the local business community to achieve synergies and sustainability of projects.



4. Training companies

Finally, the fourth concerns the **training company**, i.e. the company involved in the definition of training needs, in the construction of routes and alternation methods, in the certification of skills. There are numerous university placement offices that have stable contacts with companies and labor organizations and several companies that sit on 'steering committees' of various degree courses. Likewise, this osmosis is frequent among the operators of vocational training and their territorial network of several tens, sometimes hundreds, of companies involved in internship activities and in the different alternation training modalities.

On the other hand, at the level of secondary educational institutions further growth is required. Technical institutes certainly play an important role as a pioneer, so do well-known companies, with a reputation and credibility towards families and the territorial training network and a power to widen the reach, also aggregating SMEs that would not have a critical mass to autonomously activate ad hoc training paths. Thus, the apprenticeship (and specifically the apprenticeship in advanced training) - which represents the most complete mode of on-the-job training - will be able to make a significant contribution in strengthening the "bottom-up" of the business school alliance in expectation of a 'second channel' training being more integrated with the world of work² also in Italy.

Key lessons relevant to European-wide skills and employment policies

Lessons identified from the Regional Report findings in Lombardy, that have particular relevance to **skills and employment policy-making** at the European level, include:

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Use of sector labour market information and intelligence to guide planned actions.

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² Buratti, U., Piovesan, C. e Tiraboschi, M. (2014), *Apprendistato: quadro comparato e buone prassi*, Modena, ADAPT University Press.



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Summary

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