

Italy

Italy – A Work First Perspective

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A Work First Perspective

A. Now we have explored & compared local & national educational VET- programs in the partners countries, focused on (long term) unemployed young adults, we have to outline the possibilities to adapt them to a Work first /work placement approach.

The potential implementation of a Work first placement approach in Italian VET programme must be analysed within the legal framework, which sees responsibilities lying at different institutional levels:

Parliament and Central Government have power on issues of:

- Work, social benefits and retirement legislation;
- Management of Social and unemployment benefits;
- National programmes for the use of UE funds;
- Systemic actions plans;
- Incentives for companies;
- National councils (observatories) on work and social policies.

Regions¹ are responsible for:

- Design and implementation of Active Work policies, including VET and training;
- Regulations of interships and apprenticeships;
- Systemic regional plans (including the Regional Plan for the implementation of Youth Guarantee Programme).

Provinces are in charge for:

- Management of Public Employment Centers (regulated by national legislation);
- Registration of jobseekers in data base;
- Local systemic actions.

Finally, **Municipalities** are responsible for work integration of social disadvantaged people.

The VET market too sees the presence of several, different organizations, both public and private (also of non profit nature), under the regulation and control of Regional governments (that set rules of functioning, keep a public register of agencies and grant funding for specific projects).

Nowadays, the need of closing the gap among education and the labour market has been recognized throughout the whole education and training system (also at University level), thus all education grades after the secondary include some form of work insight: from the so called “alternanza scuola – lavoro” (school-work interchange), which is a short educational experience in a company offered to

¹ Italy is divided in 21 regions.

students aged between 15-18, to the work based training leading to professional diplomas to internships foreseen within shorter training courses for adults, leading to acknowledged certificates, to the work contract with training purpose introduced under the “Apprenticeship system”.

That is to say that the “diagnostic”, vocational, motivational and learning value of a work experience, the principle which is at the core of “Work First”, has gained mainstream acknowledgment in the sectors of education and adult training.

Coming to the active employment policies (“politiche attive del lavoro”) introduced in our Region in the last ten years and which appear to be the most similar tool to the “Work First system”, it is interesting to notice that they are based on a blend of incentives to companies, support to the jobseekers, ad hoc training and mentored internships. Besides, internships provisions have acquired more importance than training in the latest Regional calls.

At the same time, the idea of creating a safe work environment for people far away from the job market (for different health or social reasons) to make them “job ready” is the root of the creation of the so called “WISE” work integration social enterprises² (which, with different characteristics, perform a function similar to the English and Irish “community employment”).

This background framework is important for two reasons:

1. Firstly, it accounts for differences that can be traced in the quantity and quality of employment and VET initiatives across the country;
2. It is needed to understand at which levels to act if we wish to integrate the Work First approach (or parts of it) in Italian VET and employment programmes.

B. Now we have explored this, please write down the consequences and steps necessary to start a Work First model with VET-programs that operates within the framework of the local, national social system and laws of your country.

If we can say the Work First philosophy is already embedded in the VET and employment programmes, there are also distinctive features of the approach.

Let us recap WF features. The model is based on:

1. Quick workload (a job offer in a short or very short time span) and time limit;
2. Intensive supervision by the same case manager;
3. Mandatory contract, with the risk of getting sanctions (in the form of loss or reduction of social benefits);
4. Integrated service, with a model that integrates job and life coaching, sports and care, income support and childcare solutions;
5. Follow up/Aftercare to avoid failures.

The system is managed by municipalities, with a smart regulation that rewards the use of funds for WF rather than for social benefits; also particularly interesting and important appear to be the idea of the “Work Plaza”, a place where all social and work agencies – and companies too – have their offices, facilitating access to citizens and interagency cooperation.

Now, in Italy, the responsibility to regulate and manage these different elements lies at the different institutional levels described in the first paragraph.

We can distinguish a macro, medium and micro level of action: the macro being the national (and

² In Italian “cooperative sociali di tipo b”, social cooperatives type b.

regional) legislative and policy framework, the medium being the one where Provinces and municipalities can act and the micro being the level of action at which employment (public and private) service operate.

In yellow colour, I underlined issues that in Italy can be regulated at the macro levels and that, therefore, cannot be easily changed to integrate WF elements. This is clearly a weakness since the “carrot and stick” approach, used both with municipalities and jobseekers, is probably one of the reasons of WF success.

Point 4 and the “Work Plaza” concept might be approached at the intermediate level and could be promoted by talking local municipalities into pilot experiences of interagency cooperation (that could involve public services and business but also non profit organizations active in the field of culture and sport, volunteering) to improve the chance of an integrated approach to social and work exclusion.

Eventually, there are elements that can be implemented at the micro level, thus at the organization/service level. They are:

1. Quick workload (a job offer in a short or very short time span);
2. Intensive supervision by the same case manager;
3. Follow up/Aftercare to avoid failures.

At this stage, within the budget rules defined by regional calls³, the elements of supervision and aftercare are usually in place but a deeper comparison among methodologies (for instance with regard to life coach, which is not present in Italian employment services) used by case managers and mentors could be interesting and lead to an improvement in quality of processes and outcomes. The comparison could be carried out through study visits or job shadowing exchanges, involving employment agencies staff.

From this point of view, very challenging and interesting, especially now in time of economic crisis, appear to be point 1: the capability of the WF system to grant a job position in a very short time (24/48 hours – a few weeks). The partnership with business and community employment organizations put in place to reach this amazing result would be worth of investigation for Italian public and private employment services.

³ Regional Calls allocates funds defining which percentage can be spent on different actions (employer incentive, training course, skills assessment and mentoring, etc..).