

Italy



27.8% Population aged 25-34 with a tertiary degree ^a

9.7% Percentage of immigrant stock (% population) ^b

21.7% Population below the poverty line ^c

19.8% Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) ^d

Average TIMSS/PIRLS scores (4th grade) ^e
Center point: 500

548

515

510

Reading

Math

Science

Average PISA scores (10th grade) ^f
OECD average

476

487

468

487

489

489

Reading

Math

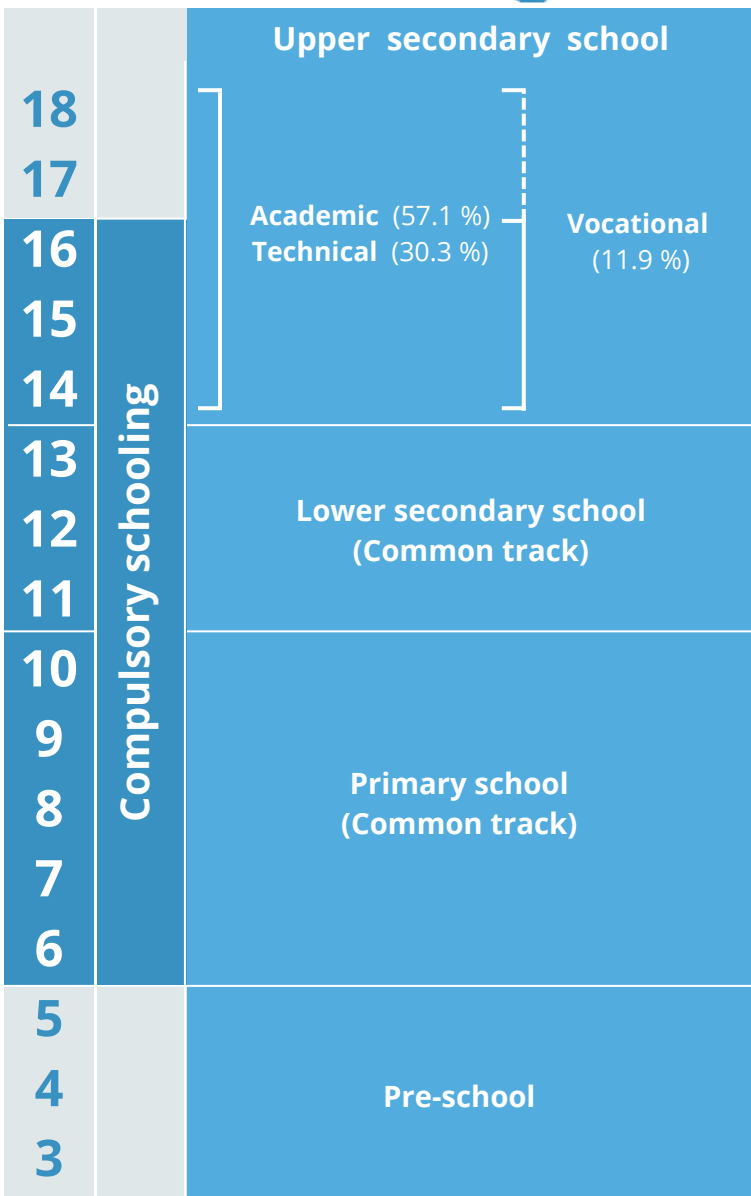
Science

4.3%

public spending in education as a % of GDP ^g

191.5

billions allocated in NPRR ^h



General features

Educational system

Education is compulsory for at least 10 years and covers the age group between 6 and 16. The purpose of compulsory education is to obtain an upper secondary school qualification or a professional qualification of at least three years' duration. Moreover, young people who have fulfilled compulsory education have a right/duty to attend training activities until the age of 18 (*Obbligo formativo*)¹⁰². Compulsory education is free of charge and it can be conducted (i) in public schools or equivalent (*scuole paritarie*) (ii) in structures accredited by the Regions (for vocational training) (iii) through parental education¹⁰³. The great majority of students enroll in public institutions in all cycles of education (in 2014, the enrollment rate in private institutions was 7% in primary schools, 4% in lower secondary school and 4% in upper secondary school). The distribution of private schools is uneven in the Italian territory, with the majority of private schools concentrated in Lombardy (around 17 %) ¹⁰⁴. Most of the students follow a similar curriculum in primary and lower secondary school, and they are asked to decide in which track they would like to enroll at the end of lower secondary school (when they are 14 years old). In this decision, lower secondary school teachers play a significant role, since they give a (not binding) recommendation to each student on which track they believe they should enroll in. The available tracks are: (i) academic tracks (*liceo*) with specializations in humanities, math and science, foreign languages, psychology and pedagogy, music and fine arts, (ii) technical tracks (*tecnico*) with specializations in business administration and technology (iii) vocational (professional) programmes, including several sub-tracks such as gastronomy and hospitality, agriculture, and mechanics. The first two tracks are state-led vocational institutes last 5 years and, upon successful completion of a final examination, they guarantee eligibility to apply for higher education. In addition, regions offer three-year and four-year vocational courses and training, issuing at the end of the course a qualification certificate (after completion of 3 years) or a diploma (after completion of 4 years). The latter,

supplemented with an additional year of study and upon successful completion of the final examination, guarantee eligibility to apply for higher education¹⁰⁵. Tertiary educational attainment is severely lower than the EU average: 27.6% of the population aged 30-34 obtained a tertiary degree versus 40.3% on average in the EU.¹⁰⁶

Governance and funding

The Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) is the principal funding entity of the public school system at all levels (with the exception of universities, which also receive funds from students' compulsory and voluntary contributions). It ensures the quality of education by setting the general guidelines, minimum standards and fundamental principles¹⁰⁷. Regions have concurrent legislative power and exclusive competence in vocational training in upper secondary school ("Formazione professionale")¹⁰⁸, while the majority of decisions in lower secondary school are taken at the State and school level¹⁰⁹. When compared to the OECD average, Italian schools enjoy a higher autonomy when it comes to resource allocation and setting of curriculum and assessment.

Performance

On average, Italian 15-year-old students performed close to the OECD average in math (with an average score of 487, very similar to the OECD average of 490) and worse than the OECD average in reading by almost 10 points (476 in Italy compared to OECD average of 487 points) and in science by 25 points (468 in Italy compared to OECD average of 493).

Girls performed better than boys by 25 points on average in reading and worse than boys in math by 16 points. The gender gap in math is among the highest in the countries that participate to the PISA assessment. The gender gap in performance is not statistically significant in science¹¹⁰.

According to OECD estimations, in Italy only 9% of the variance in reading performance is explained by socio-economic status (OECD average: 12%).

While the share of immigrant students increased in the past years (from 6 % in 2009 to 10

¹⁰²<https://www.miur.gov.it/obbligo-scolastico>

¹⁰³<https://www.miur.gov.it/obbligo-scolastico>

¹⁰⁴<http://dati.istat.it/>

¹⁰⁵<https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/percorsi-di-studio-e-formazione>

¹⁰⁶<https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2020/countries/italy.html>

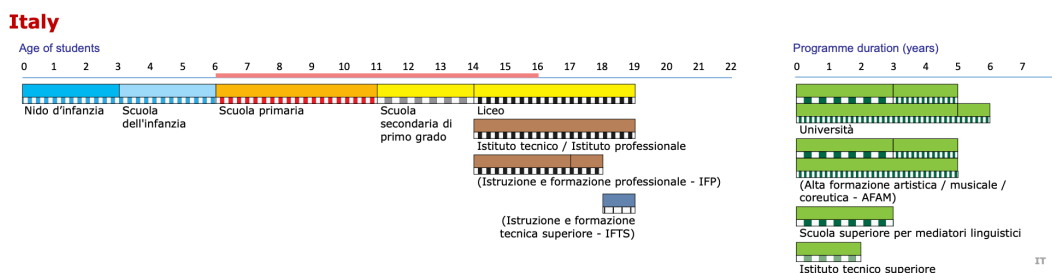
¹⁰⁷<https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/missione-e-funzione>

¹⁰⁸https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/italy_en

¹⁰⁹<https://www.oecd.org/education/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Italy.pdf>

¹¹⁰Source: PISA data, 2018 here the country highlights and here the country note.

Figure 1.8: Educational system in Italy



% in 2018), the performance gap between native and immigrant shrunk, with 14 % of immigrant students in the top quarter of reading (compared to the OECD average of 17 %).

Absenteeism and early school leaving percentages are higher than the EU average: when administered the PISA test, 57% of students reported to have skipped a day or two in the two preceding weeks before the test, and the percentage of early school leavers is among the highest in Europe (13.1%)¹¹¹. These percentages, although elevated, hide a pronounced heterogeneity at regional level in terms of performance, student truancy and school dropout: absenteeism and early school leaving are more pervasive in Southern regions.

Even among high-achieving students, expectations to go to university were low, especially if coming from a low socio-economic background (almost 13% of disadvantaged students compared to 40% less disadvantaged). Strong gender stereotypes can be observed in career aspirations: almost no girls expected to work in ITC (compared to 7% of boys) and around 13% of girls (against 25% of boys) was expected to work in the engineering/science sector.

Key policy challenges

Educational poverty is a relevant phenomenon, with more than one million children living in absolute poverty: 1 child out of 7 leaves studies prematurely and almost half of children and adolescents have never read a book. This situation has been exacerbated by the worsening economic conditions and school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, with strong repercussions on children's mental health and well-being.¹¹²

Regional differences in educational attainments and learning outcomes are pronounced,

with northern provinces having reached PISA scores similar to top-performing European countries and southern ones performing lower than the OECD average, and having higher percentages of early school leavers and students not in employment nor in education and training (NEET)¹¹³.

The gender gap in mathematics as it emerges from PISA 2018 is among the highest in OECD countries. Moreover, the narrowing gap between boys and girls in reading compared to past PISA editions was driven by a decline in reading performance among girls¹¹⁴.

Recently enacted policies and investments

To strengthen the educational system and promote development of new skills, Italy launched in 2015 The "Good School Reform" (*la buona scuola*)¹¹⁵ which recruited new teachers, promoted teachers' development by allocating funds to be spent on enhancing professional skills (especially digitalization skills), granted more autonomy to schools in the management of their (human, financial and organizational) resources, introduced evaluation of teachers and school managers, and a merit-based element in teachers' salaries.

To facilitate the development of skills and to bridge the gap between school and labor market, Italy promoted curricular traineeships (*alternanza scuola-lavoro*) which became compulsory in 2015 for all upper secondary school tracks. With the same purpose, short-cycle tertiary programs have been created (*Istituti Tecnici Superiori*), which are less theoretical than universities and are targeted to people who prefer a rapid entry in the labor market.

In order to tackle high dropout rates in upper secondary school among immigrants, in

¹¹¹<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>

¹¹²Riscriviamo il futuro: una rilevezione sulla povertà educativa digitale, Save the Children

¹¹³<https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/en/italy.html#A15>

¹¹⁴Girls' and boys' performance in PISA, OECD 2018

¹¹⁵https://www.istruzione.it/allegati/2017/La_Buona_Scuola_Approfondimenti.pdf

2014 it released guidelines for teachers of Italian as a second language (and provided qualified teachers of Italian as a second language in 2016) and allotted 500 thousand euros to promote projects that enhanced the teaching of Italian languages to immigrant students in secondary school in 2015.

With the aim of reducing regional differences in performance and drop out rates, Italy is implementing the National Operation Programme 2014-2020 ¹¹⁶ in cooperation with the European Strategy for Education and Training (ET2020), which allocated 2.1 billion of euros to the least-developed regions in Italy.

In 2016, the Government, together with a network of foundations, started the *Fund to fight child educational poverty*. Overall, the Fund is worth more than 600 million euros and the approved projects, supported with a contribution of more than 338.6 million euros, involve half a million children and young people together with their

families. Through the projects, more than 7,200 organizations, (including the Third Sector, schools, public and private entities) have been networked, strengthening the “educating communities” of the territories¹¹⁷.

As part of the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience (NPRR), Italy will allocate 30.88 billions to education, with the aim of (i) strengthening the supply of educational services from kindergartens to universities and (ii) increase investments in research. The first part will entail tackling the structural deficiencies in the supply of primary education and education services, reducing gaps in basic skills, high dropout rate and regional disparities, increase the percentage of adults with a tertiary degree and try to address the skills mismatch between education and labor demand. The second part will increase the level of Research and Development (R&D) spending, address the problem of low number of researchers and brain drain, and low demand for innovation¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶<https://bit.ly/3Qyl1At>

¹¹⁷<https://percorsiconibambini.it/chi-siamo/>

¹¹⁸<https://pnrr.istruzione.it/>