

***Students with Foreign Origins in Italian IVET - Initial Vocational Education and Training: Pathways for Integration***

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**Abstract**

The paper presents the results of the research: “Students with foreign origins, vocational training, employability and active citizenship” (2013) developed through a quantitative survey with the self-administration of a questionnaire to an audience represented by 1840 pupils with foreign origins and 1835 native pupils, aged 14-19, in 124 Centers for Initial VET in Italy. The presence of students with a foreign origin in the Italian educational system is an emergent issue, both in the fields of sociology and educational studies. Although we have data and analysis on the presence and integration of foreign students in the school system, there is still much to explore and deepen in the domain of the Initial Vocational Education and Training-IVET, even considering that the presence of students with foreign origins in our educational system is equal to 30.3% nationally (in general education and IVET), with a large geographical variance, from 5% for the South and Islands, to 38% in the North West (33% in the North-East, 24% in the Center). This research therefore has the objective of analysing the phenomenon of the presence of students with foreign origins in the initial vocational training, with reference to the following issues: expectations and characteristics of students with foreign background; presence of support services; presence of activities promoting the transition to working life and to the full exercise of citizenship; use and command of Italian as Second Language. Moving from the research evidence, some policy recommendations are presented

Keywords: Young people of foreign origin; Italian Initial Vocational Education and Training

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## Introduction

The main critical issue for our country is the extreme heterogeneity of the drop out rates in the different regions: 37.1% of 18-24 years-old drop-out in upper secondary school are resident in the South (in 2010-2011).

The ISFOL<sup>1</sup> research on the outcomes of IVET in 2014 (“Occupati dalla formazione. Seconda indagine sugli esiti occupazionali dei qualificati nei percorsi di IeFP – Employment and Vocational Training: second survey on occupational outcomes of qualified young people” in IVET, ISFOL 2014) reveals that it’s especially in the transition from the first to the second year of upper secondary school that the drop out rates grow, with a high proportion of students from the first year of Vocational Schools and, to a lesser extent, from Technical Institutes, which do not pass to the second year. In the ISFOL 2014 survey it is demonstrated that many of the young people who leave the Vocational or Technical schools are then “rescued” within the Vocational Training agencies, which provide curricula aiming at delivering qualifications in the IVET system (from 2010-11 the IVET offer delivered in the VET agencies concur to compulsory education). The IVET curricula delivered in the training agencies are particularly appealing for this peculiar audience, the drop out component, attracted by didactic styles connected with a “learning by doing” approach, and in need of support and accompanying strategies, as witnessed by those who have attended a IVET education path in the training agency (ISFOL 2014) in terms of satisfaction and success.

Moreover, 3 years after qualification, 50 % of the qualified students in IVET delivered by the training agencies have already found their first job, thus performing better than students qualified in education path delivered at school: in this latter case the rate diminishes at 38%.

Data show that students with foreign backgrounds are one of the categories most at risk of early school leaving in Italy. Many students with a foreign background enroll in three-year courses of Initial Vocational Education and Training: 38.5% of students with foreign background, choose IVET at school and 39% choose IVET in training agencies, only 23.5% enroll in the *licei* (higher education focusing on humanities), while 44% of the Italian young cohorts of the same age choose the *licei* offer, 33% IVET in School and only 19% IVET in training agencies. ISFOL estimated that young people with foreign background enrolled in IVET are 15% of the whole population of students, with the highest presence in the North-East.

## The methodology

The research was carried out by ISFOL in 2013-2015 (*Gli allievi di origine straniera nellal IeFP –Students with foreign background in Initial VET*, ISFOL 2014) on students with foreign background in IVET: nearly 4000 students, native and with foreign background were involved in the survey. 124 vocational training institutions in Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Latium and Sicily were reached. 3675 questionnaires have been used for the analysis, of which 1840 were filled in by students with a foreign background. Of this latter sub-sample, 149 pupils had a

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<sup>1</sup> ISFOL is a public institute of research on VET and Labour Market, supervised by the Italian Ministry of Labour.

foreign parent and one parent born in Italy (8.1%); 488 were students born in Italy, from foreign parents – G2 (26.5%); 212 were pupils arrived in Italy when they were less than 6 years – G1.75 (11.5%); 541 were students arrived in Italy when they were between 6 and 12 years - G1.5 (29.4%); 434 were students arrived in Italy when they were between 13 and 17 years G1.25. Only 16 (0.9%) questionnaires were compiled by pupils arrived in Italy at the age of 18 or more – G1, (for the definition of G2; 1.5; G1.75; G2, see Rumbaut, 1997) this quota being statistically not significant it has not been considered in the detailed analysis. (see Tab. 1).

**Tab 1.– Students with a foreign background interviewed, according to the migratory generation**

	<b>Sample size</b>	<b>%</b>
Students with a foreign parent and one parent born in Italy	149	8.1
Italian foreign students born in Italy G2.0	488	26.5
Students arrived in Italy when they were less than 6 years G1.75	212	11.5
Students arrived in Italy when they were between 6 and 12 years G1.5	541	29.4
Students arrived in Italy when they were between 13 and 17 years G1.25	434	23.6
Students arrived in Italy at the age of 18 or more – G1*	16	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1840</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\*This quota being statistically not significant it has not been considered in the detailed analysis

Source: data elaborated by Isfol, 2015

The core topics were: family situation and the migratory pathway; studies and training; satisfaction with the choice of VET and integration within the training centres; prospects and expectations regarding employment; linguistic and social integration outside the training context. The questionnaires were administered by ISFOL during the months of April-June 2013. The survey was financed by the Italian Ministry of Labour.

### **Choosing the VET pathway: a forced choice or a matter of vocation?**

56.3% of the students with a foreign background attended compulsory school in Italy (this is the case especially for young people from extra-EU European countries), 24.1% started compulsory school abroad and ended in Italy (the bulk of whom come from North Africa), 10.8% attended primary and middle school abroad and obtained their middle school diploma in their country of origin (mainly students from sub-Saharan Africa). None of the pupils, with foreign background, had Italian citizenship. It seems that enrolling in a vocational programme is a more frequent choice for students with a foreign background, since more than half of them (56%) enrolled immediately in a vocational training institution after obtaining the middle school diploma compared with 43.9% of children of natives. The latter mostly accessed VET after failing enrolling in another schooling programme. In addition, students with a

foreign background are more likely to report good or very good marks at the middle school diploma: 13.5% of them report such marks compared with 10.4% of children of natives.

Only 20.8% of students with a foreign background report having participated in orientation initiatives, not so different from the 23.7% of Italians. It is remarkable that 19.7% of pupils with foreign background (with a significant participation of the female universe: 20.3% versus 15.9% of boys) and 17.7% of Italians have used Internet to seek information on VET provision in their territories. 42.2 % of Italian and 40.3% of pupils with foreign origins say they decided alone without asking to anybody.

### Italian as second language (L2)

The table below shows that the percentage of students attending Italian courses as second language tends to increase with the age at arrival (from 21.9% to 56.2%). However, 21.9% of young people arrived in Italy between 13 and 17 years old report not having attended any Italian course.

**Tab. 2 – To learn Italian, did you attend Italian as second language courses? (%)**

	Migratory generation				
	Students with a foreign parent and one parent born in Italy	Italian foreign students born in Italy G2.0	Students arrived in Italy when they were less than 6 years G1.75	Students arrived in Italy when they were between 6 and 12 years G1.5	Students arrived in Italy when they were between 13 and 17 years G1.25
yes, organized by the school that I attended before the CFP	7.7	21.2	10.8	33.9	49.0
yes, organized by the CFP that I attend now	0.0	3.6	1.8	2.0	10.4
yes, organized by associations or other bodies	0.0	6.1	1.8	4.7	11.2
no, I have not attended any courses	61.5	56.2	79.5	54.9	21.9
no answer	30.8	12.9	6.0	4.5	7.5

Source: Data elaborated by Isfol, 2015

The questionnaire contained a question about the knowledge of Italian (speaking, reading and writing competence), a self-assessed measure which can give the representation of the perceived easiness in the everyday use of Italian. In the comparison between pupils with foreign background and Italians, as far as speaking and reading is concerned, there is no great difference: in both cases more than 90% of Italian and students with foreign origins declare to be good or very good: it is so evident that the 1.25 Generation (arrived when they were between 13 and 17 years old) has reached the native children and those born in Italy from foreign parents or arrived at early stages. More distance is recorded for writing: 8.2% of the students with a foreign background says they are poor or very poor compared with 3.1% of the Italian sample. If we consider into details these data, it is remarkable that 15.8% of the 1.25 Generation (6.9% of G1.5; 3.9% of G1.75; 5.6% of G2.0) affirms to be poor or very poor: a question should be posed whether this generation will be able to recover this important gap after the age of 18, without focused initiatives to avoid their permanent exclusion from an active and full citizenship.

### **Good practices identified through the survey**

The experience of the traineeships (for training purposes, from 100 to 300 hours in the second or third year) is reported as a positive experience by most students who see it as a way to favour knowledge of the professional environment and attitudes and to provide subsequent job opportunities. No case of discrimination is reported by students with a foreign background.

Intercultural didactic as a lever to tackle drop out, has been promoted by the Ministry of Education since 1990, when the migration fluxes to Italy started to become emergent. Still many actions must be accomplished before this becomes a really national relevant strategy, though in the Initial VET system some good practices can be identified: for instance, in Milan, the Vocational Training Institution, “Clerici” offers courses to teachers in intercultural issues which are funded through the Joint Inter-professional Fund for continuing education as well as through the Structural Funds from transnational projects. Over the last decade, the province of Bologna (the authority responsible for the provision of initial vocational training courses, according to the Italian Constitution) has promoted the provision of courses for teachers in the field of intercultural pedagogy and teaching methods, even with the aim of struggling early school leaving, through the organisation of meetings, seminars and training courses.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The aim of the research here presented is to analyse the presence of students with foreign origins in initial training courses. The survey involved 1840 young second-generation immigrants and 1835 Italian students, aged from 14 to 19 years old, engaged in initial training courses in order to complete compulsory education.

The study focused on the migration background and on the training choice (migratory history, access to guidance, influence of the environment on: the choice of training); the present experience in the training course, (satisfaction, environment, relationships with peers and with the accompanying figures); their expectations (with respect to work, training and education perspectives).

The survey shows that the initial vocational training carried out in the training agencies is playing a crucial role for the integration and inclusion of students with foreign origins.

From the considerations and the evidences presented above, some future directions can be indicated in terms of policy recommendations:

1. More research should be developed on intercultural pedagogy and intercultural curricula in the VET system, particularly for this evolutive age and more training for trainers in this field, should be provided;
2. The offer of Italian as second language should be developed (to complete the offer of the compulsory school) especially for those with more than 16 years old (21% never attended a course of Italian as second Language);
3. More guidance and counselling services should be offered (even for Italians): only 1 out of 5 of the pupils have taken part in formal guidance initiatives;
4. A quarter of the sample (Italian and students with foreign background) wants to keep on studying, so it is necessary to develop the offer of the fourth and fifth year on the national territory, now present only in 8 regions out of 21 (regional administrations are responsible for the educational offer in Italy).

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