



Strengthening Circular Legal and Skilled Migration
Through Cooperation Between Italy and Pakistan

Analysis of the professional and training needs of Italian companies



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Preface

The SkillNet project - Strengthening legal and skilled circular migration through cooperation between Italy and Pakistan

This research is part of the project ‘**SkillNet - Strengthening legal and skilled circular migration through cooperation between Italy and Pakistan**’. It has a duration of 14 months and is implemented by ANOLF Piemonte, in collaboration with Istituto Sindacale per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (ISCOS) and CISL Piemonte. The project’s goal is to create a positive environment for labour migration between Pakistan and Italy, with a particular focus on the Piedmont Region. To this purpose, the project will develop a conceptual framework intended as a practical guide to develop a legal mobility approach between Pakistan and Italy. In addition, the initiative will support Pakistani stakeholders in developing the skills and language requirements needed to access the Italian labour market. Finally, the products of the project also include research and methodologies aimed at contributing to the European Union's objectives of the ‘*Talent Partnership*’¹ program and at strengthening dialogue and cooperation between Italy, Pakistan and potentially other EU Member States on legal migration and mobility for work.

The project is built along three axes: research, stakeholder involvement and capacity building

Among the three planned works of research, the first two will provide an overall view of the employment needs of the Italian labour market in relation to migration legislation, as well as an analysis of the most required professional profiles in Piedmont. The third, instead, will be a conceptual framework on legal migration and mobility between Italy and Pakistan, and will offer a clear methodology for matching labour supply and demand in the Italian market, in compliance with the current Italian and European legal framework. By identifying possible inconsistencies in the classification of skills between Pakistan and Italy, the project supports the harmonisation of professional qualification recognition practices at the local, national and international level. With its research activities, SkillNet aims to increase the employment prospects of Pakistani workers in the Italian labour market.

Stakeholders are an essential element for SkillNet: the most relevant players are identified among government institutions, employer organisations, vocational training agencies and civil society organisations. This is possible thanks to the active involvement of key actors such as MOPHRD and NAVTTC in Pakistan, the Piedmont Region and the Ministry of Labour in Italy, as well as other

¹ The European ‘Talent Partnership’ program aims at developing a European framework to strengthen Member States’ initiatives on regular channels of mobility for work, and to respond to the needs of European companies for skilled workers, with a positive effect on the management of migration and the containment of irregular migration thanks to a tighter cooperation with the involved third countries.

relevant actors, including the private sector in Piedmont. The aim of these activities is to lay a solid foundation for lasting cooperation between Pakistan and Italy through the promotion of a common approach to the recognition of professional qualifications and the exchange of good practices. In pursuing this goal, capacity building actions and thematic workshops, aimed at improving knowledge sharing and collaboration between Italian and Pakistani counterparts on the topics of the project will also play an important role.

In conclusion, SkillNet aims to promote a constructive dialogue on legal labour migration by reinforcing a robust, multi-level coordination between stakeholders. By sharing information on the recognition of professional qualifications and the differences between Italian, European and Pakistani standards, the project will support a more consistent alignment of professional standards between Pakistan, Italy and Europe, thus facilitating a more effective and harmonious international cooperation.

1. Economic and employment dynamics in a changing context

1.1 Overview of the Italian economy

The first part of our study looks at the evolution of the Italian economy and its main characteristics, offering a detailed overview of the profound economic changes that Italy has undergone in its almost 170 years of history.

Since the Unification of Italy until today, Italy has gone through a **radical transformation**: before 1945, Italy was a predominantly agricultural economy, and a large part of its population worked in the primary sector. In the years after World War II, this relative industrial backwardness gave way to rapid industrialisation first, and then to inevitable tertiarization (Cerea, Pacchi, Ranci, 2019). From 1861 onwards, Italy experienced a modernisation process that enabled it to overcome the backwardness and poverty prevailing at the time of its creation as a country, and in the second half of the 20th century, it successfully obtained a place among the most developed economies in the world. The years that immediately followed the end of World War II, albeit characterised by difficulties and a rather weak economic situation, saw the beginning of rapid and significant growth: the so-called *trente glorieuses*, a time of exceptional economic expansion which went roughly from 1945 to 1973. Italy emerged as one of the world's leading economies also thanks to the efficient management of the Marshall Plan funds (Felice, Vecchi, 2013), which helped stimulate reconstruction and growth, and return to the pre-existing industrial structures (Ardeni, Gallegati, 2024).

During this time of economic boom, the so-called '**Italian economic miracle**', the weight of the economic sectors shifted. In addition to changing the role of Italy in the global economy, this had a significant impact on the relevance of economic sectors in terms of Gross Domestic Product. To fully understand the extent of this transformation, we can simply look at the changing proportions: in 1861, the primary sector, which mainly included agriculture, accounted for a prevalent part of Italy's GDP, between 45% and 55%; by 1973, the secondary sector, i.e. industry and construction, had reached a significant 40% share of GDP, showing the growing importance of industrialisation

and the national and international weight of the Turin-Milan-Genoa production area, with its large Fordist factories (Malanima, Zamagni, 2010). Today, following the tertiarization of the economy in Europe and the widespread crisis of the Fordist system,² the Italian economy is dominated by the tertiary sector.

To understand the extent of the transformation, suffice it to think that in 1861 the primary sector accounted for 45-55% of the country's GDP, in 1973 the secondary sector made up 40% of the GDP (Malanima, Zamagni, 2010), while today it is the tertiary sector that plays the most important role, accounting for 74-75% of the GDP.³

The shift from agriculture to industry, and then to services, is an economic metamorphosis that reflects the way Italy has adapted to the challenges and opportunities on a global and national scale, as well as the Italian economy's ability to reshape itself in response to the dynamics of the world market, new production models and social and demographic transformations. What some authors define as the transition from the periphery to the centre (Felice, Vecchi, 2013) in the global economy has been surprisingly fast and has shown the country's ability to make the most of the opportunities offered by its own social structure and the broader economic context. However, as some recent studies have pointed out, the Italian system seems to have been in slight decline for some years, especially if we think of its performance following *anni horribilis* such as 2009⁴ or 2020⁵ (Ardeni, Gallegati, 2024).

Intrinsic issues such as the marked **inequalities** between the North and South of the country seem to have become a constant trait in Italy's economic history. These inequalities - which have been explored in diachronic (Cohen, Federico, 2003) and comparative (Becker, 2002) analyses and in the 1970s led to splitting the country into three areas, from an analytical perspective (Bagnasco, 1977)⁶

² The term 'Fordism' refers to the system of industrial organisation adopted by Henry Ford in the early 20th century in his car factory. The Fordist system took inspiration from Taylorism (which envisaged a division of labour based on the extreme specialisation of workers), and was aimed at increasing the efficiency of the production process through strict planning and allocation of production phases and operations and a sophisticated system of incentives (wage raises, reduced hours). Effectively portrayed and criticised by movies of the time, such as Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), the Fordism found in extreme expression in the assembly line, with the alienation of workers as its downside.

³ Overview based on data from the *Annuario Statistico Italiano 2023*, the *Annual Report of the Bank of Italy 2023* and the Eurostat database.

⁴ Year when the 2008 US crisis was felt in Europe.

⁵ Year of the outbreak of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic.

⁶ We refer here to the division developed by sociologist Bagnasco, who saw Italy as not being economically dominated by the North/South dichotomy, but rather structured around three different areas, defined as *social formations*: Central Italy, i.e. the North-West of the country, with its large enterprises that followed the Fordist model; a Marginal Italy, i.e. the Centre and North-East

- are relevant in terms of the characteristics of the country's economy. Even if in 2024 Italy is the third largest economy in the Eurozone after Germany and France (International Monetary Fund, 2024), the gap between North and South remains in many areas. **Unemployment rates**⁷ alone clearly show the lack of opportunities in the South of Italy, which, in 2023, emerged as the largest backward territory in the Eurozone. Significant gaps are also observed in terms of average level of education, GDP per capita,⁸ digitalisation and lack of transport infrastructures (Istat, 2023).

The economic activity of Italy is now clearly geared towards **foreign trade**. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in 2023 Italy was the fifth largest exporting country in the world by (2024): the 0.8% increase in Italian exports in the first quarter of 2024 in trend terms⁹ (Istat, 2024a) shows the good trade performance of our country; however, in times of extreme uncertainty due to regional turmoil in the Middle East and Ukraine, with global repercussions, Italy is forced to deal with increased exposure to the side effects of conflicts. The export balance for 2023 shows a difference between growing non-EU markets and declining EU markets, where imports decreased both in value and volume (Istat, 2024d). Also worth mentioning is the importance for the Italian economy of **government investments and incentives**. Measures such as the so-called Superbonus¹⁰ have given a significant boost to the sectors of Construction, Transport, Intellectual Property Products, Other Plants and Machinery and ICT Equipment (ivi).

Looking more closely at the composition of Italian exports, along with **tourism** and **agriculture**, the **manufacturing** sector is also of strategic importance: Italy is the seventh largest manufacturing economy in the world and the second largest in Europe (ibidem). To give a full picture, if we look at the sum of exports and manufacturing, Italy now ranks sixth among the world's leading exporters of manufactured goods, which account for 95% of the total goods exported (ICE, 2024 (ICE, 2024). In terms of Italian share of world exports, the main market for Italy is the European Union (4.84%)

of the country, based on a production network of small and medium-sized enterprises; and a Peripheral Italy, i.e. the South and the islands, whose main characteristic is long-standing under-development.

⁷ According to Istat data, the average unemployment rate for the 2023 quarters for both males and females aged between 20 and 64 was similar in the North-West and North-East (4.6% and 4.3% respectively), more pronounced in the Centre (6.2%) and significantly higher in the South (14%).

⁸ Calabria's GDP per capita is about 40% of the leading region, Trentino-Alto Adige (ivi).

⁹ This was 0.6% higher than in Germany, whereas France and Spain recorded negative trends, -3.6% and -1.3% respectively (ibidem).

¹⁰ Introduced by Law Decree No. 24 of 19 May 2020 ('decreto Rilancio'), the tax benefit called Superbonus allows for a deduction of the expenses incurred for works aimed at improving buildings in terms of energy efficiency, static consolidation and reduction of seismic risk.

followed by the Middle East (2.92%), North America (2.17%) and Central Asia (1.70%). Within these macro-areas, Germany stands out as the main importer: alone, it absorbs around 11.9% of Italian exports (Istat, 2024b).¹¹

Going back to the significant **regional differences in Italy**, it should be noted that the access to foreign markets does not benefit all Italian Regions equally: while 87.7% of exported goods came

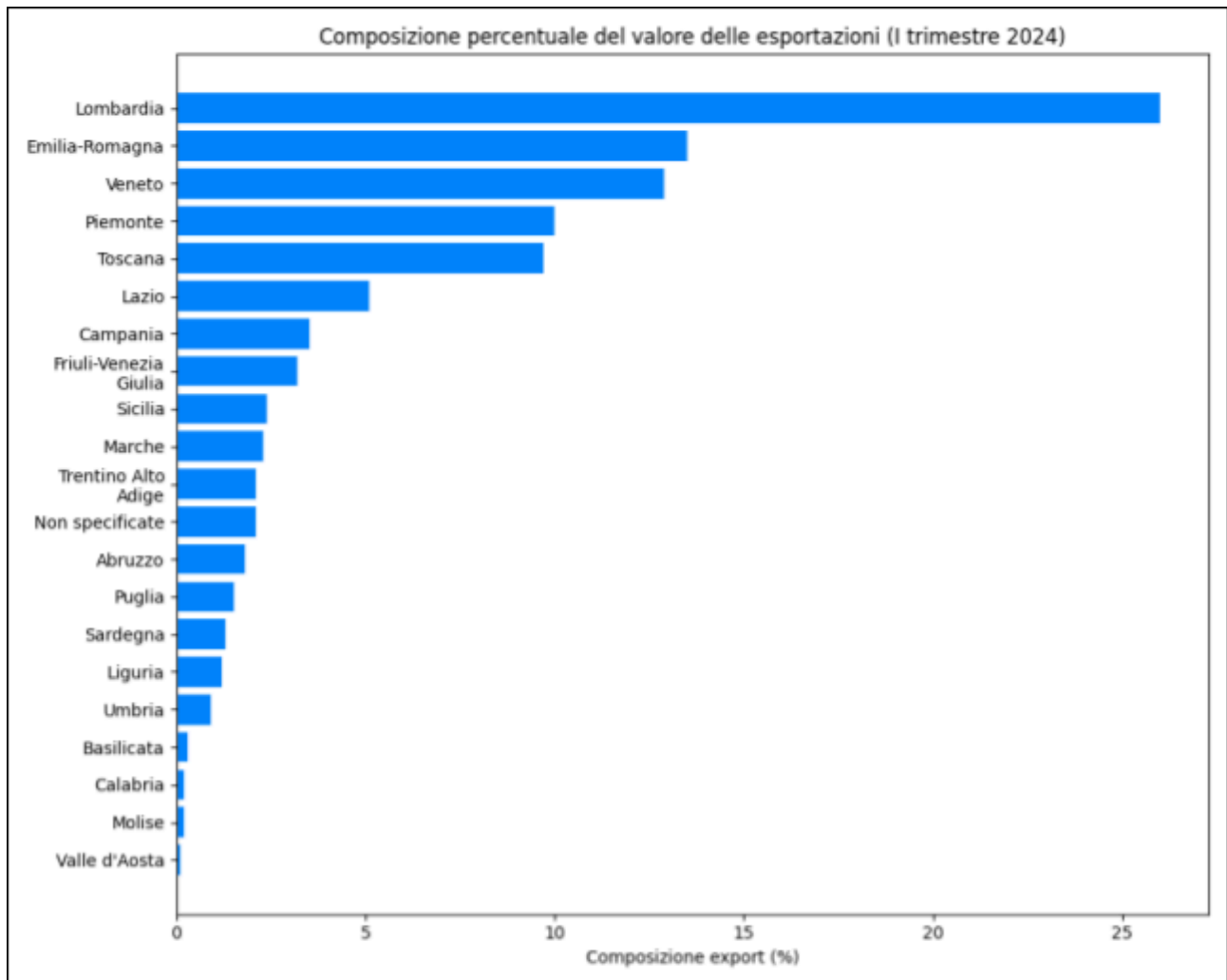


Figure 1: percentage of exports in the first quarter 2024. With the exception of outliers (Valle d'Aosta, Liguria, Lazio and Campania) the regions in the North and Centre of Italy dominate the chart.

from the Centre-North in 2023, the South only accounted for 10.9%. Piedmont alone (10.2%) exported almost the same amount of goods as the whole of Southern Italy (ivi). As the second part

¹¹ Germany is followed by the US (10.7%), France (10.1%), Spain (5.3%), Switzerland (4.9%) and the UK (4.2%) (ibidem).

of this study focuses on regional data, it might be useful to report the percentage of exports in the first quarter of 2024 for each Italian Region (Figure 1).¹²

As mentioned above, the dominance of the Central-Northern Regions is clear: although, at the beginning of 2024, exports only increased in the South and the Islands (respectively +4.3% and +8.9% vs 2023), the highest revenues come from the Northern Regions (Istat, 2024c). This, however, is a partial figure: the **greatest dynamism** in exports is observed in Campania (+28.9%), Molise (21.1%), Calabria (+20.9%), Abruzzo (13.6%) and only then Piedmont (+9.1%) followed by Tuscany (+5.6%) and Basilicata (+5.5%).¹³

An interesting observation comes from a brief but detailed analysis of the **economic operators** that exported their goods in 2023. According to Istat, 137,055 companies sold their goods abroad: a core group of large exporters (turnover of more than 15 million euro) makes up slightly more than 4% of the total number of these economic operators, but accounts for 74% of total exports, while a large group of small exporters (turnover of up to 75,000 euro) makes up more than 54% of all exporters, but only accounts for 0.2% of exports (Istat, 2024b).

If we look at the **composition of Italy's GDP**, further key elements for the analysis of the national economy emerge: as far as the productive sectors are concerned, the following table clearly shows which ones actually make up the country's GDP. Looking at Istat data on the distribution of added value by productive sector, we immediately notice a few dominant sectors: public administration and defence, compulsory social security (14%), real estate (11.1%) and wholesale, retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorbikes (10.2%) together make up more than 35% of the total GDP. Other particularly relevant sectors are professional, scientific and technical activities (8.6%), education (5.3%) and health and social work (5%).¹⁴

As far as tourism is concerned, a key industry for Italy, 2023 data show it accounted for 9.5% of the country's GDP. Most tourists come from France, while the tourists who spend the most during their stay come from the Arab Emirates and China.¹⁵

¹² The total is 155,138 million euro, down, however, from the same quarter of 2023 (159,527 million). The data come from an Istat report on Italian exports (2024c).

¹³ Data are taken from <https://mglobale.promositalia.camcom.it/analisi-di-mercato/tutte-le-news/esportazioni-regioni-italiane-2023.kl>, where Istat data are reprocessed.

¹⁴ The most complete Istat data (in: <http://dati.istat.it/index.aspx?queryid=11479#>) refer to the year 2021.

¹⁵ <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/turismo-2023-fa-pieno-stranieri-e-vale-95per cento-pil-AFWjdJ8C>.

The **positive asymmetric curve** resulting from the graphical representation of the frequency of

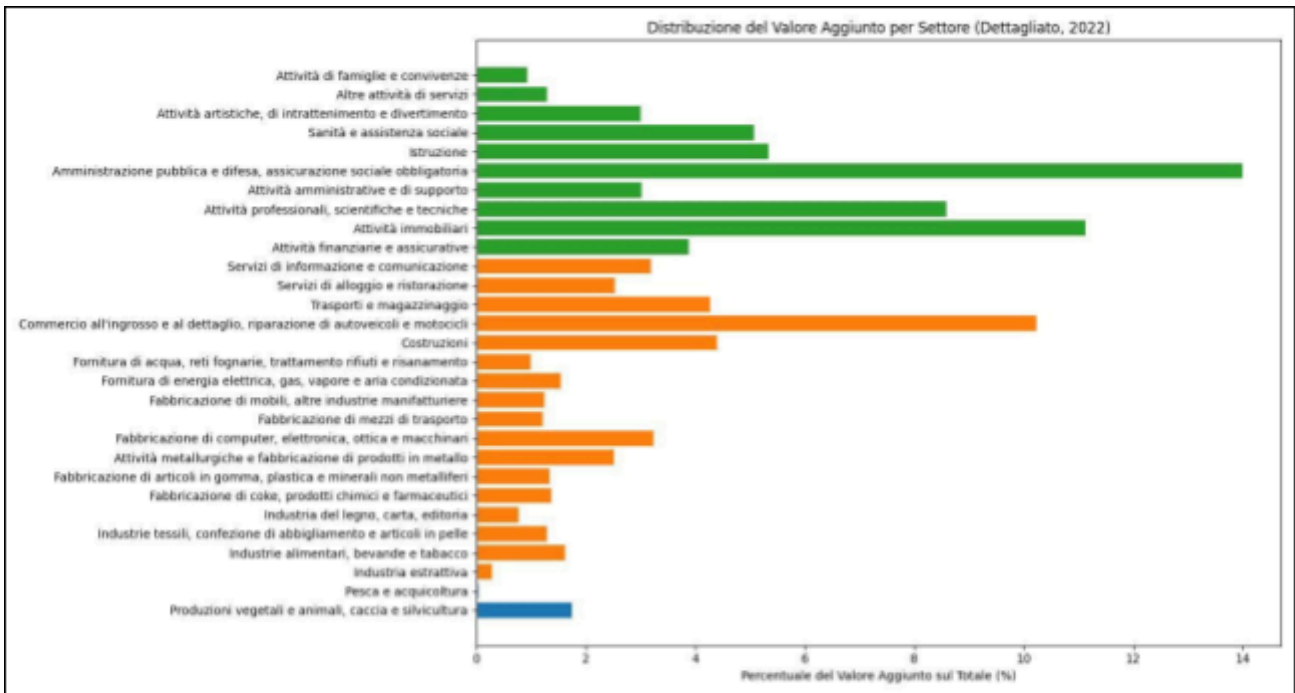


Figura 2: la distribuzione del valore aggiunto per settore fa riferimento al peso, in percentuale, sul PIL italiano dei diversi settori. Il grafico è frutto di una nostra rielaborazione a partire dai dati Istat del 2022.

percentage values confirms that the majority of productive sectors gives small contributions to the national GDP. **Figure 3**, which is clearly skewed to the left, corroborates what has already emerged from the description of the sectors that contribute more than 5% to the GDP.¹⁶

It is interesting to note the importance of the domestic market: in addition to the already mentioned strong performance of Italy as an exporting country and its relevant role on the international market (also as an importer), it can also rely on a strong domestic market to absorb its production.

To complete this brief overview, let's focus on some data on the trend of **revenues** in the various productive sectors (Istat, 2024d):¹⁷ at an empirical level, the Istat analyses show a negative trend for industrial revenues (-1%) and in particular for manufacturing (-2.5%), with problems shifting from

¹⁶ To be exhaustive, the average of the percentages is 3.4%, where the median is 2.5%.

¹⁷ Data on revenues data shed light on sales volume, product prices and market demand, all of which are useful considerations when discussing the needs of the labour market needs in terms of demand.

the supply side to the demand side. The situation is the opposite in the tertiary sector, where the revenue index (+3.9%) is increasing in all sectors, albeit with some differences: from +14.2% for accommodation and food service to +3.3% for travel agencies. The difficulties concerning access to credit, reported especially by manufacturing companies, only partially diverge from the situation in services, where the conditions for access to credit are also worsening, especially in certain sectors such as research and development and land transport and pipelines. There is also a slowdown in exports in almost all manufacturing sectors in 2023, with the exception of motor vehicles (+6.5%) and printing (+6.2%).

In terms of innovation, i.e. the propensity to innovate, the Istat report shows a mixed situation where 60% of the companies have a low or medium-low level of dynamism: they invest and innovate little, and at the same time generate only 25% of the added value and employ less than a third of the total workforce. In contrast, 22.3% of companies are more dynamic, invest and innovate more, create more than 50% of the added value and employ 44% of the workers.

To **summarise**, since its foundation, Italy has gone through a process of industrialisation first and tertiarization then, which has enabled it to move quickly from being a backward economy in Europe, based mainly on industry, to gaining a place among the most advanced global economies. Since the 30 years of the Italian economic miracle, the country has strengthened its position as an exporter to the world, specialising in manufacturing. Tourism also plays an essential role in the country's economy which, however, remains geographically unbalanced: historically, a more developed and stronger North is contrasted by a less economically advanced South that is more in need of supporting policies.

1.2 Employment: overall situation and employment needs

The current situation of the Italian labour market and the levels of employment largely reflect the complex picture outlined above. The expansion of the construction sector is in contrast with the rather negative trend of the industrial sector and the relative stability of the service sector, as pointed out by the Istat annual report (2024a). However, it is worth going into further details to give a full picture of the employment situation in Italy. Despite the fact that in 2023 the 61.5% **employment rate** was not in line with the performance of other European economies, in particular Germany, which boasted an employment rate of 77.2%, or France, at 68.4%,¹⁸ it is important to emphasise that, aside from international comparative analyses, Italian employment showed signs of growth in 2024 compared to the previous year. The data that emerged from the analyses carried out by **Confartigianato** give an overall optimistic picture of employment: according to the organisation, between 2021 and 2023, the number of people employed in Italy increased by 4.5%,¹⁹ a two-year growth that seems to be unprecedented since 1977 (2024). It is essential to bear in mind that unemployment rates are very heterogenous at the **regional level**. For example, the region with the worst indicators, Campania, shows a gap of almost 15% with the best performing region, Trentino Alto Adige. The latter, boasting a significantly lower unemployment rate, contributes to maintaining the national average at around 7.8% and the median at 6.1%. These values underline the existing regional differences and the intrinsic complexity of the labour market in Italy.²⁰

¹⁸ Persons aged between 15 and 64 are considered here. The motivation for this choice is twofold: first, we have tried to keep consistency with the Istat 2024 annual report, and secondly, we wanted to ensure the greatest possible accuracy in the comparison with the other European countries mentioned, whose national statistical institutes report data on that population bracket. The Italian data can be found on the Istat website: http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCCV_TAXOCCU1; German ones on the Destatis website: <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Arbeit/Arbeitsmarkt/Erwerbstaetigkeit/Tabellen/erwerbstaetigenquoten-gebietsstand-geschlecht-altergruppe-mikrozensus.html#fussnote-3-120426>; and the French ones on the Insee website: https://www.insee.fr/fr/outil-interactif/5367857/details/50_MTS/51_EPA/51C_Figure3.

¹⁹ In absolute terms, the document mentions an increase of 1,026,000.

²⁰ The ISTAT data, from which the figure was taken, disaggregated the Autonomous Provinces of Bolzano and Trento (<http://dati.istat.it/index.aspx?queryid=20744#>). The data relate to the age group 15-64.

Putting aside more in-depth and specific analyses aimed at highlighting the persistent territorial inequalities that characterise the country, the **report published by Istat** in June 2024 on employment and unemployment presents a picture that, on the whole, can be considered relatively encouraging. In particular, the increases observed concern the total number of **people actively seeking work**, which grew by +1.3%. At the same time, there was a decrease in the number of inactive persons, i.e. those not working and not looking for work, a phenomenon accompanied by a simultaneous increase in both the number of unemployed and employed individuals.²¹

A deeper analysis of the **complex movements of labour supply and demand** is necessary, especially in the context of the present study. A joint analysis of the data on employment rates -

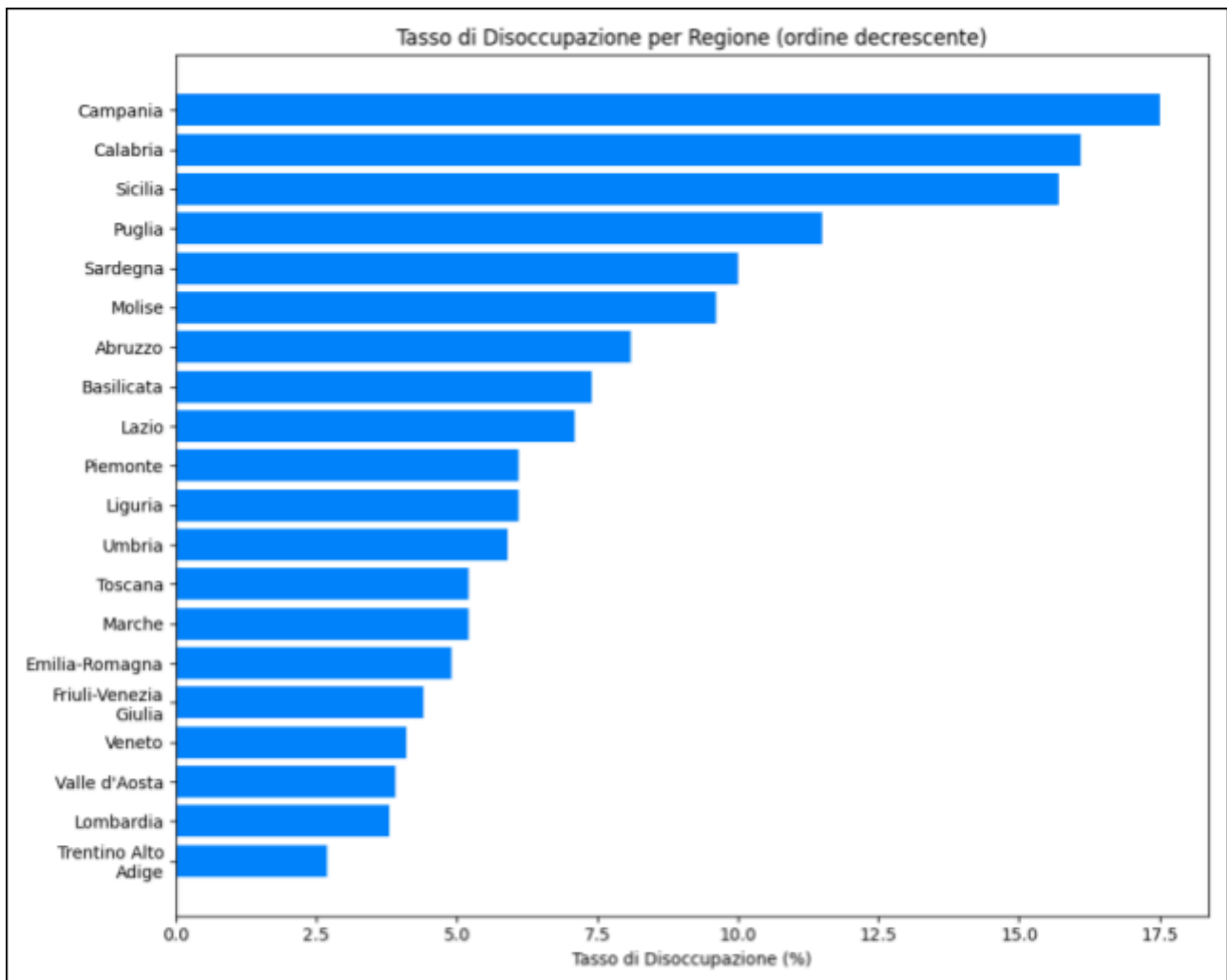


Figure 4: Our graph based on Istat data.

²¹ <https://www.istat.it/comunicato-stampa/occupati-e-disoccupati-dati-provvisori-giugno-2024/>.

which are relatively low - and those indicating the increasing difficulty of companies in finding qualified personnel, would show a clear inconsistency and discrepancy in the country's employment situation. Over the years, the Italian labour market has shown a persistent structural difficulty in facilitating the matching of supply and demand, particularly for some specific professions and sectors. This situation, which may seem as paradoxical as it is counterintuitive, is characterised by a phenomenon known as *mismatch*, indicating a marked imbalance between labour supply and demand, i.e. a structural gap between the two components of the labour market. There are various **reasons** behind this, as pointed out by Unioncamere: the current demographic winter,²² a disconnection between labour market and education system, socio-cultural changes affecting work expectations and motivations of the new generations²³ among other things (2023a: 49). The **gender gap** in employment weighs on this phenomenon, as demonstrated by the PNRR's commitment to raise female employment by 4% by 2026. The Italian Chamber of Deputies points out that, in the EU context, Italy has the lowest female employment rate (55%), a good 14% below the EU average (69.3%). The extreme gap (21.1%) between the employment rate of women aged between 25 and 49 with children under the age of 6 (inversely proportional, however, to the level of education), along with the pronounced gender pay gap (5% according to Eurostat) and the low number of women graduates in STEM disciplines show how the phenomenon requires multifactorial considerations and multidisciplinary approaches, and how this mismatch, from a broader perspective, is becoming increasingly worrying.

If we wanted to quantify the **cost** of this mismatch, in 2023 it was EUR 43.9 billion, namely a loss of 3.4% of added value and 2.5% of GDP (*ibidem*).

²² According to Eurostat data, Italy is at the same time the country with the highest median age in the EU (48) and the lowest fertility rate after Malta and Spain (1.24). Data are available on: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2024#:~:text=On%201%20January%202023%2C%20there,\(36.8%20million%2C%208%25\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2024#:~:text=On%201%20January%202023%2C%20there,(36.8%20million%2C%208%25)).

²³ This especially affects the so-called Z generation (1997-2012) and only to a lesser extent the millennials (1981-1996). Among the changes occurred, an interesting article published in *Il Sole 24 Ore* points out the weight of several factors in choosing a job, first of all the work-life balance, while among the main reasons for quitting a job are too much overtime, discrepancy of values and unhappiness caused by work (<https://allegoop.ilsole24ore.com/2023/11/14/genz-lavoro/>). Among the many studies and academic works, for insights into the difference between the work ethic of baby boomers, Generation X and millennials, we recommend the investigation by di Zabel et al. (2017). It is particularly interesting because it focuses on the Protestant work ethic and because it does not highlight significant generational differences. As for the differences between baby boomers, Generation X, millennials and Generation Z, we can mention the short study by Bertsch et al. (2021) which, instead, highlights differences in the *hard-working desire*.

Although this phenomenon, as highlighted in an interesting analysis published by Post,²⁴ cannot be explained purely in quantitative terms, knowing a few numbers is a fundamental prerequisite to then delve into a deeper discussion. The data show a complex situation: in 2023, enterprises in Italy find it hard to find the necessary staff, especially if qualified. This is the case for 45.1% of micro and small enterprises, and for 55.2% of craft businesses. These percentages are on the rise in 2024, with a share of hard-to-find workers of 47.6% (Confartigianato, 2024).

The data from the **Excelsior**²⁵ system, one of the best sources available in Italy on labour market issues, further clarify the problem by adopting a five-year perspective: in 2024-2028, the number of workers required is estimated to be between 3.1 and 3.6 million, with an average of 630 -730,000 per year (Unioncamere, 2023a).²⁶ As a result of economic expansion, the number of people in employment is estimated to grow by between 238,000 and 722,000 over this five-year period. The main driver of worker inflows will be the need to replace outgoing staff: about some 2.9 million workers replacing outgoing workers, which account for 80-92% of the estimated need (ivi: 18).

The Excelsior report's data on retirement are very interesting, as it sheds light both on the sectors where the most opportunities will emerge in the future and on the sectors where it will be more difficult to find personnel. Interestingly, the indicator for this type of outflows is high in the public sector, particularly in *health* (18%), *education and culture* (15.7%) and *other public and private services* (16.1%) (ivi: 19). Cross-referencing this data with what we said on the weight of the various sectors in terms of GDP, we can easily see a series of critical issues for the public administration: in the next five years, 60,000 new employees are expected to be hired, and 682,000 employees are expected to be replaced at an average of 135,000 per year. Despite the growth of the sector, 92% of the inflows will still be needed due to the necessary turnover (ivi: 22). When these employment issues concern the public administration, they have indirect effects on the entire economy, as the shortage of civil servants and/or the lack of appropriate skills affect the functioning of public offices, public safety, health and education, services that are also essential for the activities of the private sectors and the social context in general (ivi: 20).

²⁴ <https://www.ilpost.it/2024/02/14/mismatch-mercato-del-lavoro/>.

²⁵ Unless otherwise specified, Excelsior data come from Unioncamere - ANPAL, Excelsior Information System.

²⁶ The forecasts in the Unioncamere report refer to three scenarios, one positive, one intermediate and one negative; only the positive and the negative are explored. This paper will consider both scenarios, with two figures in each table. In the text, the first data refers to the positive scenario, the second to the negative scenario. This order was chosen to ensure consistency with the nomenclature used in the report: scenario A (positive) and scenario C (negative).

It is worth noting that the added value of public administration, defence, and compulsory social security accounts for 14% of the GDP, the highest value among the disaggregated sectors considered above.

Zooming in from sectors to professions, the five-year report shows that 41%²⁷ of the workforce need between 2024 and 2028 is for high-profile workers (managers, specialists and technicians), mainly in the public administration - a share that represents 65% of the public workforce requirement. In absolute terms, between 1.3 and 1.5 million people will be necessary. As for intermediate figures (white-collars, trade and service professionals), the need for workers will decrease slightly to between 1 and 1.2 million, whereas the need for blue-collar workers will be between 511,000 and 613,000. The report also highlights the need for unskilled workers: 285,000-333,000 individuals, i.e. 9% (ivi: 26).

Disaggregating the data, the specific need for **specialised workers** mainly concerns public and private teaching staff (147-139,000 in primary and pre-primary schools, 119-112,000 in secondary and post-secondary schools) as well as specialists in management, business and banking sciences (107-98,000), engineers (56-46,000) and medical doctors (around 50,000). For **technical profiles**, health care professions (108,000) and market relations experts (91-77,000) are at the top of the list; among **clerical profiles**, secretaries and general assistants (293-266,000) are particularly required, as well as reception and customer information workers (98-85,000). As for **commercial** and intermediate **service professions**, there is a predominant need for workers in food service (waiters and kitchen staff, 213-157,000) and sales workers (shop assistants and clerks, 200-180,000); while as far as qualified professions in health and social services are concerned, 87,000 care workers and social workers are needed. With regard to **specialised workers**, construction workers (170-154,000) and craft mechanics, fitters, repairers, machinery maintenance workers (53-45,000) are the predominant profiles; as for to **non-specialised workers**, there is a need for motor vehicle drivers (especially heavy duty vehicles), between 81,000 and 70,000 (ivi: 26-28).

The data concerning **courses of study** approach the issue from a different, yet equally significant perspective. In the five-year period at the centre of the Excelsior report's forecasts, 38% of the employment needs involves people with a **tertiary education** title (especially STEM engineers, and

²⁷ As explained before, 41% is the average of the two scenarios (A and C, positive and negative) considered by the report (ivi: 25).

graduates in economic-statistics, teaching and training and medical-healthcare sciences),²⁸ 4% can be covered by people with a **liceo high school diploma** (especially from a *liceo* specialised in classical, scientific or human sciences studies), while the majority of employment needs are for people with a **technical-professional** upper secondary education background (especially administration, finance and marketing, tourism, food and wine and hospitality, social and health field, mechanics, mechatronics and electrotechnics, construction and electronics, agriculture and agrifood, food service, secretarial administration and sales services for IeFP schools).²⁹ The remaining 12%, on the other hand, involves profiles with **less than second-cycle** education.³⁰

Again, the territorial heterogeneity in terms of employment needs over the relevant five-year period is confirmed: the geographical region least involved seems to be the Centre of Italy (20.3% of the total), followed by the North-East (21.5%). It is interesting to note how, this time, the South and North-West of Italy show similar numbers. This is probably due to the greater concentration of companies in the historical industrial triangle, combined with the relatively high exit rate of over-59s in the North-West (22.7%) and the weight of Lombardy alone, which accounts for more than 18% of the national needs (30.4% in the South and 27.8% in the North-West (ivi: 54).

The **monthly and quarterly forecasts** published on the Excelsior system highlight the emergency nature of the mismatch: in **August 2024**, for example, the difficulty in finding the people sought by companies, possibly due to a lack of candidates, rose to 48.9% (Unioncamere, 2024a). The disaggregated data show an interesting fact: 34%³¹ of hirings in August involve young people up to 29. The occupations with the greatest difficulty of recruitment, in this segment of the population, are specialised construction finishing workers (85%); craft mechanics, fitters, repairers, and maintenance workers for fixed/mobile machinery (76%); workers specialised in the installation and maintenance of electrical and electronic equipment (69%); restaurant managers and workers (57%); computer, telematics and telecommunications technicians (54%); receptionists and customer

²⁸ As specified, tertiary education, in the Italian system, refers to a degree, an ITS Academy diploma or a degree from the Alta Formazione Artistica, Musicale e Coreutica (AFAM).

²⁹ These are both five-year courses and three- or four-year regional Vocational Technical Education and Training (Istruzione e Formazione Tecnica Professionale - IeFP) courses.

³⁰ The percentages presented refer to the average of the percentages of the two scenarios (positive and negative, A and C). For the sake of completeness, the disaggregated percentages are respectively: 37.4-39.6%, 4-3.8%, 46.6-45.8% e 11.9-10.8% (ivi: 43).

³¹ In absolute terms we are talking here about 314,940 hirings, of which 106,910 are young people.

information workers (50%); and unskilled personnel in cleaning services (46%) (Unioncamere, 2024b).

According to the August 2024 bulletin of the Unioncamere's Excelsior system, the recruitment difficulties encountered by companies can only partially be explained by the inadequate educational background of the candidates. This explanation alone does not fully explain the complexity of the situation, although it is relevant in direct proportion to the level of specialisation of the job: in sectors such as the metal and metal products industry or the textile industry the inadequate educational background of candidates accounts for 20% of the difficulty in hiring new people, while in the wood and furniture industry this figure falls by 5%. Among the reasons highlighted by the bulletin, the lack of candidates certainly prevails (ivi).

It is also interesting to look at the type of **companies planning to hire** in the **quarter August-October 2024**. According to the analysis of the Unioncamere system and in line with the overview given in the previous paragraph about the Italian economy, the dominating sectors are manufacturing (19.8%), tourism (19.5%) and trade (17.8%), while only 11.6% of companies in the construction sector expect to hire new resources in the same quarter.³² When disaggregated, this data show how different sectors have a different weight: the tourism and food service sector remain unchanged, along with trade and construction, however manufacturing shows a preponderance of metal and electronics industries (4.9%) and metal and metal products (3.8%).³³ With regard to company size, the data show that the problem is inversely proportional to the number of employees: 44.4% are companies with 1 to 9 employees, 31.1% have 10 to 49 employees, 10.1% have 50 to 249 employees, while the percentage is 14.1% for companies with more than 250 employees.

Confirming the dominance of the tertiary sector, the **most in-demand professions** include restaurant managers and workers (13.84%), sales workers (8.45%), unskilled staff in cleaning services (7.26%) unskilled personnel responsible for handling and delivering goods (5.88%), drivers of motor and animal-drawn vehicles (4.68%), secretarial workers and general affairs clerks (3.49%) and skilled construction finishers (3.44%).³⁴

³² The remaining 31.3% belongs to the category 'Other services', which includes personal services (10.5%), transport and logistics (6.5%), operational services (6.1%) and other services (advanced, financial, ICT and media and communications).

³³ Following are textiles and clothing (2.5%), other industries (1.9%), chemicals and pharmaceuticals (1.3%), wood and furniture (1.1%), mineral extraction (0.7%) and paper industries (0.6%).

³⁴ These percentages are the result of our processing of data from Unioncamere - ANPAL, Excelsior Information System. In absolute terms we speak of 1,311,600 expected hirings in the quarter August-October 2024, the percentages are processed from this value.

In conclusion, the sectors with the largest projected employment needs in absolute terms over the five-year period 2024-2028 are trade and tourism (682-551,000) and other public and private services, including operational support services to businesses and individuals and public administration (529-484,000), followed by health (522-510,400), education and culture (513-474,400), finance and consulting (399-330,300) and construction and infrastructure (290-263,000).

The report highlights both the limits of the education system and the demographic dynamics linked to an ageing population, which translate into a reduction in the number of people of working age, and an increase in pensions and exits from the labour market.

Italy has a resident population between 50 and 59 of 9.4 million and an employment rate of 64.1%. It is estimated that around 6.1 million of the currently employed persons will go into retirement in the next decade, versus a population aged between 20 and 29 of 6 million. It is clear that additional problems, such as the so-called “brain-drain”,³⁵ may make the situation worse and require a solution that taps into the migration flows to our country.

³⁵ In 2021, more than 83,000 people left to expatriate; 42% were highly educated people aged 18-34. There is a large amount of research on the sociological aspects of these highly skilled labour movements; in particular, we recommend the text by Marroccoli and Schroot (2021), which looks at the phenomenon from a qualitative, comparative perspective. The work focuses on highly skilled Romanian and German immigrants in the metropolitan area of Turin, and on highly skilled workers who emigrated from Northern Italy to the EU and non EU countries.

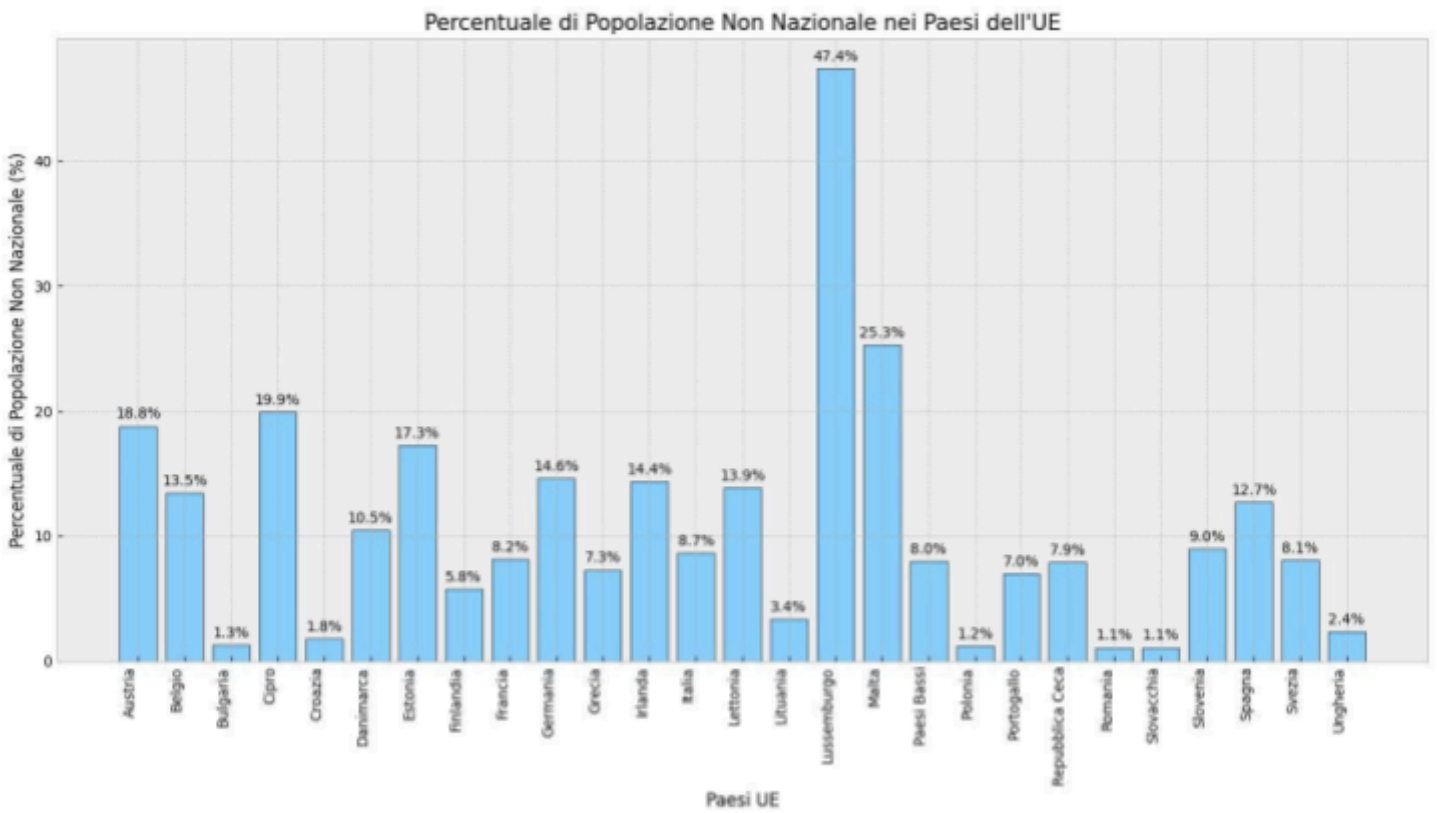


Figure 5: Our processing of Eurostat data. on Eurostat data. It is interesting to note the gap between Luxembourg and Romania/Slovakia is greater than 45%.

1.3 Migrations

As of 1 January 2024, there were approximately 5.3 million foreign citizens residing in Italy, an increase of 3.2% compared to 2023 (**Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2024**).

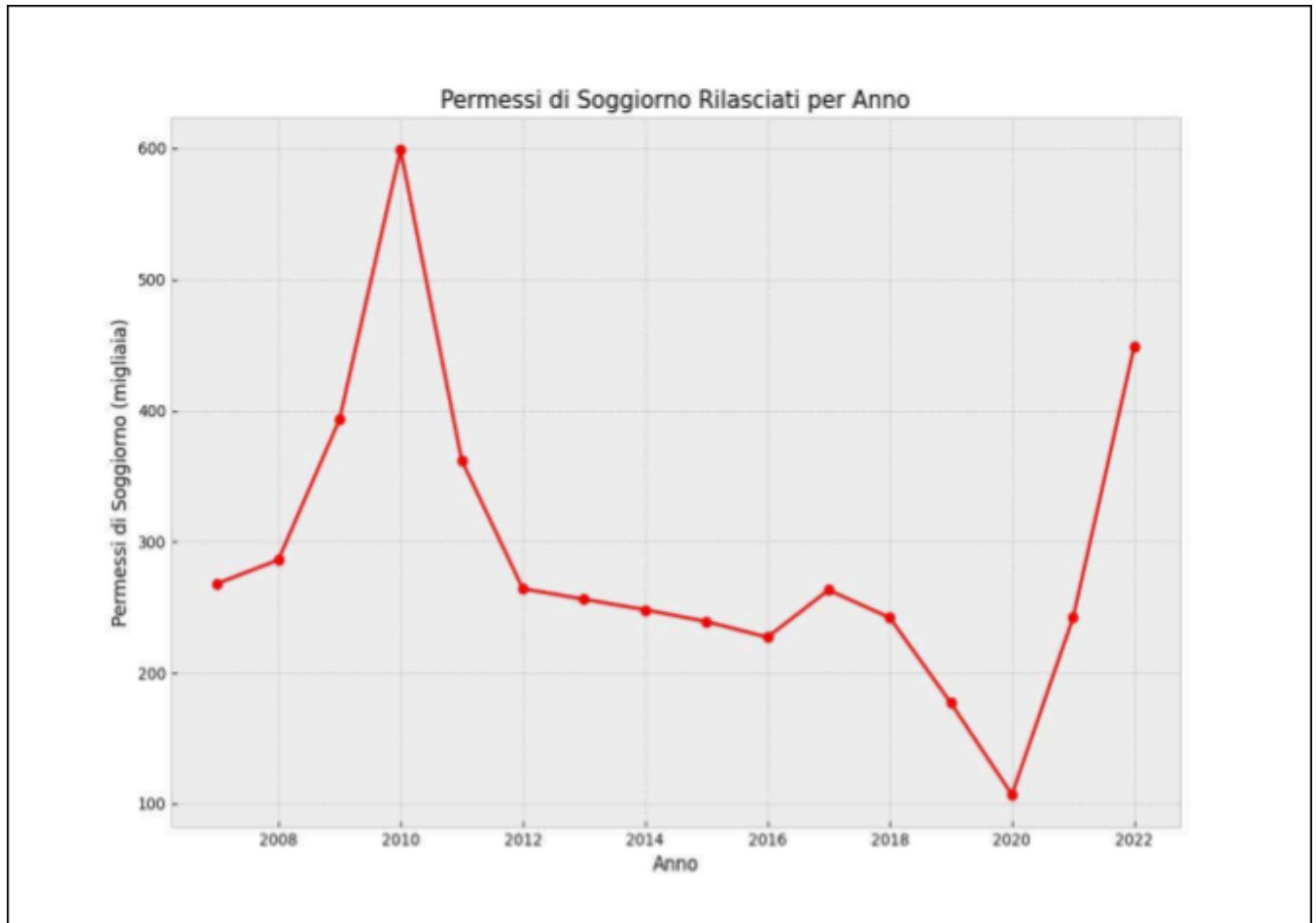


Figure 6: Our processing of data from the report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (2024).

In terms of percentage of the total resident population, Italy is in line with the rest of the European Union, where the average is 10.7% according to Eurostat data.³⁶

In Italy, the increase in foreign residents, after a brief slowdown due to the health emergency period, went up again between 2022 and 2023 (+2.2%). This population is mostly composed of Romanian citizens, who alone make up 21% of the total number of foreigners in Italy (1 million in absolute terms); Albanian (416,000); and Moroccan citizens (415,000). Above the 100,000 mark we find

³⁶https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics#Migrant_population:_27.3_million_non-EU_citizens_living_in_the_EU_on_1_January_2023.

Chinese (307,000), Ukrainian (249,000), Bengali (174,000), Indian (167,000), Filipino (158,000), Egyptian (147,000), Pakistani (144,000), Nigerian (123,000), Senegalese (112,000), Sinhalese (109,000), Moldovan (109,000) and Tunisian (102,000) citizens.

Between 2007 and 2022, the issuance of residence permits followed a somewhat irregular trend: the peak reached in 2010 (599,000 permits) was not reached in 2022 - a record post-pandemic year, in which 449,000 permits were issued mainly due to the conflict in Ukraine. Of the total number of permits granted in 2022, 15% were issued for employment reasons, compared to 45% for asylum and other forms of protection, mainly for Ukrainian citizens, as previously mentioned, but also the Pakistani and Nigerian communities (ivi).

With regard to the labour market, it has already been pointed out that, due to the ageing of the Italian population and the low birth rate, the proportion of young people in the total population is decreasing, with an increasing proportion of the over 65. In this context of demographic winter, it is worth noting that the management of incoming migratory flows can and should contribute to the participation in the national labour market. From this perspective, the labour and social integration of foreign residents plays an indispensable role in balancing supply and demand. The issue of labour integration of migrants is, as the report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies points out, a priority in many OECD countries for two reasons: first, because it would curb the ageing of the population combined with the low birth rate; second, and equally importantly, because managing migration flows with an integration approach is an effective way to better govern an international phenomenon characterised by large movements of human capital, caused by humanitarian emergencies in different areas of the world.

In order to delve deeper into the issue of migration from different points of view, we need to make a fundamental distinction between the Italian national context and the broader European context.

1.3.1 The European context

Europe, as a continent, went from being a place of emigration to being a destination of migration during the 20th century. The 19th century, the century of great emigrations, with the large

movement of human capital that coincided with the industrial development, ended with the World War I. After the war - as a result of the need for labour due to the losses caused by the conflict, the crisis of '29 and European totalitarianisms - the outflows decrease. It is especially thanks to the reconstruction needed after the World War II that the first large masses of human capital arrive on the continent. The economic boom increases the flows that, however, are the object of hostile regulation with the border blockade following the first oil shock in 1974. It is then that family reunifications take the place of arrivals linked to temporary stay plans for work purposes, and it is then that Southern Europe - especially Italy and Spain, latecomers on the immigration arena – become poles of attraction. In the 1990's, the EU, through the Blue Card system, recognises the need for qualified non-EU workers. (Ambrosini, 2020)

As we can see from this brief overview, in Europe the migratory flow has followed the classic Böhning pattern, with a first phase characterised by high labour market participation of small numbers of individuals, predominantly young males; a second phase in which the average age increases (but gender and activity rate remain unchanged); a third phase in which the number of women grows due in particular to family reunifications; and a fourth phase characterised by long stays, growth of the immigrant population, creation of “ethnic” institutions³⁷ and, conversely, increased demand for political control measures by the native population (1984).³⁸ Initially, migration waves in Europe were driven by labour demand especially in Germany, France and England. Traditionally, the distinction is made between three different patterns of inclusion related to the history, political tradition, society and culture of these countries. The so-called assimilationist model is typical of France, a country that has focused on the integration of individuals, seen as ‘rootless and independent (or to be made independent by emancipating them) from their communities of origin and traditional legacies’ (Ambrosini, 2020: 249). England, instead, is seen as an expression of the multicultural model in Europe, where policies aimed at preserving cultural differences might even change the institutional structures of the host society. The last approach, the German model, is based on a temporary model: immigration, seen as a temporally circumscribed phenomenon, concerns workers who have arrived to meet the needs of the national labour market,

³⁷ On Europe and the migrants of Islamic faith, an interesting study by Moiso and Ricucci highlights women's solidarity networks based on ethnic-religious grounds (2017), while on the topic of the birth of a European Islam, we refer to Ramadan's classic texts (1999; 2002) for an internal discussion, and to Allevi for an academic perspective).

³⁸ We have chosen to highlight Böhning's cycle because of its relevance to twentieth-century European history; however, see Ambrosini (ibidem) for a critique of this model and further integrations.

but are not there to put down roots. This model is connected to the idea of the *ius sanguinis* citizenship, i.e. inherited from at least one parent, and a ‘fluid’ view of movements of people, namely the idea that migratory movements can be explained by a simple imbalance between an empty and an overfull population (Reyneri, 2002).

Recently, the debate on migration in the EU has focused on the refugee flows coming mainly from the Middle East and North Africa as a result of the Arab Springs of 2011, but also from sub-Saharan countries due to political unrest, religious persecution and, not least, climate change.

It is precisely in this historical/geopolitical context, and in particular in light of the shortcomings emerged during the 2015-2016 refugee crisis - as emphasised by the European Commission – that the European migration legal framework called the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum** of September 2020 was developed.³⁹ The document proposed to promote the attraction of skilled workers needed by the labour market through targeted programmes that can respond to the actual needs of the European labour demand. The EU's solid experience with labour mobility programmes has led the Commission to launch ‘partnerships to attract talent’: the commitment is firmly linked to supporting ‘legal migration and mobility with key partners’. The partnerships would combine direct support for labour or training mobility programmes with capacity building in areas such as labour market and skills intelligence, vocational education and training, integration of returning migrants and diaspora mobilisation (COM(2020) 609 final: 26).

The **Talent Partnerships** announced in the Pact aim precisely to strengthen cooperation between the EU, member states and non-EU partner countries in order to ensure that the European labour market needs and the skills of workers from partner countries can be matched. In particular, the purpose of the *Talent Partnerships* is threefold: first of all, the project intends to strategically involve non-EU countries in the management of migration; the EU aims to create mutual benefits with international partners; and last but not least, the initiative is aimed at fulfilling the needs of the labour market, as already highlighted in the previous paragraph, with human resources from partner countries. This applies to Italy, but also to the other member states. As part of a network of pilot projects,⁴⁰ the

³⁹ The text of the Commission's Communication to Parliament (COM(2020) 609 final) can be found at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0609>.

⁴⁰ See projects funded through the *Mobility Partnership Facility* (<https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/mpf-projects>), the project *Match - Hiring African Talents* (<https://belgium.iom.int/match>) and the project THAMM

initiative provides direct support to mobility for study, work or training in the EU, ensuring at the same time *capacity building* assistance in the partner countries, including vocational education and training.⁴¹

There's more than *Talent Partnership*: the EU has been working to respond to labour needs in the EU through the development of the **Talent Pool**, a European platform for recruiting workers from outside the EU,⁴² a tool that will allow skilled workers from outside the EU to express their interest in working in the EU, and at the same time allowing employers to identify potential candidates in line with their needs.

Supporting migrants not only on arrival, but also before their departure from their countries of origin, is of central importance in the European strategy: in particular, the **Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027** emphasises the high value of integration and inclusion for the European way of life, defined as inclusive, because 'if we want to help our societies and economies thrive, we need to support everyone who is part of society, with integration being both a right and a duty for all' (ivi: 1).⁴³ Exclusion from the labour market is a central theme in the plan, since, as pointed out, for young migrants aged 18 to 24 born outside the EU the probability of becoming a NEET⁴⁴ is 21% compared to 12.5% for natives, with an even higher percentage for women (25.9%) (ivi: 5). Thus, the paper suggests that member states establish and strengthen pre-departure measures for integration in their countries, such as, for example, training and career guidance courses, and effectively combine them with post-arrival measures to facilitate and accelerate the integration process. This is why the plan recognises the need to **facilitate the recognition and comparability of qualifications acquired by migrants from third countries** in order to help them make full use of their skills in the labour market, while, at the same time, offering preparatory courses to help migrants complete the education already acquired in a non-European context. The idea is not only to ensure their immediate integration into the labour market: the Commission recognises the possibility that migrants may wish to continue their studies

(https://trust-fund-for-africa.europa.eu/our-programmes/towards-holistic-approach-labour-migration-governance-and-labour-mobility-north-africa_en).

⁴¹ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/talent-partnerships_en.

⁴² https://eures.europa.eu/eu-talent-pool-pilot_en#member-states-participating-in-the-eu-talent-pool-pilot.

⁴³ The text, COM(2020) 758 final, is available here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A758%3AFIN>.

⁴⁴ Acronym for 'not in employment, education or training', i.e. individuals who are not studying, not working and not in training.

in the country of arrival, increasing their level of education. Equally important are the acquisition of the host country's language, whose study 'should not stop a few months after arrival' (ivi: 10), and understanding the laws, culture and values of the host society. In terms of economic support (multiannual financial framework 2021-2027), assistance is also planned in the areas of employment and education.

The Communication on **Attracting skills and talent to the EU**⁴⁵ dates from 2022. Recognising that legal migration is a key element of the global approach to migration, it envisages strengthening and simplifying legal pathways for labour migration; the definition of a roadmap to implement the Talent Partnerships launched in 2021 and to strengthen cooperation between the EU and third country partners by the end of 2022; the establishment of an EU Talent Pool by 2023 to facilitate the connection between employers in the EU and skilled workers from third countries with the required skills and professional experience.

To conclude, in its **Communication on Skills and Talent Mobility of 15 November 2023**, the Commission introduces a set of rules to support international recruitment, recognition of qualifications and validation of skills, it proposes tools to strengthen cooperation with third countries in these areas, and reinforces the proposal to establish an EU Talent Pool to fulfil the commitments of the Pact on Migration and Asylum.⁴⁶ In its **press release of 20 March 2024**, the Commission reiterates the identification of 42 occupations affected by shortage of human resources, and responds with an action plan outlining the measures that the EU, member states and social partners are recommended to take in the short to medium term: supporting underrepresented people to enter the labour market; providing support for skills development, training and education; improving working conditions; improving fair intra-EU mobility for workers and learners; attracting talent from outside the EU.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ COM(2022) 657 final, available here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A657%3AFIN>.

⁴⁶

https://italy.representation.ec.europa.eu/notizie-ed-eventi/notizie/la-commissione-propone-nuove-misure-contribuire-colmare-gravi-carenze-di-forza-lavoro-2023-11-15_it.

⁴⁷ https://commission.europa.eu/news/tackling-labour-and-skills-shortages-eu-2024-03-20_en.

1.3.2 The Italian context

Italy, as mentioned, is a latecomer when it comes to migration. The country did not have to resort to foreign workers for its industrial development in the thirty years of the ‘economic miracle’, as it had a domestic labour pool in the South that, due to its agricultural origin and low education, saw access to unskilled labour as way to climb the social ladder (Reyneri, 2002). For this reason, Italy came to terms with migratory flows in the 1980s, going from a country of emigration to a country of immigration in an extraordinarily short period of time (Ambrosini, 2013). One of the main characteristics of Italian migration legislation is its late arrival: the first laws - in 1986, 1989 and then 1998 – were issued decades after the first migratory flows, and thus had to deal with a phenomenon that was already established.⁴⁸ Immigrants, who were given the opportunity to participate in the private labour market and who were guaranteed the same treatment as Italian citizens - with the exception of some social rights such as the disability pension - found themselves, as Ricucci recalls, in the paradoxical situation of being granted only some of the social rights associated with the status of workers, thus becoming weak citizens who were ‘excluded from political participation, from social protection, discriminated against in the labour market [... and] not recognised at a cultural level’ (2015: 50).

An important turning point in the legislation on migration is the so-called **Bossi-Fini** law (189/2002), one of the policies of the centre-right government aimed at breaking with past approaches to migration. In this case, the legislator followed the principle of prevention and repression of illegal immigration by emphasising the link between staying in the host country and working, following, to a certain extent, the temporary model already discussed: the migrant is (almost) welcome where there is a need to be filled, a gap, and is granted the right to stay in the country as long as this need exists. The actual existence of a regular employment relationship became, therefore, the *conditio sine qua non* for a valid residence permit for work purposes, while the nature of the employment relationship defined the duration of the permit. The system assumes that there are no other Italian or EU Member State workers available to cover the position applied for by the foreign worker. With this law, the condition of the legally resident foreigner becomes

⁴⁸ We refer here respectively to the so-called Foschi, Martelli and Turco-Napolitano laws.

even more precarious. It is also interesting that the possibility of legal entry is based, according to Law 189/2002, on the employer's choice of the candidate, giving preference to foreign workers who have completed a training course in their own countries based on vocational training programmes run by Italian entities.

The current legislative framework on immigration is largely based on the so-called '**Testo Unico delle Disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero**' (Consolidate Text of Provisions concerning the discipline of immigration and norms on the condition of foreigners), i.e. Legislative Decree No. 286 of 25 July 1998, which translated Law No. 40/1998 (Turco-Napolitano). The latter aimed to restrict entry for work reasons to cases where there was a request for work for specific individuals, after having ascertained that there were no other unemployed persons available among the ones (Italian or foreign) registered on employment lists, according to Article 22, paragraph 2.

One of the objectives of the Bossi-Fini zero-tolerance policy - in addition to fighting against illegal immigration - was the planning of migration flows, a long-standing need of Italy. The particular geographical location of the country - whose southernmost island, Lampedusa, is only 138 km from the coast of North Africa - has exposed it to the so-called Mediterranean route, which became even busier after the political tensions in the Middle East and North Africa after 2011. Excluding refugees, the entry of non-EU nationals is regulated according to the principle of flow programming: each year, the government, after analysing the national employment needs, determines the number of foreigners who may enter for work purposes.

Among the instruments used by the Italian state, it is important here to mention the **decreto flussi** (Flows Decree, decree on migration flows), which is used not only to regulate entries, but also plays a role in the aforementioned mismatch in the Italian labour market. It is with this decree that the government establishes annually - on the basis of, among other things, data on the actual demand for work in Italy - the maximum quotas of foreigners to be admitted for work purposes. The great novelty of the latest Flows Decree, the Prime Ministerial Decree of 27 September 2023,⁴⁹ is the

⁴⁹ The full text of the decree, in Italian, is available at <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2023/10/03/23A05503/sg>.

change of time perspective: this time, quotas are planned for the three-year period 2023-2025 (Art. 3). In numbers, the quotas cover, in total, seasonal and non-seasonal employment and self-employment (136,000 people in 2023, 151,000 in 2024, 165,000 in 2025). Disaggregating the overall numbers, in Art. 6 the decree specifies the quotas related to self-employment and non-seasonal employment in the sectors of road haulage for third parties, telecommunications, food, shipbuilding, bus passenger transport, fishing, hairdressers, electricians and plumbers (53,450 in 2023, 61,950 in 2024, 71,450 in 2025) and those subject to specific agreements with third countries; Article 7, instead, regulates the entries related to seasonal employment in the agricultural and tourism-hospitality sectors of nationals from specific countries:⁵⁰ 82,550 in 2023, 89,050 in 2024, 93,550 in 2025.⁵¹

As for the ways in which the application for the entry of non-EU workers is handled, this is decided by the employer, who autonomously manages the request, which must comply with specific deadlines (art. 8) and must be subject to the proven unavailability of a worker who is already in Italy – this refers to the aforementioned Article 22, paragraph 2, of the Testo unico.

As can be seen, the historical, socio-political and legal framework of migration in Italy is strongly influenced by the integration of migrants into the national labour market.

1.3.3 Migrants and the Italian labour market

Looking at migrants and the labour market, any discourse on integration - meant as ‘the ability [...] to achieve the same social and economic results as natives’ (**Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2024: 17**) - needs to take into account the difficulties encountered by the latter at a structural level. First of all, as the Ministry points out, in OECD countries migrants are generally more likely to be unemployed than natives (with the exception of the United States and Australia) or to remain unemployed for longer than natives. In quantitative terms, in 2022 Italy had an unemployment rate of 10.8 per cent for migrants 8%.⁵² When employed, the proportion of highly educated migrants that

⁵⁰ See Article 7 of the decree for the list of countries.

⁵¹ As mentioned in Article 9, the quotas are allocated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy between the Territorial Labour Inspectorates, the regions and the Autonomous Provinces.

⁵² Please refer to footnote 6 for the percentages for Italy. It should be noted that the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies itself (2024: 33-37) acknowledges the great heterogeneity of unemployment rates in relation to nationality, age and gender: among women

are employed is smaller if compared to their native counterparts in Italy. It should also be emphasised that just over 20% of migrants with a foreign degree find high-skilled jobs, whereas the proportion of Italians reaches 70%. This difference, as pointed out by the Ministry, is among the highest in OECD countries (ivi). If we look at the differences within the category of migrants, the statistics are also not encouraging. Migrant women face greater integration difficulties in employment, higher unemployment rates and lower employment rates, as well as old prejudices. In this context, the so-called ‘child penalty’ seems to weigh heavily: mothers tend to work fewer hours and earn less than men, or even leave the labour market (ivi). If one correlates this with the higher fertility rate of incoming migrant women, it becomes clear how fundamentally unfavourable the circumstances are for this subgroup of the population, which is often the victim of various forms of disadvantages and discrimination across the board.

This data should be read together with the living conditions of the migrant population. As the Ministry report points out:

“In Italy, the income of employed migrants is the equivalent of 70% that of natives with the same level of formal education, one of the lowest values in the EU, which drops even further when considering only migrants who have been residing in the country for less than 10 years. Migrants are also over-represented among those living in relative poverty, i.e. with an income below 60% of the median income.” (Ivi: 26)

Despite these structural difficulties, as highlighted by the Excelsior report on immigrant workers (2023b), in 2004 the incidence of foreign workers on total employment was 4.3%, it rose to 10.3% in 2014, remaining stable at that figure in 2022 (ivi: 6). What is surprising is both the speed of the ‘occupational integration process’ (ibidem) of incoming migrants and its scale in terms of numbers. It is true, as the report points out, that the process is not free from critical aspects, such as the participation in the shadow economy or the concentration in jobs that are paid less and are less skilled; however, the 2022 data show a significant contribution by foreigners in the macro sectors of the Italian economy: 8.9% in the secondary and tertiary sectors and 7% in the primary sector alone.

with EU citizenship, for example, the unemployment rate is 14%, almost double that of men (8%); between 2022 and 2023 the Albanian and Moroccan communities recorded a decrease in the number of employed persons (-9.2% and -8.1%, respectively), whereas the Chinese community recorded an increase of 11.4%, the Nigerian community +24.9%, the Russian community +19.2% and the Egyptian community +15.6%. Please refer to the report for comprehensive data.

Let's now focus on the uneven distribution of immigrants in the different sectors of the economy, to have a clearer picture of the situation. Unioncamere's Excelsior report is the most comprehensive tool and emphasises the constantly large number of foreign workers employed as blue collars: about three out of four. But we need to look at the distribution in different sectors to have a full understanding of the situation: the sector in which the most immigrants are employed is 'other collective and personal services', which includes personal care activities, where the share reaches 30.4%.⁵³ Immediately after, we find the agriculture, hunting and fishing industry (18%), which is not surprising given the significant contribution of incoming migrants to the Italian agri-food industry.⁵⁴ This is followed by hotels and restaurants (17.4%), construction (16.4%), transport and storage (12.4%), industrial activities (9.9%), trade (7%), real estate and business services (6.9%), education, health and other social services (3.7%) and, finally, public administration and defence (0.4%).

Figure 8: Graphical representation of data on the sectors with the highest share of foreign workers, in EU and non-EU countries

The situation, as can be seen from the graph, is strongly skewed in favour of personal care, an occupation that is often associated with migrant women, whose already high presence is growing, and who are often overqualified for the work of domestic helpers and caregivers (Zilli, 2018).

1.3.4 Professional needs and immigrants

Of even greater interest are the **data on sectoral distribution processed by the Excelsior system**, which show the detailed changes, over time, in the planned entries of immigrant personnel in the two macro-sectors of services and industry. As the report points out, this is one of the most

⁵³ In this part of the report, Unioncamere cites the 2023 annual report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the same cited in this paper. However, since the present text was written in 2024-2025, it refers to data from the 2024 report, although figures do not differ much. The quote can be found in Unioncamere 2023b: 8, footnote 15.

⁵⁴ Fai-Cisl's 'Made in Immigrality' report emphasises the contribution of immigrants to the sector, while at the same time highlighting the problems related to the risks of exploitation. A very brief report can be found in Il Sole 24 Ore: <https://www.ilssole24ore.com/art/nell-agroalimentare-fino-meta-manodopera-e-straniera-AFaLTiSD#:~:text=C'è%20fino%20al%2050,al%20made%20in%20Italy%20agroalimentare>.

important aspects in measuring the demand for immigrant labour, especially given the increasing difficulty of companies in attracting and retaining the staff they need.

First of all, it is necessary to highlight the fact that, in 2023, immigrant workers account for one third of the total number of personnel required by Italian companies in operational **services** (32% to be precise, vs. 24.7% in 2019) and in transport and logistics (31.8% vs. 21.9% four years before). Note, however, how the four-year variation is greater in transport and logistics: from 2019 to 2023, the demand for immigrant personnel in transport and logistics grew by 9.9%, while in operational services it grew by 7.3%. Finally, 25% of recruitments are covered by immigrant workers (25%), whose planned entries in 2023 are 7.4% higher than in 2019 (17.6%). This is followed by the accommodation, restaurant and tourist service sector, which rises from 13.2% in 2019 to 18.1% in 2023 (+4.9%), while ICT (14.4% in 2023), motor vehicle trade (13.3% in 2023) and wholesale trade (12% in 2023) show an almost twofold increase from 2019. It is interesting, however, to note that the media and communications sector is the only one to record a significant decline: from 11.3% in 2019 to 3.4% in 2023, (-7.9%).

As the report highlights, these data point to processes of ‘sectoral ethnicization’ (ivi: 33).⁵⁵

In the **industrial** sector, despite large variations, the values indicating the planned entries of immigrant personnel are lower than those of the service sector. The metal industry, with 23.2% in 2023, shows a 7.8% increase since 2019; the food industry (22.4%) has increased by 9.9%; and the construction industry (21.6%) by 9.8%.

Looking at aggregated data (foreign and Italian workers), the picture, in terms of **professions**, is clear:

- In 2023, 128,000 hirings of foreigners as **unqualified personnel in office or commercial cleaning services** were planned (33.8% of total expected recruitments);
- 74,000 hirings of immigrant workers were expected to fill **waiter** jobs (17.2% of the total, including Italians);
- 66,000 hirings of immigrant workers were expected to cover the positions of truck and lorry drivers (27.4%);
- 59,000 jobs, i.e. 14.4% of the total, were foreseen for foreign workers for the position of retail shop assistant;

⁵⁵ In absolute numbers, the total forecast for entries in the service sector is 755,000; 303,000 for the industrial sector (ibidem).

- 58,000 unskilled packing and warehouse staff (27.7%);
- 54,000 for stone, brick, refractory bricklayer (26.6%);
- and, finally, 42,000 entries were expected for foreign workers to fill the position of cook in hotels and restaurants (17.6%).

Again, we can appreciate the correspondence - as the Excelsior report points out - between data and the actual situation of immigrant labour in Italy, which is characterised by an over-representation of immigrant workers in occupations such as that of unqualified cleaner, regardless of the educational qualifications that often make them overqualified for the roles they hold.

1.4 Beyond the state of the art: problems and solutions

As mentioned earlier, the numbers do not seem to add up. Factors such as the demographic winter, the disadvantaged position of women in the labour market, the low level of tertiary education, generational turnover and cultural changes in the OECD countries, will prevent Italy from meeting the employment needs of companies with Italian workers alone. That immigrants are good for the economy is nothing new: for decades, discourses on the future of the country's social security, welfare, and pension system, among other things, have highlighted that the management of international migration can be a *deus ex machina* capable of restoring an otherwise inevitable imbalance. As we have seen, however, although companies plan a large number of recruitments, finding candidates turns out to be a much more complex job than what forecasts based solely on the unemployment rate might make it look like.

The demand for immigrant workers, however, is faced with several challenges: in 2023, according

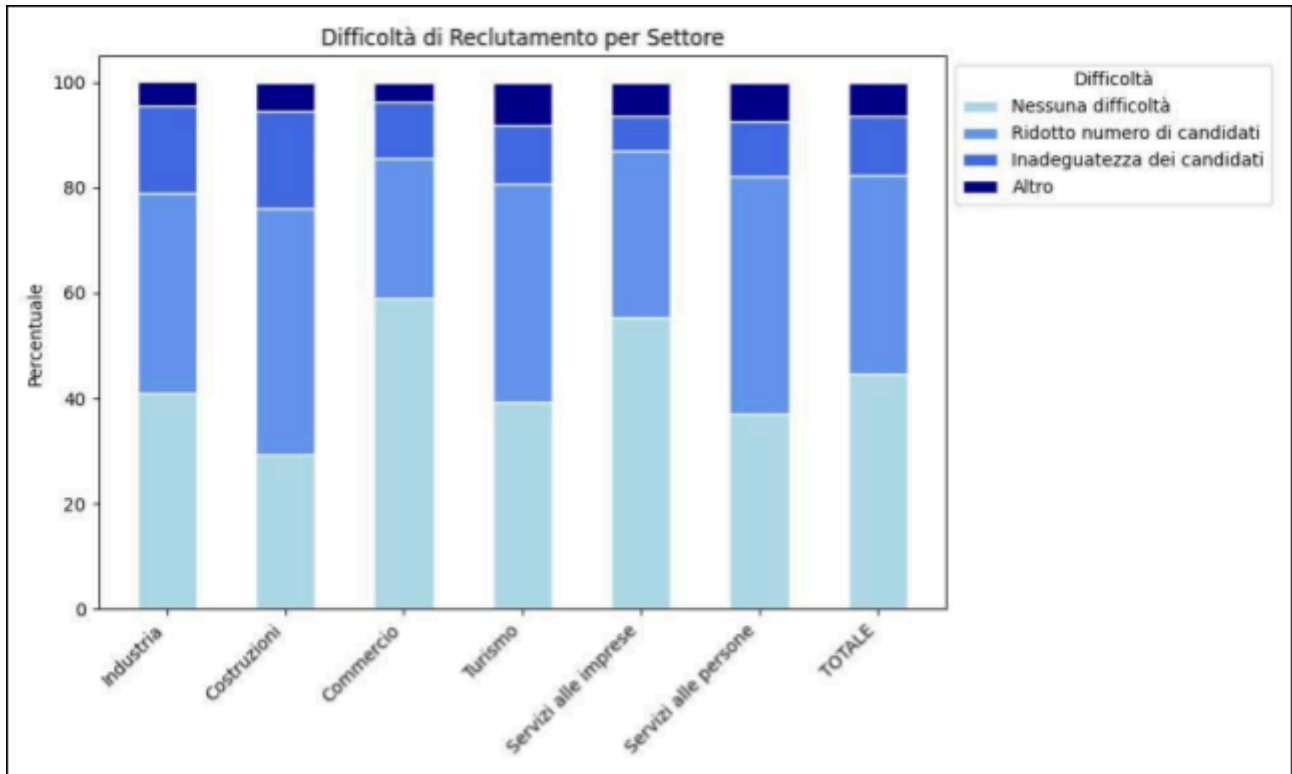


Figure 8: Our processing of the data from the Excelsior online system. The graph clearly shows the greater difficulty in the construction sector, and the lesser difficulties in trade and business services.

to the Excelsior system,⁵⁶ which looks at the difficulty in finding immigrants for recruitment by macro-sector, in the industrial sector this involved 47,250 jobs out of a total of 124,480, i.e. 38%. For construction, the percentage rises to 47%, almost half of the total hirings (50,380 out of 107,670 in absolute terms). The rates in trade are lower, even if the number of total entries is lower: 26.5% out of a total of 82,640. Tourism and business services, the sectors with the highest number of entries (199,850 and 254,260 respectively), show rates of 41% and 32%, with an interesting note: in business services, for 55% of the jobs there was no difficulty in finding candidates, while the same figure drops dramatically for tourism, to 39%. Finally, for personal services, out of 95,640 recruitments, difficulties related to the small number of immigrant candidates affect 45% of the total job offerings. If, instead, we look at the total number of immigrants hired by macro-sector and by

⁵⁶ The query with absolute values is available at:

https://excelsior.unioncamere.net/xtm/out_table.php?MRow=sys2_4&VRow=all&MCol=sys19_0&VCol=all&Vari=Extmin&MTnav=&VTnav=&MTaff=&VTaff=&Naturale=&SQL=&LRow=CD&LCol=CD&Totale=A&&tPerc=0&tPercRef=R.

recruitment difficulty in 2023, we can see an overall difficulty in all sectors (in more than 55.4% of cases).

Under the 2021 Flows Decree, out of just over 70,000 quotas, there were over 200,000 applications;⁵⁷ in 2022, the applications were 250,000 against a quota set at 82,705.⁵⁸ Although, as noted above, the quotas were increased in the three-year plan of the 2023-2025 decree, as of March 2024 690,000 applications were received for the 151,000 total available places.⁵⁹

From the very brief overview above, the inevitable conclusion is that **the numbers envisaged by the Flows Decree are not sufficient**. This is confirmed by the overall estimates of the Excelsior system and by specific estimates such as those of the Report ‘Family (Net) Work - Laboratorio su casa, famiglia e lavoro domestico’, as well as by the upward adjustments to the quotas of the decree, which make the headlines every year. The report estimates that 1.4 million people will need caregivers and domestic helpers in 2025 (2023: 80). The report thus calculates a need for additional foreign labour in 2023-2025 between 74 and 89,000 workers. The average is 25-30,000 per year, while, considering only non-EU workers, it is 21,000 per year (ivi). This final number is significant if compared with the numbers of the Flows Decree, which provides for the entry of 9,500 non-EU immigrants as caregivers and domestic helpers (as of May 2024 the applications were 112,000). The case for tourism and food service is similar: compared to the aforementioned 74,000 projected entries of foreign staff as waiters, 42,000 as cooks in hotels and restaurants and 24,000 as bartenders,⁶⁰ the quotas of the decree have not proven sufficient. Upward corrective measures - such as the additional quotas (15,000) for attending vocational training courses in Italy and for carrying out training and career guidance traineeships - established by the Decree of the Ministry of Labour

⁵⁷

<https://integrazioneimmigranti.gov.it/it-it/Ricerca-news/Dettaglio-news/id/2501/Flussi-2021-presentate-oltre-200-mila-domande-per-ingressi-per-lavoro-e-conversioni>.

⁵⁸

<https://integrazioneimmigranti.gov.it/it-it/Ricerca-news/Dettaglio-news/id/3163/Flussi-2022-oltre-250-mila-domande-il-40-dalla-Campania>.

⁵⁹

<https://integrazioneimmigranti.gov.it/it-it/Ricerca-news/Dettaglio-news/id/3728/Flussi-2024-gia-690-mila-domande-per-151-mila-quote-disponibili#:~:text=%22Alle%20ore%209%3A00%20dei,fin%20al%2031%20dicembre%202024>.

⁶⁰

<https://www.linkiesta.it/2024/03/decreto-flussi-stranieri-quote-ristorazione/#:~:text=Gi%C3%A0%20il%20decreto%20flussi%202023,circa%20140mila%20fino%20al%202025>.

and Social Policies of 28 June 2023,⁶¹ do not take into account the actual extent of the current employment requirement, a problem that cannot be solved only by resorting to additional quotas.

From a practical point of view, the *Feasibility Study on the Development of an EU Talent Pool* of 2022 offers some concrete possibilities to solve the problem of insufficient quotas, including the **UE Blue Card**. An instrument of the European Union, the Card is designed to attract and retain highly qualified workers in sectors suffering from a shortage of skills. Applying for an EU Blue Card for a highly qualified worker who is a national of a non-EU state means being able to live and work in the European Union in the same way as a native citizen.⁶² Specifically, the Card allows entry, re-entry and stay in the EU country that issues it; access to highly qualified employment in the member state that issues it; equal treatment with EU nationals in terms of working conditions, education and training, social security and access to services; the ability to apply for family reunification permits with the same duration as the Card; and the accumulation of periods of residence in several EU Member States.⁶³ With regard to travel, Card holders enjoy short-term (three months) and long-term mobility. Applicable conditions include, of course, having a valid work contract or a binding offer for a highly qualified job for at least six months; fulfilling the condition to carry out a regulated profession; having a gross annual salary in line with the threshold set by the member states; and, for unregulated professions, having the relevant higher professional qualifications.

European instruments such as the EU Blue Card only partially solve the problem of underestimating the employment needs of the Flows Decree, as it is mainly designed for highly qualified labour, specifically in STEM sectors and other areas such as healthcare.

The idea, then, is to use new **legislative instruments** that are better suited to providing solutions to the problem and that contemplate over-quota entries. We are referring, in particular, to the amendment of the Testo unico on Immigration through Decree 20/2023 (the so-called **Cutro**

⁶¹ https://www.lavoro.gov.it/documenti-e-norme/normativa/decreto_ministeriale_contingente_triennale_2023-2025_formazione.pdf. The quotas are spread over the period 2023-2025, i.e. the period covered by the 2023 Flows Decree.

⁶² With the exception of Denmark and Ireland.

⁶³ All the information on the EU Blue Card is available on the website of the Council of the European Union at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/eu-blue-card/>.

Decree). The decree has amended **Article 23** of the Testo unico,⁶⁴ excluding from the quotas of the Flows Decree precisely the entry of non-EU citizens residing abroad who have completed vocational and civic education-language training programmes approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and who are in possession of a contract. The idea that certain circumstances may require entries that are not covered directly by other legal provisions was already mentioned in **Art. 27** of the Testo unico on immigration, which already provided for the possibility of additional entries for work purposes. However, these entries are still calculated within the planned quotas.⁶⁵ The great advantage of **Art. 23** is twofold: first of all, it includes the possibility to provide for vocational and civic-linguistic education and training activities in the countries of origin, i.e. outside the European Union (Paragraph 1).⁶⁶ This training is aimed both at the targeted inclusion of workers in Italian productive sectors operating - both in Italy (paragraph 2, letter a) and in the countries of origin where the training is provided (letter b) - and at the development of productive or autonomous entrepreneurial activities in the countries of origin (letter c). Secondly, unlike the aforementioned Art. 27, the provision for out-of-quota entries (Art. 2-bis) for non-EU citizens who complete a training course under Paragraph 1 is very favourable. This ensures, among other things, that the foreign nationals who have completed the courses referred to in paragraph 1 can benefit from two comparative advantages: first, they will be given preference in the areas of employment to which the training activities refer (paragraph 3); secondly, they can enjoy employment benefits (paragraph 4).

As the ministry itself explains,⁶⁷ ‘vocational and civic-linguistic training programmes’ are programmes aimed at implementing training activities with a twofold purpose: to provide specific knowledge for a particular profession or work activity, including courses on safety and health in the workplace; to provide the linguistic and civic skills necessary to trigger a process of integration

⁶⁴ The full text of the decree, starting with the article amending Article 23 of the Testo unico, is available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2023/05/05/23A02665/sg>.

⁶⁵

https://www.brocardi.it/testo-unico-immigrazione/titolo-iii/art27.html?utm_source=internal&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=articolo&utm_content=nav_art_succ_top.

⁶⁶ As mentioned by Art. 23(1), these programmes can also be proposed by regions and Autonomous Provinces and must receive the approval of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education and Merit or the Ministry of University and Research. They can be implemented in cooperation with regions, Autonomous Provinces, third-party local bodies, national organisations of entrepreneurs and employers and workers, international bodies aimed at the transfer of foreign workers to Italy and their inclusion in the country's productive sectors, and bodies and associations that have been operating in the immigration sector for at least three years.

⁶⁷ <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/notizie/pagine/linee-guida-sui-programmi-di-formazione-professionale-e-civico-linguistica-allestero>.

both in the socio-cultural context and in the Italian labour market. The courses, aimed at foreign nationals who are resident in non-EU countries, including stateless persons or refugees in third countries of first asylum or transit, can be carried out in all non-EU states, including candidate states. The language level attained must be equal to an A1 in the CEFR,⁶⁸ while in civic education the acquisition of sufficient knowledge of the fundamental principles of the Constitution, public institutions (functioning and organisation) and the social and cultural context is required. Vocational training, on the other hand, must include notions concerning labour and workers' rights, elements of health and safety at work, technical vocabulary and career guidance sessions aimed at supporting the active search for employment. The use of remote learning system is also envisaged, at the discretion of the proposing subjects, although not exclusively.

As proof that the actual needs differ significantly from those foreseen by the Flows Decree, the social partners are acting independently. The forerunner is **Fondimpresa**,⁶⁹ which has issued a 5 million euro Notice to finance training projects for non-EU workers in their home countries.⁷⁰ We can see the first major applications of Article 23 as amended by the Cutro Decree: with Notice 4/2024 'Interventi sperimentali per l'implementazione di programmi di formazione professionale e civico linguistica in Paesi terzi' (Experimental measures for the implementation of vocational and civic-linguistic training programmes in non-EU countries),⁷¹ Fondimpresa adopts the idea of Article 23 of the Testo unico by financing the training of foreign citizens residing in non-EU countries. It does so, of course, by complying with the Guidelines 'Modalità di predisposizione dei programmi di formazione professionale e civico-linguistica e criteri per la loro valutazione' (Modalities for the preparation of vocational and civic-linguistic training programmes and criteria for their evaluation)

⁶⁸ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, a descriptive system developed by the Council of Europe (i.e. not by the EU) between 1989 and 1996 with the aim of providing a method for the assessment and transmission of knowledge applicable to all the languages of Europe. It comprises six levels of competence: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2, plus three intermediate levels (A2+, B1+ and B2+). Specific and detailed information on the CEFR can be found at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/the-common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching-assessment-cefr->

⁶⁹ A non-profit association set up by Confindustria, CGIL, CISL and UIL. Its aim is to promote continuing vocational training to promote the competitiveness of businesses and worker employability (<https://www.fondimpresa.it/azienda>).

⁷⁰ https://www.fondimpresa.it/sites/default/files/fondimpresa/Eventi-media/Rassegna-stampa/Nazionale/RS_20240805_Sole24Ore.pdf.

⁷¹ <https://www.fondimpresa.it/i-canal-di-finanziamento/conto-di-sistema/avviso-4-2024-formazione-in-paesi-terzi>.

of the Directorate General for Immigration and Integration Policies of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, which were adopted with **Directorate General Decree no. 27 of 7 July 2023**.⁷²

These guidelines - adopted in recognition of the fact that, by 2022, two-thirds of foreign workers in Italy were non-EU nationals and that empirical data show that this workforce was channelled towards low-skilled jobs - aim to define criteria for the evaluation of training programmes in countries of origin or first asylum/transit for refugees.

It is therefore clear that the amendment of Article 23 is essential to fill a gap that, as we have seen, differs significantly from the provisions on the governance of inflows implemented by the Flow Decrees. What still needs to be understood - taking into account regional and sectorial differences - is the actual employment need and the incidence of the above mentioned mismatch, and how and to what extent different stakeholders on the ground can benefit from a legal instrument that moves away from the logic of flows, creating a network of competences that can facilitate the establishment of good practices and strike a balance between demand and offer on the labour market.

⁷² https://trasparenza.lavoro.gov.it/archivio28_provvedimenti-amministrativi_0_92_726_1.html.

2. Towards the creation of the skills comparison tool: selection of sectors and professional profiles

1.2 Selection criteria

Based on the considerations presented in the first two parts of the document, let's now continue the analysis and delve into the comparison that will be presented in the last two parts of this national research. In particular, we will focus on the definition of a list of priority sectors in which the recruitment of personnel from non-EU countries should be promoted.

To start the analysis, the decision was made to narrow the focus to four sectors: constructions, care and assistance, tourism-hospitality and agriculture. Two professional profiles were then chosen for each sector in order to further refine the selection exercise. Far from being a mere theoretical exercise, the selection of a sample of sectors and professional profiles is designed to form the basis for sketching out, at a later stage, a tool for comparing skills. The end goal is to develop a reference framework for the harmonisation of classification systems at the national, European and international level.

The choice of sectors follows non-standardised theoretical considerations: we have chosen not to be constrained by rigid and uniform quantitative considerations. Instead, it meets specific needs highlighted in the previous parts of this research, and it takes into account economic aspects, employment needs and the inclusion and integration of foreign citizens. Our selection was not the result of a simple cross-reference of data, but rather of our considerations on the situation highlighted in the previous chapter, based on the data related to sectors that currently, or potentially in the future, present a greater demand for personnel, and to those in which the presence of foreign workers is already significant or is expected to be significant. We have thus selected the following sectors:

- **Agriculture**
- **Tourism/hospitality**
- **Care and Assistance (Health and Personal Care Services sectors)**
- **Construction**

It is necessary, in our view, to distinguish between general criteria and specific selection criteria. Among the latter, the **issue of public competitions** is relevant for all the four selected sectors: as we are speaking of non-EU countries, and therefore of non-EU citizens, we had to exclude all those sectors that regulate access to the professions through public competitions. The origin of the potential candidates determined the choice of the other general criteria, such as the **language level** required by the sector-related professions. Following the CEFR, it was reasonably set at a B2 level. Of no less importance is the **level of skills required for the professional figure**: in order to simplify the process, job profiles aimed at technical personnel or university graduates were not

considered due to the difficulty of including foreigners in vocational paths and apprenticeships. Finally, the **use of technology in training in non-European countries** has proven to be a criterion of fundamental importance: in the European Union, thanks to continuous technological innovation and collaborations between companies and training institutions, the skills required by the labour market are often developed through dual-track or apprenticeship courses. This synergy has a major impact on the level of skills developed and their recognition at European and Italian level. Unfortunately, the same is not always true for non-European countries and this creates a significant gap in the skills acquired. The case history and good practices on apprenticeships of non-EU countries is very varied. By way of example, let's take the case of Morocco, a country of migration where the vocational training system is effective, despite a regulatory framework for apprenticeships that can still be improved (ETF, 2023).

It is, however, specific criteria that ultimately motivate the selection made and presented here. Starting with the **agricultural** sector, if we think of the data on the composition of Italian GDP, it might be a counter-intuitive choice. However, we need to bear in mind that the need for labour in this sector is high: as mentioned in the previous pages, in the 2023-2028 five-year period 48% of the total labour demand will be for technical professional profiles in the agricultural and agro-food sectors (Unioncamere, 2023a). Also, the division of flows according to Articles 6 and 7 of the Flows Decree (see Figure 7) is relevant here: the 2:3 ratio shows a constantly higher number of workers who fall under Art. 7, related to the agricultural and tourism-hospitality sector, to meet a pressing need. It should also be remembered that it is precisely the agricultural sector that presents the most critical issues in terms of exploited immigrant workers, as highlighted in Footnote 53. The importance of this sector is also confirmed by the Excelsior data (Unioncamere, 2023b): the percentage of immigrant workers in the agricultural sector in 2022 was 7%, whereas their presence in secondary and tertiary sectors together did not exceed 8%.

The considerations on quotas also apply to the **tourism-hospitality** sector. It should be noted that the choice of this sector follows mostly the Excelsior analysis (Unioncamere, 2023: 13): the estimated need in absolute terms is the highest among all sectors. The analysis also shows that 17.3% of foreign workers are concentrated in hotels and restaurants.

It is, however, in **care and assistance** that the ethnicization of professions is most evident. This consideration goes hand in hand with the figure indicating the need for 87,000 qualified professionals in the health and social sectors in 2023-2028. It is easy to identify the reasons of the existing mismatch, in particular the demographic winter, when talking about care and assistance. The aforementioned Assindatcolf report (2023), highlighting the professional needs related to the care of the elderly and disabled, reflects the changed social needs of an ageing country.

Finally, with regard to the **construction** sector, the choice was motivated above all by considerations on the sector's growth: on the one hand, the construction sector, among others, has greater recruitment difficulties, globally speaking. As such, it is physiologically subject to the mismatch phenomenon (Unioncamere, 2023b). On the other, 50% of the investments of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) is earmarked for the construction sector, which, however, suffers from a history of rather limited growth and expansion. In this case, the hope is that a higher availability of workers will increase productivity even when the push of the PNRR gradually runs out (Unioncamere, 2023a).

2.2 The selected sectors and professional profiles

In line with the previously defined selection criteria, we proceeded to identify eight specific professional profiles, two for each sector of interest.

It is important to point out the functional nature of this choice of professional profiles. Since the objective, at this preliminary stage, was to develop a comparative tool, it was necessary to provide for different levels of difficulty in the comparison. Thus, professional figures that were more easily comparable were accompanied by profiles that were more complex to compare.

For these reasons, the profiles selected are as follows:

Sectors	Professional profiles
Care and Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Carer • Healthcare Assistant
Tourism/hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Service Worker - Dining area and serving food and drinks • Food Service Worker – Preparation of food and plating
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction Worker - Finishing and plastering work • Construction Worker - Painting and plasterboard work
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural Worker - Cultivation of herbaceous, horticultural and woody plants in open fields and in greenhouses • Agricultural Worker - Construction and maintenance of green areas, parks and gardens

2.2.1 Health sector

The health sector in Italy, traditionally state funded, is supported by the Italian state, for which - as the Constitution states - health constitutes a ‘fundamental right of the individual’ as well as an ‘interest of the community’ (Art. 32). With Law No. 833 of 23 December 1978, these constitutional principles were translated into a national health system (SSN). The SSN was at the centre of discussions on public policy and its administration during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, a time when the government attempted to respond to the need and pressure of the emergency situation with urgent measures.

Leaving aside the genesis and evolution of the sector, we have selected two key figures within the SSN, albeit not highly specialized, for the purpose of this study: Healthcare Assistants (Operatori Socio-Sanitari: OSS) and Family Carers.

Healthcare Assistants play an essential role in the basic care of patients, supporting them in their daily activities and personal hygiene. The altruistic traits of the work of a Healthcare Assistant can be clearly seen in the emotional support provided to patients, which extends beyond a mere clinical activity. Regarding the places where they work, Healthcare Assistants can carry out their work in a multitude of contexts, including Local Health Units (ASL) facilities, private clinics and private homes. According to the text of the State-Regions Agreement of 22 February 2001, Healthcare Assistants work ‘in both the social and health sectors, providing social-assistance and social-health

services, in residential or semi-residential facilities, in hospital settings and at the user's home' (Art. 3). In order to obtain the qualification of Healthcare Assistant, it is necessary to attend a specific vocational training course, including face-to-face classes, do periods of internship, and, most importantly, pass a final qualification examination. Healthcare Assistant courses are available throughout Italy. However, it should be noted that only courses organised by public bodies - such as Local Health Units (ASLs) - or by private bodies certified by the Regions and Autonomous Provinces, issue the necessary qualifications to practice the profession.

Family Carers perform their role in home care and personal care services, providing personalised care for the elderly, disabled or people with special physical needs. In Italy, this profession can be entered by attending a training course provided by accredited bodies, which includes a theory course and an internship period.

2.2.1.1 Qualification of Healthcare Assistant in the Vocational Training Context

The qualification of Healthcare Assistant (Operatore Socio Sanitario - OSS), formally established by the State-Regions Agreement of 22 February 2001, responds to the need to satisfy a person's basic needs and promote their well-being and autonomy (Art. 1). The training of Healthcare Assistants, aimed at providing technical and interpersonal skills, is regulated at regional level and involves a course of no less than 1,000 hours, with at least 450 hours of theory , 100 hours of practical training/stage and at least 450 hours of internship (Art. 8, Paragraph 2).

The theory course covers theoretical aspects related to the social-cultural, institutional and legal, psychological and social, health and safety, and technical-operational spheres (Art. 10).

The hours of practical training allow students to apply this theoretical knowledge in a controlled environment, while the internship provides direct experience in the work environment. Healthcare Assistants acquire a number of transversal and specific skills during their training, ranging from direct assistance daily activities related to personal hygiene, eating, and moving, to the cleaning and maintenance of the spaces. Medical support is the distinctive tasks of Healthcare Assistants: they perform simple dressings, take vital signs, and assist in the administration of oral therapies on a daily basis, regardless of the context where they work.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that according to Article 13 of the Agreement, it is up to the Regions and Autonomous Provinces to define the details of the training of the Healthcare Assistant, including the need to fill any gaps attributable to previous training.

2.2.1.2 Qualification of Family Carers in the Vocational Training Context

The figure of the Family Carers fits into a less stringent regulatory framework than that of the Healthcare Assistant, probably because of the context where the job is carried out. As the word suggests, the Family Carer does not work in the context of hospitals or Local Health Units, but rather in private homes to support the users who request their services.

One of the most relevant legal references to the Family Carer is Law No. 328 of 8 November 2000, in particular Article 12(1), which states that the creation of a regulatory framework precedes that of the professional figures it regulates. Some vocational training institutions provide a vocational qualification aimed at training Family Carers to meet the growing demand for personalised care for

the elderly, disabled or people with special needs. The training to become a Family Carer, structured to provide specific and transversal skills to work effectively in family settings, is regulated at regional level and includes a combination of theory and practical lessons. In general terms, the courses include 200-300 hours of training split between classroom lessons and practical workshops. Emphasis is placed on first aid information and basic principles to handle emergency situations. Household management is equally important, as it covers skills required for housekeeping and meal preparation, as well as to give support in daily hygiene and personal care activities.

Family Carers can practice their professional in a wide range of contexts, from working directly in the homes of the assisted persons to working in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other facilities for the elderly and disabled. The profession of the Family Carer is constantly evolving, also due to technological innovation, and the continuous updating of skills, through adequate training, is essential to deal with new situations.

2.2.2 Tourism/Hospitality

As mentioned in the first part of this research, the hospitality and tourism sector is one of the main components of our economic systems as well as a driver of social and cultural development by promoting national and local resources of territories, while increasing employment. The tourism sector is multifaceted and covers a wide range of fields from the provision of accommodation to food services and entertainment for travellers and tourists. Tourist facilities can include hotels, resorts, bed and breakfasts, hostels, mountain cabins and campsites.

Skills related to food and beverage expertise, operational management of food service and hospitality settings, culinary culture and food safety are essential for those working in the sector.

These roles require specific skills and appropriate training, often acquired through specific professional courses. In addition to the skills formally acquired through training, additional transversal skills are also essential, such as: knowledge of foreign languages; communication skills; customer relationship management.

2.2.2.1 Qualification of Food Service Worker – Preparation of food and plating

The Food Service Worker specialised in the preparation of food and plating is an essential professional figure in the hospitality and food service industry. This role involves the preparation of dishes and menus, following recipes and hygiene and health regulations, and contributes significantly to the quality of service offered to customers. The qualification obtained is considered a Level 3 qualification according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The skills required for this qualification include the knowledge of cooking and food preparation techniques, the ability to use kitchen equipment and tools safely and efficiently, the knowledge of hygiene and health regulations applicable to the food sector; organizational skills, and the ability to plan and organise work in the kitchen.

Relational skills, given the social nature of the profession, are equally essential. It's not only important to be customer-oriented, but also (and most importantly) to be able to work in a team and collaborate with other members of the kitchen staff. The role might require a certain amount of

creativity and innovation in the preparation of dishes, even if the ability to follow instruction is fundamental.

The training to become a Food Service Worker is structured to provide a solid foundation of theoretical and practical knowledge and includes, in the basic training, fundamentals of hygiene and safety at work, elements of nutrition and dietetics and an introduction to culinary techniques and meal preparation. The **specific training**, instead, focuses on advanced cooking and food preparation techniques, kitchen management and organisation, food regulations and quality control. The training process also includes practical experience with internships and apprenticeships in real food service contexts, such as restaurants, hotels, canteens and catering companies. The Food Service Worker can work as a cook in restaurants and hotels, chef de partie or even start an entrepreneurial activity managing their own business.

2.2.2.2 Qualification as Food Service Worker – Dining area and Serving Food and Drinks

The qualification of Food Service Worker specialised in setting up the dining area and serving food and drinks is essential to ensure excellent service in the hospitality industry. The comprehensive and structured training process prepares professionals to effectively manage room and bar service, offering many career opportunities in various work contexts. At the end of the training, the holder of the qualification is able to perform the duties of a waiter or bartender, welcome customers in a food service establishment and assist them adequately.

The qualification obtained is considered a Level 3 qualification according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Again, the training process combines theory and practice. The contents are not too different from the training provided for the qualification discussed in the previous paragraph, with the exception of the specific training, which includes fundamental notions on table and bar service, preparation and presentation of drinks, cocktails and coffee, and regulations on the serving of alcohol and food safety. The qualification opens up many job opportunities in high quality food service contexts, such as waiter, bartender, chef de rang, maître and head waiter.

2.2.3 Agriculture

The agricultural sector, which at the beginning of 2024 was shaken by the so-called ‘tractor protests’ caused, among other things, by high production costs, in 2024 was also the object of legal provisions aimed at supporting economically and from a health point of view.

In addition to what was already mentioned in the first chapter, it is also interesting to note that this sector is characterised by a wide variety of activities ranging from the cultivation and harvesting of agricultural products to livestock management and processing of food products. As is true for all sectors, technological innovation is transforming agriculture with the introduction of precision farming practices, biotechnology and sustainable management techniques.

The complexity of the sector is mirrored by the multiple professional figures who play key roles in the production, management and innovation of agricultural activities.

Agricultural Workers, as described here, perform manual activities related to the cultivation and harvesting of agricultural products. Responsibilities include land preparation, sowing, irrigation, harvesting and maintenance of agricultural equipment. The role may also include the rearing and

care of animals. A technical diploma or vocational training in agriculture is required. Fundamental skills include the use of agricultural machinery, knowledge of cultivation practices and the ability to work outdoors in different climate conditions.

2.2.3.1 Qualification of Agricultural Worker- Cultivation of herbaceous, horticultural and woody plants in open fields and in greenhouses

The qualification of Agricultural Worker specialised in the cultivation of herbaceous, horticultural and woody plants in open fields and greenhouses is a relevant professional figure in the performance of production processes in the agricultural sector, with highly diversified skills. The qualification obtained is considered a Level 3 qualification according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). As previously mentioned, the skills of Agricultural Workers, are broad, encompassing a wide range of technical knowledge and practical skills needed to effectively manage crops in a wide variety of agricultural contexts. The necessary training provides knowledge of cultivation techniques, i.e. a solid foundation of how to grow herbaceous, horticultural and woody plants, both in the open field, i.e. outdoors, and in greenhouses. This includes soil preparation, sowing, transplanting, plant growth management and harvesting of agricultural products. Agricultural Workers are trained in the management of soil and water resources, and acquire the ability to prepare and manage the soil for cultivation, including fertilisation and irrigation, as well as skills in the assessment of soil fertility, the selection and use of appropriate fertilisers, and the efficient management of water resources to optimise crop yields. The ability to use and maintain agricultural machinery and equipment is encouraged, as is the control of diseases and pests.

Another key skill is the knowledge of the relevant regulatory framework, including occupational safety regulations and environmental regulations related to the use of agricultural machinery, chemicals and agricultural waste management.

The training process to obtain qualification includes Agricultural Worker includes basic training with theoretical and practical lessons on agronomy, plant biology, agricultural chemistry and cultivation techniques, which aims to provide a solid foundation on which to build more advanced skills. Students also participate in specialised modules aimed at an in-depth study of specific topics such as the cultivation of herbaceous, horticultural and woody plants in the open field and in greenhouses, and in modules that include both theoretical lectures and practical exercises in the field and in protected structures.

An internship and a final exam assessing the skills acquired through theoretical and practical tests complete the qualification.

2.2.3.2 Qualification of Agricultural Worker - Construction and maintenance of green areas, parks and gardens

The Agricultural Worker specialised in the Construction and maintenance of green areas, parks and gardens works in public and private contexts with to preserve the urban and rural landscape. The qualification obtained is considered a Level 3 qualification according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Core skills include the design of green areas, and thus the ability to read and interpret projects for green areas, parks and gardens. The Agricultural Worker is trained

in the preparation of soil for planting, including soil quality assessment, fertilisation, soil amendment and the implementation of appropriate drainage systems; planting and transplanting of trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants and flowers, which requires a thorough knowledge of plant species, their ecological requirements and appropriate planting techniques; maintenance of green areas, which requires the ability to carry out ordinary and extraordinary maintenance work related to pruning, grass cutting, irrigation, fertilisation, weed control and plant disease management, as well as to agricultural machinery and equipment. Again, a basic knowledge of the relevant regulatory framework is provided.

The training process is designed to develop specific professional skills. It includes basic training with theoretical and practical lessons on agronomy, botany, soil chemistry and cultivation techniques, which aims to provide a solid foundation on which to build more advanced skills. The training also includes specialised modules covering topics such as landscape design, garden construction and management of green areas; modules that include both theoretical lectures and practical fieldwork, as well as internships at companies in the industry.

2.2.4 Construction

The construction sector is a cornerstone of the world economy. It encompasses a wide range of activities from residential and commercial to industrial and infrastructure construction, requiring the integration of multiple professional and technical skills. The construction industry has been growing steadily in recent years, driven by the need for new infrastructure and an increasing urban population, and is set to keep on expanding: already in 2015, the *Global Construction Perspectives and Oxford Economics* report stated that the global construction market would reach USD 15.5 trillion by 2030, with an annual growth rate of 3.9 per cent (GCP, Oxford Economics, 2015). This increase is supported by the growing demand for new housing, transport infrastructure and commercial buildings. Technological innovation is crucial for improving efficiency and sustainability in the construction sector: 3D printing technologies and advanced materials are revolutionising the way buildings are designed and constructed (Tay et al., 2017). The adoption of sustainable construction practices and the use of environmentally friendly materials are on the rise, responding to growing environmental concerns and promoting more energy efficient buildings.

The construction sector faces several challenges, including, as mentioned in previous sections, the shortage of skilled labour, regulatory complexity and risks associated with projects. The shortage of workers with advanced technical skills is a major issue that requires continuous and targeted training to fill the mismatch between supply and demand. In addition, bureaucratic procedures and regulatory complexity can slow down projects and increase costs. Risk management is essential for the success of construction projects, which require careful planning and proactive management of possible problems.

2.2.4.1 Qualification of Construction Worker - Finishing and plastering work

The qualification of Construction Worker specialised in finishing and plastering work aims to prepare a key professional figure in the construction sector who can contribute significantly to the aesthetic and functional quality of buildings. The skills of a Construction Worker specialised in

finishing and plastering work can be divided into three main areas: technical, epistemic and transversal. The former are related to the preparation of surfaces, cleaning and levelling of the surfaces to be treated, the application of preparatory treatments, plasters and coatings, manually and with the aid of mechanical equipment, as well as other activities such as the positioning of decorative elements. Knowledge of the regulatory framework of reference and of quality control tasks is also covered. The epistemic skills pertain more to the knowledge of construction materials, the *physical* and chemical characteristics of materials used in cladding and plastering, their behaviour in different environmental conditions, and conservation techniques. Finally, transversal skills such as the ability to collaborate and problem solving skills complete the picture.

The training to become a Construction Worker specialised in finishing and plastering work involves a combination of formal education, practical training and apprenticeship; a combination of attendance of specific vocational courses in the construction sector, study of technical subjects, internships in construction companies and practical training in plastering and coating application techniques. The apprenticeship period in a construction company, during which the apprentice works closely with qualified workers, acquiring operational and technical skills in the field, completes the training. The qualification offers job opportunities in contexts where it is experience that determines the specific occupation that can be covered, as it is directly proportional to the level of responsibility within a team.

2.2.4.2 Qualification of Construction Worker - Painting and plasterboard work

The qualification of Construction Worker specialised in painting and plasterboard work prepares professionals for the preparation, application and finishing of paintwork and the installation of plasterboard structures, contributing significantly to the aesthetics and functionality of buildings. As is the case for Construction Workers specialised in finishing and plastering work, the skills of a Construction Worker specialised in painting and plasterboard work can be divided into three main areas: technical, epistemic and transversal. The difference between the two lies, of course, in the nature of the technical skills. Candidates for this qualification are specifically trained in painting, and acquire skills related to surface preparation, i.e. cleaning, sanding and surface treatment. The application of paints plays a key role in the qualification, so training covers the use of both manual and mechanical techniques for the application of paints, enamels and other decorative and protective coatings. The aim of the training is to make the future worker proficient in various painting techniques, the construction of walls, ceilings and other plasterboard structures, and the finishing of surfaces using appropriate techniques independently.

Once again, the transversal skills required also for the other qualifications are included in the training: quality control and compliance with standards, safety regulations and regulations relating to safety at work in the construction sector, with a particular focus on the use of paints and solvents. The epistemic skills include those specific to painting, i.e. the physical and chemical characteristics of the materials used in painting and plasterboard, including paints, solvents, fillers and panels; the behaviour of materials in different environmental conditions; and methods of preservation and application.

Once the training is completed, the Construction Worker specialised in finishing and plasterboard work performs his or her job in companies in the construction sector, working on residential, commercial and industrial projects. Again, given the highly practical nature of the qualification,

experience, together with theoretical knowledge, determines the job profile and hierarchical position within the work team.

3. The taxonomy of skills and the comparison tool

3.1 *The taxonomy of skills: the concept of skill*

It would be complex to outline the whole system of skills development without a brief historical excursus on the development of the very idea of skill and its implementation in Italy and the EU institutions.

The intention here is not to outline an etymological history of the broad meaning of the term ‘skill’, but rather to explore the connection of this concept to the world of work and training. Work and school are the perfect fields to develop and give a precise definition of the idea of skills. At work, they can define the burden of responsibility and remuneration; at school, they provide a valid indicator to assess the attainment or non-attainment of quantifiable educational goals. It was in the 1980s, in particular, with the collapse of the Fordist system, that a discourse on the management of human resources as the key to competitiveness - increasingly associated with the notion of ‘compétence’ (Dubar, 1996) became popular in Europe, and especially in France. According to Dubar (ivi: 188-189), five elements combine to form a new model regulating labour relations. One in particular is of interest here: the new evaluation criteria based on what the author calls *compétences de troisième dimension* (third-dimension skills). What he is referring to here are not manual skills, nor, as Dubar points out, technical knowledge. Rather, he is talking about personal and relational qualities: responsibility, autonomy, teamwork. In other words, skills which are more related to commitment or dedication to the company, an aspect that is increasingly regarded as a prerequisite of efficiency. Within this framework, continuous training is encouraged as a way of acquiring or updating one’s skills.

In the 1990s, skills, understood as resources that can be analysed and quantified, were discussed by the so-called ‘Saggi’ (the Sage), i.e. the members of a Commission appointed in 1997 by Luigi Berlinguer, Minister of Education. The Commission's conclusions address the issue of essential knowledge from the perspective of a broader cultural vision in which ‘knowing’, ‘knowing how to do’ and ‘knowing how to be’ contribute to a more dynamic cultural education of a generation that is capable of adapting to a less rigid, more precarious and changing society. When Dubar speaks of third-dimension skills, he refers precisely to these three aspects. According to the Commission, the teaching of disciplines provides the tools to interpret the world in which one lives and to come to terms with its rapid changes. The task of the teacher, then, i.e. the person entrusted with the task of transferring skills, is precisely that of creating aggregations, i.e. structures of knowledge that can be applied to different fields and domains and counteract the heterogeneity and diversification of knowledge. This context gives rise to the concept of the ‘school of the curriculum’ as opposed to that of the ‘school of the syllabus. In the 2000s, especially thanks to Presidential Decree 275/1999 whose provisions were applied as of 1 September 2000 (art. 2, para. 3), the traditional central role of syllabuses fades away, making way to curricula (arts. 8, 9, 11).

Gradually, terms such as ‘skills’ and ‘competences’ find their way into the school and pedagogical language. Since the 2000s, a number of European Union efforts related to education, such as the Lisbon Memorandum 2000, the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, the EQF of 2008, the European Union strategy ‘Europe 2020’, pave the way for possible comparisons. Italy implements these initiatives

through a prolific production of regulations. By way of example, we can mention the *Indicazioni nazionali per il curriculum della scuola di infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione* (National Indications for the Curriculum for Infancy School and the First Cycle of Education), which define the goals for the development of competences, and Law 169/2008 with the subsequent Presidential Decree 122/2009, which regulate the assessment of learning and the certification of competences. With the reorganisation of secondary schools through Presidential Decrees 87, 88 and 89 of 2010 curricula are geared towards transversal and permanent skills.

3.2 The taxonomy of skills: the Quadro nazionale delle qualifiche

The decree of 8 January 2018 established the National Qualifications Framework (Quadro nazionale delle qualifiche - QNQ), which became the main reference document for the classification of skills in Italy. The QNQ is also the tool that describes all qualifications issued within the national system of skills certification. In essence, the QNQ refers the national qualifications back to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in order to ensure a coordination between the Italian qualifications system with that of other EU countries. The rationale behind the genesis of the QNQ is, therefore, to coordinate the systems that provide public training and issue qualifications.

Preceding the QNQ by six years was the State/Regions Conference that, on 20 December 2012, signed the agreement on the first referencing of the Italian qualifications system to the EQF. In 2015, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education signed an agreement on the referencing to the EQF of the qualifications given within the regional vocational education and training system (Istruzione e Formazione Professionale - IeFP). As a result of these initiatives the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour developed the QNQ as described in the decree. The QNQ classifies qualifications according to eight levels, described in terms of learning outcomes covering knowledge, skills, and competences. The levels range from 1, which represents basic and simple skills, to 8, which corresponds to advanced and highly specialised skills typical of PhDs. The main objective of the QNQ is to facilitate transnational mobility of students and workers, promote lifelong learning and improve employability. Also, it supports the validation of non-formal and informal learning, valuing all forms of learning acquired throughout life, not only those obtained through formally structured pathways. The implementation of the QNQ includes strict quality requirements for qualifications, compliant with internationally recognised standards. This system aims to ensure that the qualifications issued are of high quality and transparent, making the competences of individuals more understandable and, above all, globally comparable.

3.3. The taxonomy of skills: the Atlante del lavoro e delle qualificazioni

Since 2013, the National Institute for Public Policy Analysis (Istituto nazionale per l'analisi delle politiche pubbliche - INAPP) has been engaged in a research effort aimed at producing the Atlas of Work and Qualifications (Atlante del lavoro e delle qualificazioni).

INAPP was created on 1 December 2016 following the conversion of ISFOL (Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori, Institute for the Development of Vocational Training of Workers), established in 1973, and inherited its mission: to support vocational training

in the first phase of regional decentralisation, as per Framework Law No. 845/1978. According to the law, the then ISFOL provided the technical assistance that the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Regions were entitled to obtain in the exercise of their functions in the field of vocational training (Art. 19). Having the role of institutional link between central and local administrations, ISFOL was, in fact, the main centre for the collection, research, analysis, information and evaluation of experiences in the implementation of training policies in Italy. Its work was a fundamental reference for operators and central and local administrations for decades.

The transformation of ISFOL into INAPP took place in the context of a policy governance reform under the Jobs Act. On 1 December 2016, the transition from ISFOL to INAPP was defined (Legislative Decree no. 150 of 14 September 2015, Art. 10). While maintaining its role as an entity to support public policies in the field of training and employment, INAPP has maintained a certain degree of functional flexibility to adapt to changes, updates, reforms and novelties in EU and labour market policies. Against the backdrop of the dynamism of the European Union, with the advent of the EQF, it became urgent to develop a national system which would define professional skills and qualifications in a clear, exhaustive and recognisable manner, also at the European level, so as to guarantee the comparability of qualifications between the various member states. Sensitive to the subject and aware of its importance, INAPP began working in close collaboration with the Regions, social partners, universities and other stakeholders. The main objective was still to develop an exhaustive and constantly updated database of professional qualifications in Italy and to create a tool that could accurately map the professions of the national labour market. The tool is useful in several areas, first and foremost that of career guidance, providing clarifications and information to all those wishing to find their way in the labour market. It can also be useful for labour policies, in supporting those involved in regulatory and political decision-making processes in the planning of ALMPs, as well as in training and education, by facilitating the work of educational and training institutions wishing to design training paths that are as close as possible to the actual needs of the labour market.

This system not only supports the definition of vocational training policies by policy makers, but also provides a reliable and up-to-date reference framework for the guidance and reskilling of workers. The methodological process used to build the Atlas followed various steps: first of all, data were analysed and catalogued, resulting in the identification and classification of all regional qualifications in Italy. Once the qualifications had been mapped and identified, a standard language was defined to make sure that the description of skills would be consistent with the EQF system. Finally, a process was launched to develop a digital platform that would allow easy access to all stakeholders. Among these, workers can use Atlas to acquire useful information on career and training pathways suited to their professional choices, while the unemployed and first-time job seekers can use the tool to find their way in the labour market, planning their employment or training strategies on the basis of the demands of companies. Finally, Regions, Provinces and Ministries have the opportunity to define coherent labour, education and vocational training policies that can reduce the existing mismatch.

With its Atlas, INAPP has clearly created a system which, by classifying professional qualifications, contributes to greater transparency in the labour market and to worker mobility. The creation of the Atlas as a strategic tool for the management of labour and vocational training policies in Italy has effectively contributed to the modernisation of qualifications in the country, reducing, among other things, the misalignment between the education and IeFP system and employment needs, improving effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and equity in the labour market.

3.4 The taxonomy of skills: the link with formal education

In Italy, the taxonomy of skills is characterised by a strong integration between formal education, vocational training and active labour policies. In order to define formal education, it should be noted that the Italian education system is divided into different levels: primary school, lower and upper secondary school and higher education (universities and higher technical institutes). Each level contributes to the acquisition of basic and specialised skills.

3.4.1 The case of vocational training

Vocational training, or IeFP (Istruzione e Formazione Professionale), is an essential element in the effort to upskill and reskill the workforce. It includes initial training programmes for young people, lifelong training programmes for adults and apprenticeship schemes. Active labour policies are implemented to facilitate the integration or reintegration of the unemployed into the labour market. These include career guidance services, vocational training and employment support measures.

The primary objective of IeFP is to facilitate the integration of young people into the labour market, in line with the needs of the Italian market. The IeFP system aims to support young people in finding employment, providing specific and professionalising skills that are in line with the demands of the production system. This should happen through the promotion of training that is qualitatively consistent and accessible throughout the country. However, the discrepancy between theory and practice clearly emerges from the analysis of the IeFP system, which reveals a significant heterogeneity and disparity in the training offered in different Italian Regions. The resources invested, the tools used, and the results obtained vary considerably from region to region, creating a discrepancy that potentially undermines the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the training system. The heterogeneity of the training offer and the contribution of schools in the provision of vocational training contribute to further imbalances in the system. The differences in funding and the lack of national coordination prevent consistent quality in the training offer. This phenomenon, referred to as ‘geopardizzazione’ (Salerno, 2019), is a tangible obstacle to an effective and nationally integrated training system.

As mentioned, the vocational training system in Italy is highly decentralised, with the Regions playing a key role in the planning and implementation of training programmes. Each Region has its own system that responds to the specific economic and social needs of its territory. On the one hand, this system makes it possible to adapt training programmes to the peculiarities of the local labour market by responding to the local needs, on the other hand it may cause substantial differences and disparities between Regions. The regional training offer includes a wide range of courses, delivered by vocational schools and specialised training centres. The regions manage European (European Social Fund - ESF) and national funds to finance their training programmes. These funds support the implementation of projects that improve the skills of the workforce and promote social inclusion. A key aspect of the regional system is the close collaboration with the private sector: companies actively participate in defining training content, take in trainees and apprentices, and help to ensure that the skills developed are relevant to the labour market. Regional

employment agencies, on the other hand, provide guidance, counselling and job-search support services and cooperate with training centres to ensure that training courses are aligned with employment opportunities.

Although, as pointed out above, the Regions have competence in the field of IeFP, the State reserves the authority to establish common rules to harmonise regional models. It is crucial for the State to ensure compliance with the essential levels of services related to fundamental rights, such as the right to work and education. This helps to ensure a high quality, consolidated and widespread training offer throughout the whole country, mitigating regional disparities. In order to improve the effectiveness of the IeFP system, it is also necessary to support and develop qualified career guidance and accompaniment policies, promoting vocational pathways that can respond in a timely and capillary manner to the actual needs of the labour market and its evolving dynamics. It is essential, therefore, to identify and fill the professional gaps in the market, using adequate financial resources and ensuring rigorous quality control of the training process, while also guaranteeing educational continuity in vocational training, from IeFP courses to Higher Technological Institutes (Istituti Tecnologici Superiori - ITS).

The improvement of the regional education system requires more stability and a national perspective. Policy-makers should recognise the importance of the IeFP system and implement targeted measures to improve the quality and effectiveness of the system. This should include strengthening career guidance policies, increasing funding for training pathways and promoting greater integration between different regional training policies.

3.5 Case study: the Repertorio regionale delle qualificazioni e degli standard formativi

The *Repertorio regionale delle qualificazioni e degli standard formativi* (Regional Directory of Qualifications and Training Standards) of the Piedmont Region, recently updated to better align with labour market needs and European education and training policies, is a key tool for the governance of the vocational training system. Its main objectives include making the regional training offer transparent and recognisable, simplifying the mobility of workers within the regional, national and European labour market and promoting lifelong learning together and the reskilling of personnel. In this way, the Directory facilitates the matching of labour supply and demand through the definition of clear and up-to-date skills and qualifications.

As mentioned, the Directory is structured on several levels which correspond to the EQF levels. The recent update of the Piedmont Region introduced some important new elements. First of all, new professional qualifications have been added in emerging sectors, such as renewable energy, digitalisation and environmental sustainability. Secondly, the existing qualifications have been revised to better reflect current labour market needs and technological innovations.

Thanks to this update, the Directory is now more consistent with the QNQ, thus facilitating the recognition of qualifications at national level. Digital tools for managing and consulting qualifications were also introduced, improving accessibility and transparency.

An integral part of this modernisation is the identification of certain priority areas for skills development, as they are increasingly relevant. These include, for instance, energy and the environment, i.e., as already mentioned, qualifications related to green technologies, energy

management, and sustainable development; but also, due to the digitisation process, qualifications related to the so-called Industry 4.0. Personal services remain essential in the current demographic context, while the promotion of cultural heritage and tourism services have preserved their importance.

The implementation of the Directory is supported by a series of regional initiatives and programmes. Training projects financed by the European Social Fund (ESF), for example, aim to improve the skills of the workforce in Piedmont through targeted training courses. Cooperation with companies is also very important. Local companies are involved in the definition and updating of qualifications, ensuring that training courses are aligned with the needs of the labour market. Moreover, the Piedmont Region continuously monitors the effectiveness of the Directory, using performance indicators and feedback from stakeholders.

The system is beneficial for all parties involved: it helps workers understand and recognise the skills they have acquired, and improve their employability and professional mobility; it helps companies identify and recruit staff with the appropriate qualifications, thus helping to reduce the mismatch between demand and supply of skills; finally, training providers have a clear framework for developing coherent and recognised training pathways.

3.6. *The International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO)*

The *International Standard Classification of Occupations* (ISCO) was developed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The first version of ISCO was adopted in 1957 (ISCO-58) during the 9th International Conference of Labour Statisticians. The original version has been revised several times (ISCO 68 and ISCO 88) until the latest version of the International Classification of Occupations system (ISCO 2008), which is the result of a consultation process involving consultants from various countries and international organisations. The primary purpose of ISCO is to provide a framework to make internationally comparable occupational data available. The tool should also promote international occupational mobility by facilitating labour migration between countries, providing an internationally recognised classification of occupations. ISCO supports labour policies by providing governments with reliable and comparable data to base their policies on, it facilitates career counselling and guidance by supporting employment services and recruitment agencies in the management of job offers and in the search for suitable candidates, it ensures a better knowledge of the recognition of skills and qualifications. Thanks to this system, it is possible to plan vocational training programmes that are aligned with the required skills by identifying the skills needed for specific occupations.

In defining the categories of the occupations, ISCO 08 uses a multilevel hierarchical structure which goes from the most general to the most specific level:

- *Major Groups*: these are 10 major groups identified by a one-digit code (e.g. 2 - Professionals) representing the most general categories of occupations.
- *Sub-Major Groups*: 43 sub-groups are identified by a two-digit code (e.g. 22 - Health Professionals) that offers a more specific subdivision within the *Major Groups*.
- *Minor Groups*: 130 minor groups are identified by a three-digit code (e.g. 221 - Medical Doctors) which further subdivides the *Sub-Major Groups* into more detailed groups.
- *Unit Groups*: 436 unit groups are identified by a four-digit code (e.g. 2211 - Generalist Medical Practitioners); they represent specific occupations, detailing the tasks and skills required.

These groups are in turn organised according to two main aspects: the skill level and the skill specialization. The ISCO system has the following clear advantages: guaranteeing a certain standardisation and terminological consistency that helps to describe occupations, thus reducing possible misunderstandings at the international level; facilitating integration with other international classification systems; being usable also by countries that have not developed their own national skill classification systems.

The most critical issues of the system are related to the constant, quick and dynamic evolution of the labour market. The demand for frequent updates clashes with the complexity and effort required to maintain a system of this magnitude, and its maintenance is made even more difficult by such an elaborate multi-level hierarchical structure. The language issue is also relevant: interpretations and translations into various languages can cause possible discrepancies in the application of the definitions in individual countries.

Despite these challenges and criticalities, the benefits offered in terms of data comparability, support for employment and training policies, human resources process management and facilitation of labour mobility remain significant.

3.7. The taxonomy of skills in Europe (ESCO)

The genesis of the ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) system dates back to 2010, when the European Commission launched the project as an integral part of the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The initial objective was to create a tool that could support the European labour market through greater clarity and interoperability between the various national taxonomies of skills. After years of development and consultation with numerous stakeholders, with the support of CEDEFOP and other organisations, and constant integration with national and international classification systems, the first official version of ESCO was launched in July 2017. The ESCO version v1.2, launched in 2024, has been adapted to the changes in the labour market and has already started to integrate competences required for new professions, such as those related to the green and digital transition, thus including new occupations and emerging skills in the area of innovative technologies. This trend is set to continue in the future, with a focus on the competences needed to meet environmental and technological challenges. Like ISCO, ESCO, too, is a key instrument in the EU for the standardisation of professional competences and qualifications. The system's main and current objectives are: to provide valuable data for the creation and development of labour policies based on a detailed knowledge of useful and available competences, which comes from the analysis and study of the data in the system; to contribute to the competitiveness and innovation of the European market; to bridge the gap between the competences provided by the existing education and training systems and the demands of the labour market by fostering the dialogue between training and work systems and the transition from education to employment; to standardise competences and qualifications by enabling workers to present their skills in an unambiguous way across Europe, thus fostering transnational employment.

The ESCO system offers a shared standard terminology to describe competences, qualifications and occupations, reducing ambiguities and improving communication between different countries and sectors. Access is free for all users (institutions, companies, individuals), and its integration, through the use of technology, with other labour information systems and platforms, improves the

overall efficiency of the labour market. However, the ESCO system also suffers from some weaknesses, such as: the complex structure, which makes it difficult to fully adopt the system, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises or for countries with low implementation capacity; different language interpretations may give rise to misunderstandings in the practical application of the system; the system is hard to update in real time, with the risk of frequent time misalignments. From this perspective, the use of artificial intelligence is increasingly relevant to keep the ESCO system up-to-date. AI is often used to analyse large volumes of data from job advertisements, training courses and other sources, helping to identify new relevant competences and occupations. This approach allows for greater accuracy and speed in updating the system.

3.8. Comparative analysis of the ESCO and ISCO systems

Both ISCO and ESCO, as highlighted, play a key role in aligning the components of the labour market at the supranational level, both in terms of analysis and to define policies for employment. This section will highlight the main differences between the two systems.

The most obvious discrepancies are related to the geographical context of the categorization. ISCO provides a standardised classification of occupations at a global level, whereas ESCO is an initiative of the European Commission that details the ISCO categories in order to better respond to the specific needs of the European labour market. The structural organisation of the two systems is also different: ISCO, as mentioned above, is based on a four-level classification whereas ESCO, although it is based on the ISCO structure for its first four levels, adds a fifth level to provide more details on the different occupations. This additional level allows for a more detailed and accurate classification of the competences and qualifications required for each occupation. In ESCO, each occupation is mapped by a single ISCO-08 code. This means that ESCO uses ISCO-08 as the hierarchical frame of reference for occupations, but expands the details to the level of specific competences. For example, while ISCO might classify an occupation in a general way, ESCO provides specific details on the competences, qualifications and tasks involved in that occupation, thus expanding its analysis. Mapping ensures that ESCO occupations correspond to or are more specific than ISCO group units, while maintaining a single-level hierarchical structure where each element has exactly one parent at a higher level. The third difference has to do with the scope of application: ISCO is primarily a statistical classification used for a wide range of statistical-operational applications, whereas ESCO is designed to be used also in the context of career guidance, training and labour market analysis in the EU. In summary, while ISCO provides a basic structure for classifying occupations at the international level, ESCO enriches this structure with details specific to the European labour market, including information on competences and qualifications.

Looking also at future perspectives, ISCO seems to focus more on the global overhaul of occupations, while ESCO aims to achieve greater integration with digital technologies and extensive collaboration with various stakeholders to meet the specific needs of the European market.

Despite the existing differences, the two systems should be considered as a whole: the integration of both ESCO and ISCO allows for the standardisation of labour statistics internationally, providing a common basis for comparative analysis between different countries and regions. The collaboration between the ESCO and ISCO systems is a meaningful example of how occupational classifications

can be integrated to meet the specific needs of the European and non-European labour markets, while maintaining consistency with international standards. This combined approach not only facilitates labour mobility and the matching of labour supply and demand, but also provides a solid basis for the development of effective employment and training policies.

3.9. Recognition and validation of skills

The recognition and validation of skills is affected by some multifactorial variables, such as the geographical context (European or non-European), the heterogeneity of the institutions in charge of recognition, according to levels, the presence or absence of international conventions regulating the matter or of bilateral agreements between countries.

3.9.1 Recognition of skills in Europe

The legal framework governing the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad is based on a number of international, regional and national documents. The main references are: the Lisbon Convention of 1997, the Bologna Process, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), Directive 2005/36/EC.

The Lisbon Convention, promoted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, aimed to facilitate the recognition of academic degrees and qualifications between member countries through recognition processes involving various actors, such as academic institutions, certification bodies and governments establishing that, unless there are substantial differences, periods of study and academic qualifications must be recognised.

The Bologna Process was launched with the Bologna Declaration, signed on 19 June 1999 by 29 European ministers for education. The declaration builds on the previous Sorbonne Declaration of 1998, signed by four countries (France, Germany, Italy and the UK) to express their desire to harmonise their higher education systems. The Bologna Process was a turning point in the modernisation of higher education in Europe. Through a series of coordinated reforms, it has helped to create a more integrated and internationally competitive education system. By establishing the European Higher Education Area, the process has facilitated the mobility of students and staff, fostering the flow of human capital and skills within the EU and making European higher education significantly more competitive and attractive globally. Among other things, it was with the Bologna Process that the participating countries decided to standardise the higher education system by dividing it into three cycles: bachelor, master, PhD. The success of the innovations brought about by the Bologna Process can also be quantified by measuring the European Union's soft power, i.e. its ability to provide a model of efficient supra-state organisation. Some authors point out that other regions in the world, such as the Pacific, Latin America, the United States or African regional organisations, have adopted *Bologna-type* inter-state mobility programmes (Huisman et al., 2012).

The already mentioned EQF was set up in 2008 and later revised in 2017. Its revision has kept the core objectives of creating transparency and mutual trust in the landscape of qualifications in Europe. The EQF is an 8-level, learning outcomes-based framework for all types of qualifications that serves as a translation tool between different national qualifications frameworks. The EQF is organised according to the level of proficiency, thus level 1 is the lowest and 8 the highest level. Most importantly the EQF is closely linked to national qualifications frameworks, this way it can provide a comprehensive map of all types and levels of qualifications in Europe.

For the recognition of professional qualifications in the EU, the reference document is Directive 2005/36/EC. The directive sets up: an automatic recognition system for nurses, midwives, medical doctors (general care and specialists), dental practitioners, pharmacists, architects and veterinary surgeons; a general recognition system for other regulated professions such as teachers, translators and estate agents; and a recognition system based on professional experience, e.g. for carpenters, upholsterers and beauticians. The directive defines how each level of education required for a qualification corresponds to a certain number of years of study, and therefore an EQF level. Consequently, the recognition of qualifications in a member state is based precisely on the EQF: first of all, it is ascertained that the person **at least obtained a certificate/diploma attesting to the EQF level just below the one they want to have recognised**, so that the competences related to the reference level are considered acquired. Then, it is possible to determine the validation process for the competences to be recognised.

3.9.2 Recognition of skills in non-European countries

The recognition of titles and qualifications in non-European countries follows a multi-stakeholder procedure involving several institutions. In a hyper-globalised world and in a European context in which the sheer scale of human capital movements for work purposes, as mentioned earlier, is a novelty in itself, the recognition of qualifications obtained in countries outside the European Union is a fundamentally important element in facilitating integration and professional mobility. Among the main international instruments facilitating this process are UNESCO conventions, bilateral agreements, supplementary examinations and internships and, last but not least, national and international qualifications frameworks.

Starting from UNESCO, the organisation has promoted other regional conventions among countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and in the Arab States, each with the aim of harmonising the criteria for recognising qualifications at the regional and inter-regional levels. As for the bilateral agreements, many countries sign bilateral agreements with non-European countries for the mutual recognition of qualifications. These agreements detail the procedures and equivalence criteria for academic qualifications. Clearly, these procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications may vary significantly depending on the country and the specific context and may include academic assessments reporting the educational content of the studies completed in foreign countries. This involves the translation and authentication of academic documents and a meticulous comparison with local curricula. In some cases, it may be required to take supplementary exams or complete internship periods to demonstrate that the skills acquired meet local standards.

Finally, the national and international qualification frameworks and other similar systems support the understanding and recognition of qualifications between different countries. Some non-European countries and regions are developing their own national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), inspired by or in alignment with the EQF, thus facilitating the mutual recognition of qualifications.

The already mentioned Lisbon Convention is extended to non-European countries wishing to join it. Although the recognition of degrees with non-European countries is increasingly necessary, it can be present some challenges, to the diversity of educational systems. The significant diversity in educational systems, curricula and evaluation methods makes a direct comparison of qualifications complex. Another issue has to do with quality and reliability: the lack of uniform global standards for the accreditation and quality in higher education can complicate the recognition of foreign qualifications. Bureaucratic hurdles, such as complex and costly administrative processes, can be a significant obstacle for individuals seeking recognition of their qualifications.

3.9.3 Recognition of skills in Italy

The document that regulates skills certification in Italy is Legislative Decree No. 13 of 16 January 2013, entitled ‘Definizione delle norme generali e dei livelli essenziali delle prestazioni per l'individuazione e validazione degli apprendimenti non formali e informali e degli standard minimi di servizio del sistema nazionale di certificazione delle competenze’ (Definition of the general rules and essential levels of performance for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning and of the minimum service standards of the national system of skills certification). The decree regulates and determines the identification and validation of learning: general rules for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning are established, especially with reference to skills acquired outside formal education and training processes, such as work experience and voluntary activities. The decree also establishes the National Skills Certification System, aimed at ensuring that the acquired skills are recognised consistently in the whole country; defines the minimum levels of performance (livelli essenziali delle prestazioni - LEP) that must be guaranteed throughout the country. This means that each region must ensure a minimum level of quality and accessibility in the skills certification process. Finally, it defines the minimum service standards that certification bodies must meet. These standards cover the quality of skills identification, validation and certification processes. Throughout the process of validation and certification of skills, Regions and Autonomous Provinces play a fundamental role, as they can adapt the national regulations to their local context, in compliance with the Essential Levels of Performance (LEP) and the minimum service standards.

3.10 The comparison tool

The comparative tool makes it possible to compare the above-mentioned reference frameworks, highlighting any differences or gaps between professional profiles in third countries, and at the Italian, European and international level. In particular, the tool is structured so that the competences, knowledge and skills for each professional profile - as described in the classification systems - can emerge.

The detailed comparative exercise will be conducted on the 4 sectors and 8 professions identified using the selection criteria described in part three of this research. The comparative table, in compliance with the different cataloguing methodologies, takes into account the selected sector of reference, and the repertoire used for the description and the professional figure analysed. After a first general presentation, the actual comparison is carried out through:

- The ISCO system by identifying, as required, *Sub-Major Groups* represented by a two-digit code, *Minor Groups* identified by a three-digit code and *Unit Groups* represented by a four-digit code;
- The ESCO system indicating the description of the professional figure, the relevant competences (*tasks*) and abilities (*skills*)
- The Atlante delle qualifiche e delle professioni describing the profession, competences, knowledge and related skills.

3.10.1 Practical instructions for the comparison between ESCO - ISCO and local systems

Understanding the differences between similar professions or how the acquired skills translate into other countries or systems can be complex. To facilitate this process, a comparison tool has been created that compares occupations on a national, international and European level, going into the details of the required competences, knowledge and skills.

The tool is presented as a table with several sections. Initially, the user enters the professional figure of interest at the local level and then compares it with the international systems. Then the tool looks for a correspondence in the ISCO system to identify the reference codes.

The sections on ESCO and the Italian standard (Atlante delle qualifiche e professioni) have been separated to facilitate the comparison of contents and to highlight any gaps, discrepancies or similarities between the systems. The comparison starts with the descriptions of occupations and then moves on to the overall analysis of competences and skills, considering that the terminology used by ESCO and the Italian Atlante is not always consistent.

This tool offers valuable support in several ways. For job seekers, it is an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of companies and to present their skills in a strategic way. Training providers can take advantage of this tool to design targeted and effective training courses that are aligned with the real demands of the labour market. Finally, legislators can use it as an information base to develop labour policies that help employment and professional mobility, reducing the gap between the demand and supply of skills.

Conclusions

Change, an economic, political and social phenomenon, has been the common thread of all the points raised so far. The big changes in the history of Italy in terms of employment, economy and migration have shaped the current scenario, defining its nuances, opportunities and complexity. These variations are not only **diachronic**, but also, and most importantly, **diatopic**: differences at territorial level are a second common thread found in the analysis carried out so far. In particular, they highlight the non-monolithic nature of the various analyses presented in the previous pages: we looked at the Italian GDP, but we had to clarify the weight of the different Regions; employment and unemployment rates were mentioned, but it was necessary to point out the gap between the region at the tail end and the one at the top.⁷³ The above mentioned **mismatch** itself and its causes are not equally distributed across Italy: the birth rate is positively unbalanced towards southern Italy and Trentino Alto Adige,⁷⁴ while for the percentage of over-80s the picture is patchy.⁷⁵ Looking at the employment rate by adopting a regional and gender perspective, the situation is also unbalanced: the gap between the Italian region with the highest female employment rate in 2023, Valle d'Aosta (68.1%) and the trailing region, Campania (31.1%) is 37%. The same data on male unemployment show almost half the gap (20.9%) between Veneto, the region with the highest percentage (78%) and Sicily (57.1%), the trailing region.⁷⁶

In such a geographically **varied** situation, the aforementioned **Excelsior** report highlights the differences at the **regional** level (2023a: 54): speaking of macro-regions and employment needs expected in the five-year period 2024-2028, the needs of the North-West account for 27.8% of the total, those of the North-East for 21.5%, those of the Centre 20.3% and those of the South and Islands account for 30.4%. The 10% difference between the Centre and the South and Islands reveals a gap that grows even further if you look at individual Regions: the gap between the trailing region, Molise (0.5%) and the one on top of the ranking, Lombardia (18.4%), is almost 18%.

⁷³ 15% difference in the unemployment rate in 2023 (17.8% for Calabria and 2,9% in Trentino Alto Adige) and 28% difference in the employment rates the same year (72.3% Trentino Alto Adige and 44.4% Campania). Employment data, not reported in the chapter of this paper, are taken from: <http://dati.istat.it/index.aspx?queryid=23190>.

⁷⁴ <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/nascite-calo-sardegna-trentino-alto-adige-ecco-classifica-numero-medio-figli-AF7hD7GD>.

⁷⁵

https://genova.repubblica.it/cronaca/2023/04/07/news/la_liguria_e_la_regione_piu_anziana_ditalia_gi_ultimi_dati_dellistat-395278117/.

⁷⁶ The employment data comes once again from Istat (<http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?QueryId=23190#>). The criteria specify year (2023) and age (15-64) and the results are filtered by gender.

The **selection** of sectors and profiles presented in the third section of this work was made precisely within this complex and disrupted framework. However, to ensure that this comparison and selection is not just a sterile theoretical reflection devoid of practical applications, the project at the basis of this research aims to go beyond a mere general overview. Valuable **information** on the legal framework of migration and recruitment from non-EU countries, together with the discussion on skills and the differences between the international, EU, national and regional levels, should serve as a **starting point** to create a positive context to facilitate labour migration between non-EU countries and Italy.

For such an ambitious objective, though, the theoretical framework alone, although of fundamental importance, is not enough. **It is necessary** to involve stakeholders and initiate a capacity building process aimed at partners; furthermore, the focus needs to be narrowed to move from the national level analysed so far to the regional level.

For this reason, the **second part** of this research will look at the specific case of the Piedmont and immigrants from Pakistan. The criteria for the choice of these case studies will be explained in greater detail; for now, suffice it to say that, at a practical level, narrowing the perspective allows us to better **identify** the real needs of the labour market for different regions, which can be extremely varied. The primary objective, i.e. to meet employment needs and to offer migrant workers the opportunity to bring their skills to fruition available in legal and safe ways, cannot overlook these **geographical variations**. Only by analysing the territorial context in **qualitative** terms, through tools suitable for an in-depth analysis that can combine numbers with direct experiences, is it possible to make a first attempt to build a concrete migration pathway for non-EU talent, based on the transmission of information and the exchange of knowledge within the framework of the values and principles that Europe promotes in the world.

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Strengthening Circular Legal and Skilled Migration
Through Cooperation Between Italy and Pakistan

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