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Key features of the education system

Governance

The education system is organised according to the principles of subsidiarity and of autonomy of institutions.

[The State](#) [1] has exclusive legislative competences on the general organisation of the education system (e.g. minimum standards of education, school staff, quality assurance, State financial resources). The [Ministry of Education](#) [2] and the [Ministry of University and Research](#) [2] are responsible for the general administration of education at national level for the relevant fields, respectively. The Ministry of education has decentralised offices ([Regional School Offices](#) [3] - USRs) that guarantee the application of general provisions and the respect of the minimum performance requirements and of standards in each Region.

[Regions](#) [4] have joint responsibility with the State in some sectors of the education system (e.g. organisation of ECEC (0-3), school calendar, distribution of schools in their territory, right to study at higher level). Regions have exclusive legislative competence in the organisation of the regional vocational education and training system.

[Local authorities](#) [5] organise the offer (e.g. maintenance of premises, merging or establishment of schools, transport of pupils) from ECEC to upper secondary education at local level.

Schools have a high degree of [autonomy](#) [6]: they define curricula, widen the educational offer, organise teaching (school time and groups of pupils). Every three years, schools draw up their own 'three-year educational offer plan' (*Piano triennale dell'offerta formativa* - [PTOF](#) [7]).

At higher education level, universities and institutions of Higher education for the fine arts, music and dance (*Alta formazione artistica, musicale e coreutica* - Afam) have statutory, regulatory, teaching and organisational autonomy.

Providers

The Italian education system is mainly a public State system. However, private subjects and public bodies can establish education institutions. Such [non-State schools](#) [8] can be either equal to State schools (called *scuole paritarie*) or merely private schools. These latter cannot issue qualifications.

The State directly [finances](#) [9] State schools. *Scuole paritarie* receive State contributions according to criteria established annually by the Ministry of education.

[Home education](#) [10] during compulsory education is a possible options only upon certain conditions.

Students attending a merely private school or a parental school must sit for specific exams to prove the acquisition of the expected competences.

Inclusion

Education at all levels must be open to everyone: Italian citizens as well as foreigner minors from both EU and non-EU countries. Compulsory education is free.

The principle of [inclusion](#) [11] also applies to pupils with disabilities, to pupils with social and economic disadvantages and to immigrant pupils. In such circumstances, measures focus on personalization and didactic flexibility and, in the case of immigrants with low levels of Italian, on linguistic support.

The State also guarantees the right to education to pupils/students who are unable to attend school because hospitalised, detained or at home for a long illness (please see the section 'Organisational variations and alternative structures in secondary education').

Stages of the education system

The Italian education and training system includes ECEC (0-3 and 3-6), primary, secondary, post-secondary and higher education.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

[ECEC](#) [12] for children aged less than 3 years is offered by educational services (*servizi educativi*)

[ECEC](#) [13] for children aged from 3 to 6 years is available at preprimary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*).

The two offers make up a single ECEC system, called 'integrated system', which is part of the education system and is not compulsory. Although being part of the same system, the ECEC 0-3 is organised by the Regions according to the single regional legislations, while the 3-6 offer is under the responsibility of the Ministry of education.

Compulsory education

[Compulsory education](#) [14] starts at 6 years of age and lasts for 10 years up to 16 years of age. It covers the whole first cycle of education and two years of the second cycle. The last two years of compulsory education can be attended either in an upper secondary school or within the regional vocational education and training system.

Compulsory education can be undertaken either at State school or at [scuole paritarie](#) [15] or, subject to certain conditions, at merely private schools or through home education.

In addition, everyone has a right and a duty (*diritto/dovere*) to receive education and training for at least 12 years within the education system or until they have obtained a three-year vocational qualification by the age of 18.

First cycle of education

The first cycle of education is compulsory and is made up of [primary](#) [16] and [lower secondary](#) [17] education.

Primary education (*scuola primaria*) starts at 6 years of age and lasts 5 years.

Lower secondary education (*scuola secondaria di I grado*) starts at 11 years of age and lasts 3 years.

Within the first cycle, students pass from one level to the next one without exams. At the end of the first cycle of education, students who pass the final state examination progress directly to the second cycle of education, the first two years of which are compulsory.

Second cycle of education

The second cycle of education starts at the age of 14 and offers two different pathways:

- the upper secondary school education
- the regional vocational training system (IFP).

The first two years of the second cycle of education are compulsory.

The [upper secondary](#) [18] school education (*scuola secondaria di II grado*) offers both general (liceo) and vocational (technical and vocational) programmes. Courses last 5 years. At the end of the upper secondary school education, students who successfully pass the final exam, receive a certificate that gives them access to higher education.

The regional vocational training system ([IFP](#) [19]) offers three or four-year courses organised by accredited training agencies or by upper secondary schools. At the end of regional courses, learners receive a qualification that gives them access to second-level regional vocational courses or, under certain conditions, short-cycle courses at higher education level.

Higher education

The following institutes offer education at [higher level](#) [20]:

- Universities (polytechnics included);
- High level arts, music and dance education institutes (Alta formazione artistica, musicale e coreutica - Afam);
- Higher schools for language mediators (Scuole superiori per mediatori linguistici - SSML);
- Higher technical institutes (Istituti tecnici superiori - ITS).

Access to university, Afam and SSML programmes is solely for students with an upper secondary school leaving certificate. The Ministry of education and individual institutions establish the specific conditions for admission.

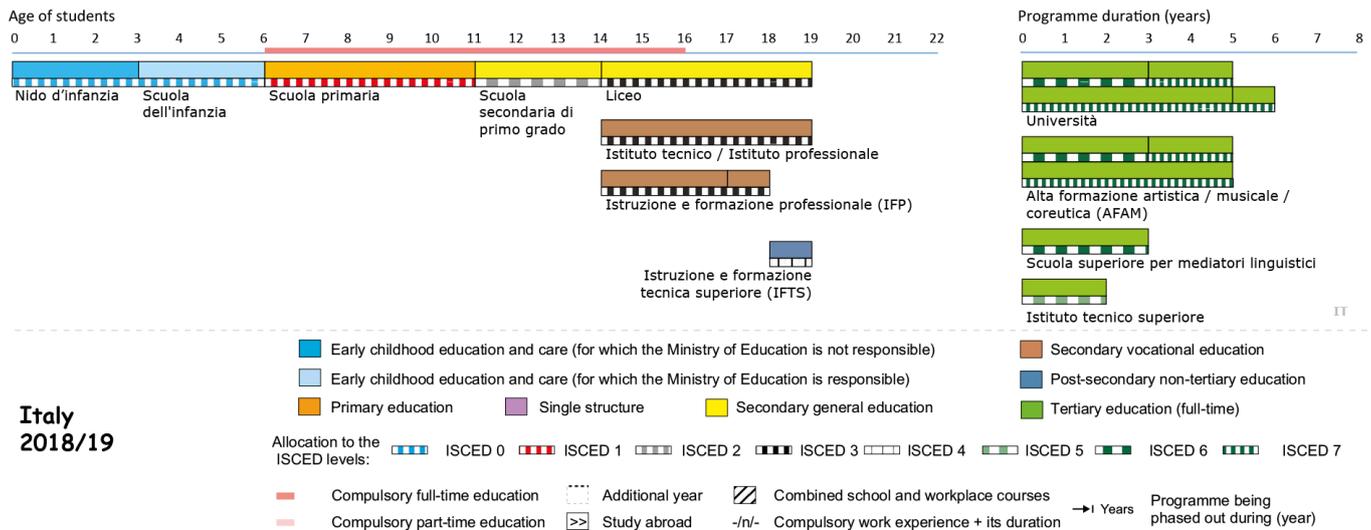
Courses at ITSs are accessible to students with an upper secondary leaving certificate and to students who have attended a four-year regional vocational course followed by an additional one-year course in the Higher technical education and training system (IFTS). ITS offer short-cycle bachelor programmes, according to the Bologna structure.

Adult education

[Adult education](#) [21] includes all activities aimed at the cultural enrichment, requalification and professional mobility of adults. Within the broader term 'adult education', the domain "school education for adults" (*istruzione degli adulti*) only refers to the educational activities aimed at the acquisition of a qualification as well as to literacy and Italian language courses. Adult education is provided by centres for school education for adults (*Centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti - CPIA*) and by upper secondary schools.

Structure of the national education system

/national-policies/eurydice/file/italydiagram-2018-2019_enItaly_Diagram 2018-2019



Source: Eurydice 2018/19

Useful links

[Ministry of education](#) [22]

[Ministry of university and research](#) [2]

National Institute for documentation, innovation and research in education ([Indire](#) [23])

National institute for the evaluation of the education and training system ([Invalsi](#) [24])

National institute for the analysis of public policies ([INAPP](#) [25])

National agency for evaluation of university and research ([ANVUR](#) [26])

Common European reference tools provided by the Eurydice Network

- [National Student Fee and Support Systems](#) [27]
- [Organisation of the Academic Year in Higher Education](#) [28]
- [Organisation of School Time in Europe](#) [29][30] (Primary and general secondary education)
- [Recommended Annual Instruction Time in Full-Time Compulsory Education in Europe](#) [31][32] (Presented by grades/stages for full time compulsory education as well as by subject and country.)
- [Teachers and School Heads Salaries and Allowances in Europe](#) [33] (Salaries and allowances of teachers and school heads at pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary)

education levels.)

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- [1] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/main-executive-and-legislative-bodies-39_en#ItalyState
- [2] <http://www.miur.gov.it>
- [3] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/administration-and-governance-central-andor-regional-level-39_en#USR
- [4] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/main-executive-and-legislative-bodies-39_en#Regions
- [5] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/main-executive-and-legislative-bodies-39_en#LocalAuthorities
- [6] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/administration-and-governance-local-andor-institutional-level-39_en#Autonomy
- [7] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-32_en#PTOFGlossary
- [8] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-private-education-39_en#PrivateEdu
- [9] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/funding-education-39_en#Funding
- [10] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisational-variations-and-alternative-structures-primary-education-23_en#ParentalSchool
- [11] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/educational-support-and-guidance-33_en#Inclusion
- [12] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-programmes-children-under-2-3-years-19_en#ECEC03
- [13] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-39_en#ECEC36
- [14] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-education-system-and-its-structure-39_en#CompulsoryEdu
- [15] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-32_en#ParitariaGlossary
- [16] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/primary-education-23_en#PrimaryEdu
- [17] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/secondary-and-post-secondary-non-tertiary-education-26_en#LowerSecondaryEdu
- [18] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/secondary-and-post-secondary-non-tertiary-education-26_en#UpperSecondaryEdu
- [19] <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/secondary-and-post-secondary-non-tertiary-education-26>

_en#IFP

[20] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/higher-education-39_en#HigherEdu

[21] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-39_en#AdultEdu

[22] <http://www.miur.gov.it>

[23] <http://www.indire.it>

[24] <http://www.invalsi.it>

[25] <http://inapp.org/>

[26] <http://www.anvur.org>

[27]

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-student-fee-and-support-systems-european-higher-education-201819_en

[28]

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-academic-year-europe-%E2%80%93-201920_en

[29]

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-school-time-europe-primary-and-general-secondary-education-%E2%80%93-201920_en

[30]

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/eurydice/index.php/Publications:The_Organisation_of_School_Time_in_Europe_Primary_and_General_Secondary_Education_%E2%80%93_2016/17

[31]

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/recommended-annual-instruction-time-full-time-compulsory-education-europe-%20-201819_en_en

[32]

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/eurydice/index.php/Publications:Recommended_Annual_Instruction_Time_in_Full-time_Compulsory_Education_in_Europe_2015/16

[33]

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/teachers-and-school-heads-salaries-and-allowances-europe-201718_en