



i SKILL

D3.1 - National report Italy

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Executive Summary

In Italy, in 2022 the participation rate of adults (aged 25 to 64) in education and training activities was 9.9 %, an increase after it had hovered around 8 % for years. However, the figure is lower than the European average, which stands at 10.8 %.

In Europe, it is mainly young people (17.1 % at ages 25-34, 9.8 % at ages 35-44 and 8.7 % at ages 45-64) with higher levels of education and jobs in skilled occupations who participate in education and training activities. On average, those over age 45 and in low-skilled occupations are, in turn, little involved in learning pathways. In Italy, this imbalance is particularly pronounced.

A real system of continuing education is absent in Italy, partly because of a rather fragmented regulatory framework, in which there is no real law but only provisions spread across different sources, with difficult coordination among the various institutional actors involved. A central role is played by the social partners, through the joint interprofessional funds for continuing education, and by the regions, which provide their own resources and those of the European Social Fund. Nevertheless, among the 60.2 % of companies that activate training pathways for their employees, most resort to self-financing.

The importance of training is particularly perceived in the automotive sector, which in Italy consists mainly of small to medium-sized enterprises that require, now more than ever, skills enabling the technological and organisational transformation processes triggered by the green and digital transitions.

To explore the role of the social partners in promoting continuing education with particular reference to the automotive sector, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of trade unions, employers' associations, companies, training providers and local authorities. A roundtable was also held where these various stakeholders could share their assessments regarding the topics covered by the research.

In Italy, there is no unified strategy for addressing the challenges posed by innovation and encouraging participation in continuing education. Instead, there is a high degree of heterogeneity, depending on the company (and especially its size class), the territory and even the type of worker considered.

The absence of a national industrial policy capable of synthesising the diverse emerging needs and combining investment in innovation, new technologies and related enabling skills – and thus training – was recognised as particularly problematic. Furthermore, the absence of systems for anticipating needs and mechanisms for the public certification of skills only limits the effectiveness of the training carried out.

In this context, the role of the social partners in the automotive sector is now decisive at both the national and company levels. Nationally, the latest renewals of the national collective-bargaining agreement have included the subjective right to training (2016), with 24 hours of training to be carried out over a 3-year period for all employees. At the level of company bargaining, the MetApprendo platform accompanies even the smallest companies in the design, delivery and registration of the training carried out, although it is still not uniformly developed throughout the country.

The growing interest in training, together with the characteristics of the Italian labour market, have led the social partners in recent years to increasingly value tools: the aforementioned

joint interprofessional funds, including projects dedicated to the unemployed as well as workers in the sector; the innovative New Skills Fund, which makes it possible to carry out training in conjunction with a reduction of the working week, subject to signing agreements at the company or territorial level with the social partners; the expansion contract, introduced to encourage generational turnover and the transmission of knowledge between outgoing and incoming workers at the company; and apprenticeship.

To promote the accessibility, dissemination and quality of continuing education, it is crucial to introduce industrial policies in Italy as well, built through dialogue between public decision-makers and social partners, integrating resources and tools so as to maximise their effectiveness. It is also important to standardise rules and procedures for access to these training opportunities. These policies must then be capable of being disseminated at the territorial level, so as to respond to current specific needs through the active participation of locally present stakeholders.

Introduction

This national report analyses Italy concerning the role of social partners in promoting adult education, with specific reference to the automotive sector. For a complete understanding, we need to start from the most general statistics that allow us to frame Italy according to **demographic, employment and education characteristics**.

As of 1 January 2023, the **Italian population** was **58 851 000** (with an average age of 46.4), decreasing by about 0.3 % compared with 2022, with a constant negative trend since 2015. Regarding labour data, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2022) survey for the 4th quarter of 2022 reports an **employment rate** (understood as the ratio of employed people to the corresponding reference population) of **60.6 %** and **unemployment of 7.8 %**, peaking at 22.3 % for young people, and an **inactivity** rate of **34.2 %** among the 15-64 age group.

Considering education statistics, while at the early stages of schooling, Italy's figures rank above the OECD average, with 92 % of children aged 3-5 enrolled in education (OECD Report 2022), **41 % of the population aged 18-74 possesses at most a junior (middle school) diploma**, about 17.7 million people. **Secondary-school graduates represent 42 %**, or 17.9 million people, and **college graduates represent 14 %**, 6.1 million; a further **3 % have master's and doctoral degrees**, 1.3 million (INAPP, 2022c). Therefore, the share of adults holding a tertiary degree (academic and non-academic) is significantly lower than the European average, as will be discussed in more detail below.

Moreover, in this general framing, it is useful to recall Italy's **welfare regime** according to the Esping-Andersen classification (already specified in this project's I SKILL Working Paper 2023): a segmented 'status-oriented, corporatist' type, with a polarised, state-centred industrial relations regime and a role for social partners in public policy of an irregular and politicised type (Visser, 2009). This classification into macro-sectors is useful for a comparative look at all the countries involved in this research (Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Italy, and Slovakia), set out in the individual national reports and which in most cases have different welfare regimes from the Italian one.

Finally, the **automotive sector**, which is the focus of insights in Section 2 in particular, employs 250 000 people, with a turnover of EUR 93 billion and 5 700 companies.

According to the latest available data (EU-LFS, 2020; ECS, 2019),¹ in 2023 Italy is the 21st place in the EU on national and company-level indicators concerning adult learning participation and social dialogue (Table 1 and Table 2). The latest Eurostat data show that the situation has improved positively in terms of adult participation in learning². Below are presented data on employees' participation in adult learning that provide a background for the following analysis (Table 1 and Table 2).

¹ A detailed comparative analysis by EU countries is available in the project's Working Paper on the Role of Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue in Improving Adult Learning Outcomes and Equity: https://www.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ISKILL_D2.1.-Working-Paper-on-Role-of-Industrial-Relations-and-Social-Dialogue.pdf

² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/TRNG_LFS_02_custom_6633206/default/table?lang=en

Table 1. Participation in education and training of employed people aged 25-64 – Italy

		2010	2020
Adult learning outcomes (%)	Adult learning PR ³ total	6.31 %	7.65 %
	Adult learning PR formal	1.54 %	1.28 %
	Adult learning PR nonformal	4.76	6.37 %
	Mean hours of learning total (formal and non-formal)	12.19	4.57
Inequality dimensions (%)	Adult learning PR Females	6.68 %	7.48 %
	Adult learning PR Males	5.98 %	7.05 %
	Adult learning PR High Skilled (ISCED 5–6)	16.54 %	17.16 %
	Adult learning PR Medium Skilled (ISCED 3–4)	8.22%	7.72 %
	Adult learning PR Low Skilled (ISCED 0–2)	1.23 %	1.38 %
	Adult learning PR Standard Work (Full-time permanent employment)	5.66 %	7.52
	Adult learning PR Atypical Work (Part-time, shift/evening/weekend, temporary employment)	6.62 %	7.72

Source: CSPS SAS and KU Leuven teams' calculations on EU-LFS 2020⁴

Table 2. Company-level indicators regarding adult learning participation and social dialogue – Italy

	2019
Employee participation in training sessions (average number)	46.48
Employees receiving on-the-job training (average number)	33.40
Firms with union representation	9.76 %
Firms with non-union representation	0.00
Firms with country-specific forms of employee representation	0.00
Firms with a works council	10.68 %
Firms indicating learning from more experienced colleagues as “most important” for becoming more skilled on the job	57.59 %
Firms indicating participation in training as “most important” for becoming more skilled on the job	28.70 %
Firms indicating learning by doing as “most important” for becoming more skilled on the job	27.04 %

Source: CSPS SAS and KU Leuven teams' calculations on the European Company Survey (ECS) 2019

³ Participation rate (PR)

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/1978984/6037342/EULFS-Database-UserGuide.pdf>

1. National context on adult learning

1.1 Participation, user type, training type, vulnerability conditions: An overview

Adult education, in Europe, is understood as the totality of all activities aimed at the **cultural enrichment, retraining and occupational mobility of the adult population**; it includes formal⁵ (school and university) adult education and training as well as non-formal and informal training. Continuing education, typical of workers and of professionalising the workforce, which adults access outside formal education contexts (usually in companies) and on which the present research focuses, is part of non-formal training⁶.

The competencies of European citizens are recognised by the European Union as basic foundations for the economic growth and success in general terms of the EU itself, and for the well-being of a society that is educationally competitive and inclusive with respect to labour dynamics. In this context, in recent years, continuing education and lifelong learning in Italy have seen a primary role played by both institutional actors and businesses, with substantial funding and projects aimed at raising the quality of training and its diffusion. The Italian case, in comparison with other European countries, can be well understood through the framework provided by European institutional reports, specifically the Eurydice 2021 report *Adult education and training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications 2021* (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). According to that report, in short, Italy belongs to a group of countries (along with Greece, Spain, Portugal, North Macedonia and Türkiye) with a high percentage of low-skilled adults. This group also has low percentages of adults who have attained an upper secondary qualification during adulthood, as we will see more specifically in the data to be presented in this section.

A first data point to consider is the **participation rate of adults** (aged 25-64) **in education and training activities**, which in 2019 was 11.3 % for the European average and was 8.1 % for Italy, with a distance from the European value remaining constant over recent years and therefore very far from the European benchmark set for 15 % (Benchmark Education & Training 2020). Then, after years of stagnation, Italians' level of educational participation increased in 2021: the adult population aged 25-64 participating in education and training activities was 9.9 %, placing it close to the corresponding European average value of 10.8 %, marking a reversal from the decline recorded in 2020 (7.2 % compared with 8.1 % in 2019) and a difference of +1.8 percentage points over the 2-year period.

However, it is necessary to look at the context of continuing education not only from a quantitative point of view, but also on the basis of the **criteria of equity in access to training** for all social categories. It is here that a negative trend emerges, as certain individual socio-demographic characteristics are decisive, particularly for vulnerable groups. In Europe, it is

⁵ For the definition of formal, informal and non-formal training, please refer to the working paper of this research (I SKILL Working Paper 2023).

⁶ For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that in Italy there are also Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIA), or autonomous educational institutions, organised into local networks, to which workers can apply and which offer programmes corresponding to basic education up to the completion of compulsory education, as well as language courses for immigrants.

de facto the younger population with high levels of education and jobs in skilled occupations who participate more in training. In general, those aged over 45 with low qualifications are less involved in training than younger people; **this is true for the entire EU but is especially the case for Italy**. The rate of training participation is inversely proportional to age group: those aged 25-34 (17.1 %) are, in fact, more involved in training than those aged 35-44 (9.8 %) and even more so than those aged 45-64 (8.7 %) (INAPP, 2022). The main inequalities are thus based on age in combination with occupational status and education, and on these criteria Italy always ranks lower than the European averages (the largest gap occurs in the percentage of the unemployed who access training activities – a difference of almost 6 points between Italy and the EU; INAPP 2022 Report based on Eurostat).

Finally, looking at the statistics in this area, it is essential to know that the real Achilles' heel of the Italian case is the **low level of education in general**, because it is precisely and directly related to access to continuing education. In 2021, the share of Italians aged 25-64 with a secondary school diploma was 62.7 %, which had increased by +0.9 % compared with 2018 but was still more than 16 percentage points lower than the EU average of 79.2 %, while the share of people with a tertiary degree in Italy was 20 % (an increase of 0.6 % from 2018) compared with 33.4 % in the EU.

The low level of education is in fact a ballast that weighs on access to lifelong learning. Suffice to say that the percentage of Italian graduates participating in training is the same as the percentage of the population with a first-degree education⁷ in countries with higher participation: it is, therefore, clear that the low level of education negatively affects the rate of participation in training. Specifically in Italy, in 2021, 23.4 % of those with a tertiary degree participated in continuing education activities (18.6 % for the EU), while it was 10.1 % among secondary school graduates (8.2 % for the EU) and **2.4 % among those with a lower level diploma** (which is **very low and lower than the European average value** of 4.3 %) (ISTAT 2022).

The **type of training** most often undertaken by adults is carried out in the workplace and thus is **non-formal**. It occurs mainly, as we shall see later, through systems/institutions linked to businesses (joint interprofessional funds). In contrast, with respect to a formal training choice, fewer adults over the age of 30 in Italy, compared with the European average, choose a **formal** tertiary type of training, such as a university pathway in adulthood (2.2 % vs. 5.8 % for the EU). For those over 40 the percentage is almost negligible at 0.3 % (against a European average of 1.2 %) and a notable distance from other European countries (5 % in Germany, 5.4 % in Spain, 9.5 % in the UK, 15.1 % in Sweden and 16.2 % in Finland) (OECD 2018).

Taking into consideration the degree of qualification of the employed, learning opportunities are three times greater for **high-skilled than for low-skilled** workers at the European level. Even so, in Italy (taking into account that the distance between the two categories is slightly

⁷ First-degree school in the Italian system is compared to the first part of secondary school (from 11 to 13 years old).

greater than the European average⁸) participation levels are low for both categories (with the high-skilled at 15 % and low-skilled at 3.9 %) compared with the European average. Thus, categories that already have good professional qualifications have greater access to continuing education.

In addition to what has already been noted, the data confirm that it is **people in employment who are more likely to be engaged in training activities**, regardless of the formal or non-formal training type. Eurostat data (INAPP, 2022) for 2021 indicate that the participation rate of employed people aged 25-64 in education and training activities was 11.4 % (the EU average was 11.5 %), while for the unemployed it was 6.8 %, much lower than the European average of 12.7 %, and for the inactive 7.1 % (an EU average of 7.9 %). **At the territorial level**, according to the same surveys participation in training activities in Northern and Central Italy was 10 %, while it was 8 % in the Southern region – registering a narrowing of the gap in the last 2 years (INAPP, 2022).

1.2 Training providers in Italy

In order to know the Italian landscape with regard to the actors that provide continuing education (understood as indicated in Section 1.1), it is worth pointing out a clarification: in this context, **continuing education is understood as training aimed at employed individuals** and, consistent with their employment position, training hours are recognised as paid working hours (Ismeri, 2020)⁹. In Italy, the continuing education system calls **upon a large number of actors involved in planning and organisation**, within the framework of a complex and not always functional structural management.

The actors involved are of different natures and entities, ranging from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, central administrations and institutes, regions, autonomous provinces and the European Social Fund, to labour agencies, social partners and interprofessional funds for continuing education, other joint funds, universities, secondary school institutes and so on.

This plethora of actors involved can also be explained from a legal-institutional point of view, since the Italian Constitution itself, in promoting the elevation of workers' training, gives legislative competence in the matter to the regions. Therefore, the context is fragmented and it lacks a system in which the tasks and responsibilities of those involved in continuing education are specifically defined, as well as a coordinating superstructure that can set shared and strategic objectives capable of charting a direction. The lines of training intervention in terms of programming overlap among the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, regions, autonomous provinces, social partners and individual companies, just as funding for training

⁸ About the consequences of the level of education on skills, it is possible to refer to the research conducted with the international OECD program “Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies” (PIAAC), carried out from 2010 (OECD 2013). The project examines the competences of the adult Italian population regarding the parameters of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving. In brief, the study shows that in Italy, a higher level of education determines higher levels of competence. Considering the skill mismatch, the Italian population has over-skilled and under-skilled shares higher than the OECD average for both literacy and numeracy (INAPP Report 27, 2022b).

⁹ First Thematic Evaluation Report of the European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020 of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano).

(clearly excluding cases of self-financing by the companies themselves) is accessed through national, regional or collective-bargaining instruments (as we will see specifically later).

The heterogeneity of the actors involved is also reflected at the level of financing. At the regional level, continuing training is financed through the instruments made available by the **European Social Fund** (which is principally used for the training of unemployed workers or those at risk of unemployment), while at the national level it is through the **joint interprofessional funds**, an instrument that belongs to the world of bilaterality¹⁰ and which, as we shall see, is not always taken into account by companies.

Despite the presence of financed training, the main channel of financing for companies in Italy is a company's internal resources through self-financing (Unioncamere, 2021). This signals a difficulty on the part of companies to access or even know the external financing possibilities to which they are entitled. In turn that creates a major difference between larger companies that can afford internal courses with their own funds, and smaller entities, such as small companies, which in light of only self-financed sources, do not organise courses.

1.3 Joint interprofessional funds

Joint interprofessional funds (established by Article 118 of Law No. 388 of 23 December 2000) are bodies of an associative nature promoted by trade unions and employers' associations. Their purpose is to facilitate access to training, by reducing or eliminating company costs, supporting the qualification of workers' skills, with greater guarantees of employability, and promoting the growth and competitiveness of companies and the country's system. They are autonomous bodies, established on a sectoral basis, supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies also through the administrative agency ANPAL (introduced in 2015 with the functions of guidance, coordination and monitoring of active labour policies).

Economically, interprofessional funds are based on the collection of **0.30 % fees paid to the National Institute for Social Security (INPS) by all companies**, which they can redistribute to fund members in the form of training. Companies can therefore allocate this fee to a specific fund with the guarantee (Law 845/1978) that this will be used for training activities aimed at qualifying or retraining their employees, with no cost to join a specific fund or constraint on switching from one fund to another. The funds represent **the largest source of funding from public resources for companies and workers** and manage the largest share of the 0.30 % contribution earmarked for workers' continuing education, with an increasing number of companies joining the funds. Generally, the funds allocate a very high proportion of what they receive from INPS to training activities (e.g., in 2020 this was 94 %), net of other costs normally devoted to management or preparatory activities.

¹⁰ In Italian industrial relations discourse, reference is often made to *bilateralismo* and *bilateralità*. There is some dispute about the difference between these two terms, and at times they are used interchangeably. As a general rule, *bilateralità* (bilaterality) means the process by which certain bodies are set up by the parties to a collective agreement. On the other hand, *bilateralismo* is frequently seen as the theoretical framework for *bilateralità*. In most cases *bilateralismo* is translated into English as 'bilateralism' (Biagi and Tiraboschi, 2010). Conversely, no direct equivalent exists in English for *bilateralità*, and the problem is usually dealt with by reference to 'bilateral bodies' or 'joint bodies' (Manzella and Bromwich, 2017; Manzella, 2018).

The nature of the activities financed by the funds is, for the most part, related to the **retraining of personnel** with a focus on **innovation processes** (digitisation, the green and blue economy), with a tendency towards the expansion of training proposals aimed at achieving the certification of skills for workers who participate in the training. The delivery of the courses, in varying percentages depending on the funds, is through both in-person and distance learning. Especially since the pandemic, synchronous training activities have become more prevalent thanks to the provision of virtual classrooms.

According to the Excelsior information system survey referred to by the Chambers of Commerce, interprofessional funds are **used by about a fifth of Italian businesses**, particularly the services sector (20.3 %) followed by the industrial sector (18.3 %). For the former of the two sectors, it is education and private training services along with computer and telecommunications services that make most use of the funds. By contrast, in industry, it is the chemical, pharmaceutical and petroleum sector and the tourism sector that remain at the tail end of the funding requested (18.1 %). In support of the work of the interprofessional funds, the 2015 European Continuing Vocational Training Survey of 2019, a business survey, shows that the Italian figure for companies that have done training (of any kind) stood at 60.2 %. Companies that access public funding are able to build more structured training proposals and diversify course content; also, the rate of access to training is higher than self-funded training. Finally, participation by union representatives in the planning and organisation of training proposals can result in increased investment in training by the company of about 10 %. It can also ensure better quality training in terms of the inclusion of more categories of workers and the purpose of training interventions, oriented not only by the professional needs of the company but also by the need for workers' employability. There are 19 interprofessional funds currently active, divided according to the production sector for which they provide training. Table 1 describes the allocation of each fund, the number of member enterprises and the related number of employees, along with the resources over 2004-2021 and specifically in 2021 alone.

Table 1. List and description of interprofessional funds

Fund	Description	Companies involved 2022	Employers involved 2022	Resources for 2004-2021 (EUR)	Resources for 2021 (EUR)
Fonarcom	<i>Fund for workers in the service, handicraft, SME sectors</i>	146.147	1.153.493	387.663.485	41.146.446
Fondimpresa	<i>Fund for workers of industrial enterprises</i>	136.554	4.409.638	4.602.716.288	290.569.744
Fondo artigianato formaz	<i>Fund for workers in craft enterprises</i>	94.976	459.967	478.259.947	21.264.416
For.te	<i>Fund for workers in commerce, tourism, service, credit, insurance and transportation industries</i>	82.035	970.038	1.211.102.056	48.382.128
Formazienda	<i>Fund for continuing education in the trade, tourism, services, professions and SMEs sector</i>	79.727	665.940	214.918.441	27.190.760
Fonditalia	<i>Fund for continuing education in the economic sectors SME industry</i>	56.692	359.737	113.920.337	12.720.421
Fondoprofessioni	<i>Fund for professional firms and companies related to them</i>	34.951	136.785	107.455.945	5.784.467
Fon.ter	<i>Fund for tertiary sector: tourism and distribution – services sectors</i>	23.734	242.204	232.544.944	9.624.308
Fondo formazione Pmi	<i>Fund for workers in SME industrial enterprises</i>	20.796	220.271	307.371.845	10.260.864

Fondolavoro	<i>Fund for Continuing Education of Micro, Small, Medium and Large Enterprises</i>	20.616	125.096	12.456.713	3.122.199
Fon.coop	<i>Fund for workers in cooperative enterprises</i>	12.183	478.259.947	459.967	94.976
Fondo conoscenza	<i>Continuing education trade-tourism-services sector of small to medium-sized enterprises</i>	11.805	91.760	5.767.899	2.037.057
Fond.e.r	<i>Fund for church bodies, associations. and foundations, co-ops, for-profit and nonprofit enterprises, religiously inspired companies</i>	8.121	115.531	76.052.811	4.858.707
Fondo formazione S.P.I.	<i>Fund for continuing education in public services</i>	4.046	163.495	104.018.068	10.818.062
For.agri	<i>Sector fund for continuing vocational training in agriculture</i>	3.293	28.513	67.262.043	6.507.057
Fondo banche assicurazioni	<i>Fund for continuing education in the credit and insurance sectors</i>	936	240.326	564.613.997	40.171.855
<i>Total funds for employees</i>		736.712	9.830.421	8.904.052.142	561.265.167
Fondirigenti	<i>Fund for industrial executives</i>	13.164		419.316.561	22.335.299
Fondir	<i>Fund for executives in the service industry</i>	4.005		146.477.247	7.667.333

<i>Fondo dirigenti PMI</i>	<i>Fund for executives of SME industrial enterprises</i>	398		6.368.054	104.927
<i>Total funds for executives</i>		17.567		572.161.862	30.107.558
<i>Total</i>		754.279		9.476.214.003	591.372.725

Source: INAPP Report 2022 (2023), p. 166.

1.4 Continuing education at the regional level

While companies can take advantage of funded training through the interprofessional funds channel, the other option is mainly the **European Social Fund** managed by the regions. Legislative autonomy on the part of Italian regions in the area of continuing education stems from the reform of Title V of the Italian Constitution (Article 117), which occurred through the approval of Constitutional Law No. 3 of 2001. This reform markedly affected the relationship between the state and the regions, implementing a process of reallocating responsibility for legislation between the centre and the periphery.

The INAPP Report (2021) on lifelong learning, *Lavoro, Formazione e società in Italia nel passaggio all'era post covid-19*, regarding the European Social Fund Operational Programme (2014-2020), notes that the regions have made resources available for training financed under Thematic Objective 8, 'promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting worker mobility' for the following **investment priorities**:

- 8.1 equality between men and women in all areas, including access to employment and career progression, reconciling work and private life, and promoting equal pay for equal work or work of equal value;
- 8.5 the adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change;
- 8.6 active and healthy ageing;
- 8.7 the modernisation of labour market institutions, such as public and private employment promotion services, by improving the satisfaction of labour market needs, including through actions that improve transnational occupational mobility, as well as through mobility programmes and better cooperation between institutions and stakeholders.

Recently, some regions have expanded training activities to help achieve other priorities related to social safety nets upon derogation or by supplementing available financial resources. According to the INAPP Report (2021), in 2018 and 2019, **65 calls for proposals were announced by the regions**, for total funding of more than EUR **344 million**, mainly from the European Social Fund and, in part, from state (Revolving Fund, Law No. 236/93, Law No. 53/2000) and regional resources. These proposals were mostly aimed at encouraging the upgrading of skills (71 %), at enhancing the employability of groups at risk (31 %), at supporting digitisation processes for enterprises (17 %) and at strengthening technological

and IT skills (18 %). Some were also aimed at categories such as the unemployed, involving training for upskilling, reskilling and reintegration into the labour market. Others focused on assisting self-employed workers and entrepreneurs (recipients of 60 % of the calls), employees (78 %), workers suspended in CIG or CIGS (two types of wage guarantee instruments, 34 %) and young people hired on apprenticeship contracts (23 %).

According to data from the Digital Observatory on Active Policies and Vocational Training (Cnosfap)¹¹, with regard to thematic objective 8, the regions, in the first half of 2022, allocated more than EUR 317 million (for all planned priorities). This includes regions/autonomous provinces that in 2022 planned continuing education interventions – nine in total, for resources amounting to more than EUR 52 million – aimed at the unemployed.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning the **Guaranteed Employability of Workers** programme (GOL), an initiative envisaged in Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Mission 5, Component 1) **to upgrade active labour policy services**. It has financial resources of EUR 4.4 billion and is estimated by ANPAL to involve, by 2025, 3 million beneficiaries, 800 000 of whom will be in training activities, and 300 000 of these related to digital skills. The programme is being implemented by the regions and autonomous provinces on the basis of the regional plans (PARs) approved by ANPAL. Implementation is linked to the Plan for Strengthening Employment Centres and the national New Skills Plan, with measures for the re-employment of the unemployed, citizens' income recipients, laid-off workers, the disabled, women, young people, the over-50s and other disadvantaged categories. According to the Economic and Financial Document 2023 – DEF (Parlamento Italiano, 2023) the main financial planning file of the Italian state), as of March 2023, the GOL programme has reached 1 046 804 individuals who have signed an individualised pact following an assessment and profiling service. Among them, 75 % fall into vulnerable categories. Of the individuals reached, 432 097 were immediately placed in a job, 237 015 on upskilling pathways, 192 791 on reskilling pathways and 34 551 in activities for social inclusion.

1.5 Collective bargaining and continuing education

In relation to continuing education, and consistent with the purposes of this research, it seems useful to give space to collective bargaining, which operates through union and employer representation, with respect to **regulation in the area of vocational training of workers**.

Today in Italy, there is an **increase in the role of trade unions and industrial relations** in the design, implementation and monitoring of various interventions and programmes (Treu, 2020; Ciucciovino, 2021; Ciucciovino et al., 2021), often with tasks of guaranteeing the training itself in terms of the qualification and retraining of workers. This takes place in a context of constantly changing skills in the main transition processes (Casano, 2022; Garofalo, 2019), analysed in the first phase of this project (Astarita et al., 2023), with awareness of the rather critical condition of Italy compared with other European countries in terms of access to vocational training as shown in the previous paragraphs (for the doctrine and reflections on this, see Ciucciovino, 2021; Tiraboschi, 2021; Varesi, 2022).

¹¹ <https://www.cnos-fap.it/node/66024>

In fact, given the situation, all actors are strongly urged to propose **actions to support vocational training**. Employer associations and trade unions in particular can intervene through national collective bargaining in the different categories.

In the past, references to training in collective bargaining were meagre and limited (Garofalo, 2004). Today we see more frequent intervention by the parties and greater sensitivity, especially in certain sectors. However, at a general level, we note that there remains a sort of crossroads as to the **purposes union and employer actors attribute to the training proposal**. On the one hand, the purpose is the **competitiveness of the enterprise**; on the other, there is the **guarantee of employability** of the worker, as present not only in contracts, but also in the rule establishing the interprofessional funds for continuing training discussed above. Depending on the sector, different purposes are attributed, but often with ambiguity or polyvalence about them that impacts on the enforceability of training and financial coverage.

Analysing the collective contracts on this last point, **two options** mainly emerge: the first provides that **the costs are divided between the employer and employee in equal or different parts** in favour of the employee at the individual level (where part of the training is carried out during working hours and part outside). The second provides that the **training activity is carried out completely at the expense of the employer** and during working hours (e.g. in the metalworkers' contract). In the case of training services that are not individual but collective, where there is a need for a more complex and articulated organisation (consulting on design, certification, instrumentation, teaching, etc.), the higher collective level emerges, involving the social partners through the interprofessional funds.

The vocational training system envisages a 'design infrastructure' (Bavaro, 2017), made up, for example, of committees and observatories of various types, which are given the task of including workers' participation and related representation. In cases that develop such infrastructure, the system succeeds in creating a **virtuous training circle** combining the **identification, planning and monitoring** of training, operating throughout the country and through a multi-level organisation. The **central level** defines the thematic areas for which workers' qualification and retraining interventions must be focused, the minimum standards and the relationship with the interprofessional funds. The **territorial or company level** includes activities for mapping professional needs through joint observation and the sharing of training programmes.

It is clear that these make up a fairly complex 'infrastructure' in terms of governance where, in some cases, a decisive role is assigned to **joint bodies**, in the form of associations, nonprofit, governed by collective agreements, set up by employers' associations and workers' unions to guarantee certain services, including training (an example is the Ente Bilaterale Nazionale per il Turismo). In other cases, this duty is carried out by a body specifically created for a particular category. To a more frequent extent, an information flow is established between company management and trade union representatives regarding the training proposed and carried out (such information may concern the training programme, the results expected and obtained, the number of workers who participated, etc.). In light of these observations, we note that **for the majority of collective bargaining agreements there is no binding model to refer to for the supervision of training**.

Looking at what norms have given concrete expression to the training of workers, two main ones can be distinguished. The first concerns norms related mainly to the establishment of the

150 hours of paid leave for the acquisition of a qualification or basic extra-professional training. It comes from the 1970 Workers' Statute and is in force in all the national collective agreements (see Article 171 'Right to Study') but is nowadays little used. Subsequently, thanks to **consultation between the social partners**, other means of access to training for workers have been introduced a second set of norms, not aimed at catching up on compulsory schooling or at meeting individual needs but at renewing the **worker's professionalism in accordance with the company's needs**, with greater involvement of trade union representatives with a consultative and negotiating role. In this context, we refer especially to the **subjective right to training** introduced by the metalworking collective agreement (Bavaro, 2017; Mostarda, 2021; Impellizzieri and Machi, 2021) and then by the electrical sector. This agreement specifies **a training allowance with the right to use it over a 3-year period**. The fact that this right is subjective is an unusual aspect because, if the employer were to default, the worker still has the possibility to use the training pool independently. Other sectors operate differently, without this subjective right: for example, different and sometimes more extensive training activities may be proposed in terms of hours but with cost sharing or outside of working hours and, above all, they are not enforceable by the worker.

The issue of workers' training, in a broad sense, is by its nature more prone than others to a confrontation by companies and trade unions of a specific reality. It is at the forefront of negotiations to meet both the needs of companies and workers' training needs to a particular level and calls for more specific attention than at the national level. In this sense it is useful to briefly analyse **collective bargaining at the company level** in relation to the issues concerning training.

According to recent studies (Impellizzieri, 2023; ADAPT, 2022 on Collective Bargaining in Italy 2021) of Italian collective bargaining, the number of second-level collective agreements that contain contractual clauses on training are growing. In 2022, for example, more than one in five contracts (according to the studies mentioned) dealt with the point and a first systematisation of regulatory models also became possible. There are in fact at least five types of agreements, classified by content, used by social partners to intervene.

A first type considers **agreements for the establishment of joint bodies** with the functions of consultation, discussion, planning and monitoring of training activities, where special commissions are established and recognised trade union representatives. These commissions can have different roles depending on the case, ranging from sharing decisions and therefore, responsibilities (including the merits, for example, of proposals for projects or pathways for professional updating, monitoring and promotion), to mere consultation or the sharing of information.

A second type concerns agreements that define the **principles, content and purposes** of corporate training activities, going beyond the training plans that are developed with the resources of the interprofessional funds and defining other parallel and/or additional training measures. These may in particular include certain categories of workers who demonstrate training needs or specific conditions, e.g., elderly workers or those with care responsibilities, low-skilled workers, seasonal workers and young people with apprenticeship contracts for a company placement.

The third type covers agreements that **incentivise participation in training activities through a financial reward**, which can be provided in different forms and conditions. For

example, participation in training could become a criterion for obtaining a performance bonus, or the outcome of a course and the results obtained could be made decisive; in other cases, a scholarship is provided for completing a specific course underway.

The fourth type of agreement has the purpose of **attesting, certifying and enhancing the acquired skills and the professionalism**. In this case, there are systems that identify and then certify the professional and transversal skills of the workers at the company. Sometimes, the training mechanism can lead to an increase in the contractual job grade or a bonus, as a result of an evaluation process of the skills obtained.

Finally, a fifth category entails agreements that are functional for **external markets and the management of employment transitions and relocation** of workers who have been made redundant or are in a situation that requires relocation (for example, in the event of a company crisis or closure of the company), where in certain cases the companies bear the costs for the re-skilling of the worker (also with public support or with agreements with the company where the transitioning worker should be hired).

Thus, the above reveals an attempt through collective bargaining to **give more weight to training in the employment relationship as a tool for productivity and innovation of companies** within a dynamic of participation and negotiation, but so far without achieving a particular strategic weight relative to company choices. Often training is a front for mere consultation between the parties, with the risk of ‘under-negotiation’ (Heyes and Rainbird, 2011), that is, **lacking a proactive role for unions** which call for the acceptance of training plans administered by company management without confrontation and with a reduced payroll cost. That said, there would need to be the **introduction of a subjective right to training for those contracts, most of which do not include it**, and a process of verification and improvement where it does exist. On the other hand, company agreements contain good practices that still do not spread and, in most cases, **do not take advantage of the role that joint bodies in the relevant sector could have** (Varesi, 2012).

Collective bargaining, therefore, has the space to better integrate training processes into industrial relations, considering future and evolving professionalism, where there is a need for a social (not just corporate) definition and construction of professionalism.

1.6 The New Skills Fund

Finally, brief space should be devoted to the **New Skills Fund**, which was discussed in this project’s working paper (Astarita et al., 2023) as a specific policy measure for Italy in relation to worker training. This is a public fund co-financed by the European Social Fund, which was created in 2020 to counter the economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and renewed at the end of 2022. The New Skills Fund has made it possible to **reshape working hours through company or territorial agreements that provide for part of the total time spent in training activities** (minimum 40 hours, maximum 200 hours per worker), covering workers’ contribution and social security costs, and is becoming a best practice at the EU level.

Central to the measure is the **integration of financial support for companies with training activities for worker retraining and the modernisation of production processes**, with the involvement of social partners. According to the Italian Court of Audit as of November 2022, 378 182 workers had been involved, with funding of about EUR 782 million. In addition, the New Skills Fund, through the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience (Mission 5,

Component 1) sets the goal of making this measure structural, as indicated in the National New Skills Plan (*Official Gazette of the Italian Republic General Series*, 162, No. 307). The measure has seen changes between the first version and the second version, for example, the reimbursement of the cost of workers has decreased from 100 % to 60 %. There is also a push towards a **reduction in normal working hours for the same total remuneration for those who participate in training** (in these cases, in fact, the reimbursement is 100 %). In addition, the content of the training initially had to take into account changes in productivity and organisation due to Covid-19, but later the focus shifted to the acquisition of skills useful for the green and digital transitions. Finally, of particular interest in this context is the **role of the interprofessional funds in the New Skills Fund**, which especially in the most recent version, makes the interprofessional funds the privileged partners for the implementation of programmes and the financing of costs strictly related to training.

1.7 Overview of the automotive sector

In Italy, the automotive sector is an **ecosystem that has a globally recognised identity** thanks to a combination of different factors, including technology and style, performance and functionality, even arriving at the development of territories specifically dedicated to it (such as ‘Motor Valley’), producing high-quality products. The **automotive industry in Italy has driven the development of skills, innovation and production capacity, including in related fields**, primarily the manufacture of machinery and equipment, which have brought social benefit to the entire country.

With regard to domestic vehicle production, the sector has seen a **gradual decline in recent years**, falling from 1.8 million vehicles in 1997 to only 700 000 in 2021 (of which fewer than 500 000 were passenger cars). But overall **the sector has maintained a significant weight in the Italian economy, thanks to exports of domestically produced components** to meet international demand. In 2019, the automotive sector reached a turnover of EUR **93 billion**, or 5.6 percent of GDP, with 5 700 companies and **250 000 employees**, 7 % of the entire Italian manufacturing workforce (ANFIA, 2022). In the motor vehicle, trailer and semi-trailer manufacturing sector alone, there are more than 2 000 enterprises, 180 000 workers (11 % of the total metalworking workforce), producing an added value of more than EUR 13 billion or 13 % of the total metalworking workforce, exporting EUR 31 billion, just over 50 % of the total turnover and about 16 % of metalworking exports and 7 % of domestic exports (elaboration Osservatorio Federmeccanica FIM, FIOM, UILM based on ISTAT data). As with other sectors, the automotive industry is **strongly impacted by current trends**: electrification, connectivity, self-driving vehicles and shared mobility, as part of the green transition that brings with it structural changes to companies and the need for professionals with renewed or new skills. This transition entails the proposal to stop the sale of new cars that produce carbon emissions by 2035, which would lead to a loss of about 73 000 jobs in Italy.

According to a recent survey (ANFIA, 2022), in the next few years automotive companies will need **new professionals** – especially in the areas of production processes, automation and mechatronic systems, products and materials, and environmental sustainability. Thus, most companies will be interested in hiring skilled workers and technicians for programming numerical control machinery and maintaining industrial robots, while engineers and designers will be mainly in demand in the area of software and application development and production processes. The R&D area related to processes for products and materials will also require

skilled workers, along with engineers and designers. As **such workers do not seem to be readily available in the labour market**, the training pathways of **higher technological institutes** (ITSs) seem to be a good entry pool for the workers in demand, as they are able to build shared plans with companies, in addition to **vocational education and training** (IeFP) and the **higher technical education and training** system (IFTS).

2. The voices of participants: Insights and evidence from semi-structured interviews at the company and sector levels

2.1 The bodies involved

As part of the activities inherent to the project, as already anticipated, several stakeholders were involved in semi-structured interviews and a roundtable discussion held in Rome, at ADAPT headquarters, on 1 February 2023.

The objective of this qualitative survey was **to understand the role of industrial relations in promoting access to and enhancement of continuing education in Italy**, having as a particular reference the **automotive sector**.

To achieve this goal, business managers, human resource managers, workers, employee and employer representatives, training institutions and territorial public bodies were involved. Stakeholders who participated in the semi-structured interviews and roundtable discussion are listed in the tables below.

Table 1. Entities and qualifications of participants in semi-structured interviews

N.	Institution	Role
1	Vuxi Weifu	Employers/managers
2	Bercella	Employers/managers
3	Brembo Group	Training/HR – IR managers
4	RSU Ferrari – FIM CISL	Employee representative at firm level
5	Federmeccanica	Employers' organisation representative
6	FIOM – CGIL	Trade union representatives at sectoral level
7	FIM – CISL	Trade union representatives at sectoral level
8	Fondimpresa	Education and training provider representative
9	IFOA	Education and training provider representative
10	Regione Lombardia – Direzione Generale Formazione e Lavoro	Public official at regional level
11	Bercella	Workers within the company

Table 2. Participants at the roundtable

N.	Institution	Role
1	Federmeccanica	Employers' organisation representative
2	Confimi	Employers' organisation representative
3	Confartigianato	Employers' organisation representative
4	FIM-CISL	Trade union representatives at sectoral level
5	UILM-UIL	Trade union representatives at sectoral level
6	FIOM-CGIL	Trade union representatives at sectoral level
7	Fondimpresa	Education and training provider representative
8	IFOA	Education and training provider representative
9	Forma.Temp	Education and training provider representative

The choice of participants for the realisation of the qualitative survey was therefore oriented by the objective of involving **highly representative participants**, especially enhancing the role – and therefore the presence – of the **social partners**, while also giving space to and gathering the points of view of others who are particularly important in the field of continuing education in Italy.

As far as **companies** are concerned, three companies operating in the engineering and particularly the automotive sectors were involved: one of international origin, Wuxi Weifu; a large Italian company, Brembo Group; and a medium-sized company, Bercella.

On the **representation side**, all the major national workers' unions representing workers in the automotive sector were involved: the FIOM-CGIL, the FIM-CISL and the UILM-UIL. At the same time, on the side of employers' representation, the most important employers' associations in the engineering sector were involved: Federmeccanica, the representation of industrial companies; Confimi, an association representing small to medium-sized enterprises; and Confartigianato, the representation of artisan companies.

It was then decided to involve **educational institutions** as well. In this sense, two training institutions set up directly by the social partners were involved: Fondimpresa, the most important joint interprofessional fund for the world of Italian industry (see, on this point, Section 1); and the Forma.Temp solidarity fund, dedicated to income support but also and above all to the training of temporary workers and those generally 'in transition'. Added to these was the involvement of a major training institution, IFOA, which deals with continuing education at the national level and was created at the behest of the Chambers of Commerce, and thus once again from the experience of mediating bodies and representation.

As for the **workers' point of view**, a female worker from a medium-sized Italian company was involved, as well as a worker representative, an employee of Ferrari.

Finally, a **regional administration**, the Directorate-General for Training and Labour of the Lombardy Region, was also involved in view of the regional competence recognised by the Constitution in vocational training and responsibility for managing the resources of the European Social Fund, including for public calls and announcements (see, on this point, Section 1).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely, through the use of a digital platform for online interaction, using a list of questions shared by the project partners, modified differently according to the respondent's group.

The panel discussion was conducted in a hybrid mode, with most of the guests in attendance and only two connected remotely. The participants were asked to react to and share views on the questions regarding the topics covered in this research.

The evidence gathered through the qualitative analysis is presented below, anonymised and divided by survey level and by topic: the role of industrial relations in promoting continuing education (Section 2.2), companies facing the challenge of qualification and retraining (Section 2.3), training institutions and their contribution (Section 2.4), the value of continuing education in workers' experience (Section 2.5), followed by some concluding remarks (Section 2.6).

2.2 Training, innovation, inclusion: Challenges for the automotive sector

2.2.1 *The revived centrality of adult learning*

The interviewees shared important information regarding the **automotive sector in Italy**. A sector with a turnover of about EUR 5 billion in 2022 and about 2 400 companies, it is mostly dedicated to components, as the only vehicle assembly and production company left on Italian territory is Stellantis. The sector employs about 280 000 people, though if one broadens the look more generally to the mobility sector, they reach 1 200 000 workers.

The automotive industry, as one interviewee recalls, has been experiencing a crisis that has been structural since at least 2008, with an impressive collapse in production if one compares the 400 000 vehicles released in 2021 with the more than 2 000 000 cars produced between the 1980s and 1990s.

It is a sector where **subcontracting** is particularly widespread, with numerous medium-sized or even small and very small companies (about 80 % of the total), many of which develop components for international markets, thus integrating into supranational supply and value chains.

It is in this context, therefore, that the important innovations and transformations generated by the twin green and digital transitions come into play. And that one understands, in turn, the possible impacts. The interviewees recalled that since there is no real or at least widespread indigenous production of vehicles in Italy, the risk is that of a 'suffered' transition. That is because it is controlled, designed and managed by foreign markets, where the vehicles are actually produced and where the 'how' and 'where' of intervention is established. This generates a cascade effect that also affects Italian component companies, which are only given 'instructions' – without controlling the process – for how to intervene and modify their work in the light of the innovations introduced.

Moreover, the dual transition may generate in Italy – at least in the short term – worrying employment impacts related to the changed demand for labour, and especially for skills.

An example was shared by one of the interviewees regarding the assembly of an electric motor, which requires about a tenth of the workforce currently engaged in the assembly of endothermic engines. Another example recalled was the soon-to-be-built giga-factory in Termoli (in Molise), which will require 2 500 employees (500 fewer than the current plant) with innovative skills, to be trained by first enhancing the human capital already present in the area.

The interviewees were keen to recall how the dual transition will be grafted onto a sector, the automotive one, that has been able to benefit from the **national Industry 4.0 plan** for a few years. But in addition to having given marginal importance to the training of workers to build new enabling skills, it actually reinforced an Italian tradition – namely that of investing in the production process, innovating it and not the product made. The diffusion of research and development processes and the widespread propagation along the supply chain of product innovation is a weakness of the sector in Italy, limiting its ability to develop, especially in a context of profound change like the current one.

And it is precisely by following the automotive supply chain, in its ramifications, that we observe **the different effects that the dual transition will have (and in part is already having) on the skills required of workers**. For example, one interviewee shared the experience of smaller companies, where on the one hand there is a growing difficulty in interfacing to carry out maintenance activities with increasingly complex vehicles, given the progressive ‘digitisation’ that affects every component. Yet on the other hand, the transformation of the market now requires even a small entrepreneur to have new skills to attract customers and thus to compete – and by extension be able to invest in improving the technology available to intervene in vehicle maintenance.

The presence of component and subcontracting companies, coupled with the limited company size of automotive firms, means that the **value of training for competitiveness – present and future – is not always immediately understood**. Reference was made to competition still often being based on price rather than on product innovation – for which new collaboration between research, labour and continuing education is required.

It is therefore now possible to better understand the role – present and potential – of training in the industry. **Currently, in the automotive industry and beyond, there are significant differences based on company size**. Larger companies are often better structured and able to plan, manage and implement numerous and articulated training courses for their employees. In contrast, smaller ones struggle with this planning and management activity, as many interviewees repeatedly pointed out. If the former can also do without a relationship with public policies and thus with programmes financed by national or community resources, the latter, on the other hand, often lack sufficient resources to make adequate investments in training, and have difficulty – complicated by bureaucracy – in accessing the opportunities made available by the social partners and the public.

How, then, to achieve widespread training, accessible to all, and capable of building skills that not even the training systems of today are able to offer on their own? Social partners are decisive for the achievement of these goals, whose role in this area and the tools adopted by them can now be explored in depth.

2.2.2 *The role of industrial relations in promoting continuing education*

There are several tools devised, or in any case managed, by industrial relations that are functional in fostering access to and the quality and effectiveness of continuing education.

In 2016, the social partners in the engineering-industrial sector (and therefore also in the automotive sector) introduced a highly innovative element for the Italian panorama in the renewal of the national collective bargaining agreement: the **subjective right to training**. It provides for the access of all employees in the sector to 24 hours of training to be carried out over a 3-year period. In contrast to training often concentrated on senior staff (see, in this regard, Section 1), this right has instead allowed access to training pathways for even low-skilled workers, who, as is well known, are often excluded from continuing education activities.

To give further impetus to this innovative element, in the 2021 contract renewal, the parties extended the number of beneficiaries (including also some fixed-term workers) and promoted the **implementation of a digital platform, called MetAppendo**. It allows remote and/or asynchronous training on basic technical, transversal, digital and linguistic skills, and above all to record it in an individual digital dossier. The tool is thus designed to improve, further implement and strengthen the subjective right to training in the metalworking sector. Respondents' assessment of these tools is positive. MetAppendo, with which some 17 000 companies and 910 000 workers are now associated, was also designed to help smaller companies to implement quality training pathways, given that these are often more difficult to design and follow. It additionally supports effective needs analyses, without which there is a risk of missing the opportunity offered by the subjective right to carry out any kind of training in order to comply with the contractual dictate, which does not specify the topics on which training activities should focus.

What is more, MetAppendo, which was described by one interviewee as a 'training manager', also allows for reporting and thus **keeping track of the training carried out**. Each worker can access a personal digital dossier, certified with blockchain technology, where a record is kept of the courses taken and the skills acquired, allowing for the portability of this information – an additional innovative element for the Italian context.

These are the main tools introduced by national collective bargaining that interviewees wanted to focus on. The role of industrial relations does not end here, however. There are several additional elements that interviewees wanted to mention.

For example, the **national observatory dedicated to the automotive industry**, also referred in a February 2022 document where all social partners agreed to promote a common strategy to meet the challenges generated, in particular, by the green transition.

In addition to national collective bargaining, interviewees pointed out that more recent **corporate bargaining** has also taken an interest in training issues, although in this case not uniformly. In general, training is often still thought of as a tool to be resorted to in case of company crises, which is functional for the relocation of workers. It has not yet been established as a useful tool for the competitiveness of companies, workers or territories. It is therefore an issue that is increasingly given attention, but often in larger companies that sign company agreements and not uniformly throughout the country.

As noted above, one measure introduced during 2020 at the national level was the **New Skills Fund** (Fondo Nuove Competenze). The fund made it possible, in the face of company or

territorial collective agreements and the reshaping of working hours, to carry out training activities for the same cost, with the state intervening through the fund to cover the salary for the hours dedicated to training. In the second half of 2022, the New Skills Fund was refinanced and a new notice was issued, which provides for the coverage of (only) 60 % of the hourly pay of the employee involved in training, and clearly indicates the skills on which the activities must focus, related to the green and digital transitions. This option has not been widely taken up, according to interviewees, despite the great interest it has received. It would be useful, especially according to some of those involved in this research, to return to recognising 100 % coverage of the hourly wage, as well as to giving more freedom in the choice of skills on which to do training.

This is because one of the main limitations to the dissemination of training, according to those interviewed, is a culture still averse to these issues. It is one that sees and thinks of training only as a cost and never as an investment, linked to the objective unfamiliarity of many less-structured companies with the activities of needs analysis, design and implementation of training pathways.

In this sense, a strong incentive mechanism such as the one offered by the New Skills Fund made it possible to increase workers' participation in lifelong learning pathways, which they could attend during their normal working hours and simultaneously to be particularly attractive even to companies that had fewer resources to devote to training activities. One interviewee pointed out that the New Skills Fund is undoubtedly an innovative and interesting tool, but that work should be done – at the level of industrial relations – to encourage not the rescheduling of working hours, but their structural reduction. Especially for workers involved in particularly heavy activities, that would also be useful for implementing continuing education pathways.

In fact, an experience similar to that of the New Skills Fund but of 'purely' contractual origin is that of the **Craftsmen's Solidarity Fund (FSBA)**, which has already provided for the suspension of work – paid – and the carrying out of training activities.

Even in the case of the **Craftsmen's Solidarity Fund** there is (for many years already), in fact, a mechanism similar to that introduced by the New Skills Fund.

The FSBA, established as a result of the so-called Fornero reform (law n. 92/2012), named after the then Italian Minister of Labor, provides for the disbursement of contributions to employees of artisan companies who are suspended from work, for example due to company crises or unforeseeable weather events. The Social Partners built an integration between the FSBA and the joint interprofessional craft fund, Fondartigianato, providing that "suspended" workers could benefit, in the hours and days of suspension of work activities, of training courses financed thanks to Fondartigianato.

A virtuous collaboration between distinct entities of the bilaterality governed by the social partner of the craft sector was thus realized, allowing workers to access - against the signing of a collective agreement, as requested by the New Skills Fund - training paths useful to foster their employability, triggering reskilling and upskilling processes.

The New Skills Fund as well as the issue of company bargaining also highlight the importance of worker participation, at the local and specifically company level, which is necessary to seize all the opportunities offered by joint management of such an important matter as training, and to promote its dissemination and accessibility.

On the other hand, since 2001 (l. 388/2000), **joint interprofessional funds for continuing education** have been available in Italy, which are of contractual origin since they were established by inter-confederal agreements at the sectoral level. In this case, the resources collected thanks to the 0.30 % levy, established by law, on employees' pay are sent to these funds, which companies can join so they can participate in notices dedicated to training or access the resources they themselves confer and collect in individual accounts. The most representative social partners (including) in the industrial sector created Fondimpresa, which is the most important interprofessional fund in Italy in terms of member companies and resources. Some interviewees pointed out that for accessing the resources made available by the interprofessional funds and the New Skills Fund, there are **bureaucratic aggravations and complications** that, once again, limit the use of these tools by less structured enterprises. So too is the reporting of activities carried out.

Another interesting experience for the sector is that of **Forma.Temp, the fund dedicated to temporary jobs**. It provides 60 000 training courses per year for 360 000 people, and thus operates (also) within the automotive sector. This experience is interesting because the parties have structured, starting with the so-called Biagi Law of 2003 (Legislative Decree 276/2003), a system for which training is often aimed at the employability of the worker, including and especially fixed-term, in transition. The training is not, therefore, solely dedicated to full-time and permanent employees, but also and especially to all those who turn to employment agencies to find a job or change jobs, and who often do not immediately gain permanent contracts. Forma.Temp provides not only the provision of resources to carry out training activities, but also placement bonuses at the end of the courses and an entry skills assessment. It is also experimenting with a digital badge system.

Related to this is the opinion of one of the interviewees that bilaterality should be **strengthened to promote and implement training activities aimed also and above all at temporary workers and, in general, at 'flexible' forms of employment**. Again, using a joint approach, commissions should also be set up – in some contracts, such as that for the metalworking industry, which are already operational – dedicated to strengthening dialogue with the training system.

Two additional elements were touched upon by the interviewees in responding to questions about the role of industrial relations in promoting training. Both represent elements that have been taken into account by the social partners but are not yet sufficiently developed, given the necessary intervention (still lacking) by the government. The first is the **expansion contract** (aimed at the recruitment of new professionals), the retraining of staff skills and the early exit of workers nearing retirement – a tool to facilitate generational turnover. However, the available resources were found to be insufficient, as the cost to companies is still too high. The second concerns **social shock absorbers**. Only recently (and only in some cases) has the possibility of conducting training at the same time as work suspension been introduced. In general, they are designed to handle crisis, negative and not transitional situations, that is, they do not see production stoppages as an opportunity to invest in worker training.

The social partners also have a decisive role in the 'simple' activity of promoting the tools and funds made available – by the state as well as by contractual bilaterality – since what **is often lacking is knowledge of these opportunities on the part of companies and workers**. Moreover, there is no space – physical or digital – or interlocutor from which to acquire all this information.

2.2.3 *Industrial relations, training and public policy: Towards a possible integration?*

Faced with the characteristics of the automotive sector and the critical issues mentioned, the social partners have long since questioned the government, which has intervened with the creation of a **fund to support the automotive sector of about EUR 8 billion in total to be used over 8 years**. These resources, however, have so far mostly been used to incentivise demand and thus for the purchase of sustainable vehicles (given their high price, which is at least 50 % higher than other cars), equipped with electric motors. Nevertheless, all interviewees agreed on a first major limitation: **the complete absence, in Italy, of dedicated industrial policies for the automotive sector** that go beyond just making incentives available for the purchase of new vehicles. What is lacking is an approach to the sector that, having identified through continual dialogue with the social partners the trajectory that is to be pursued to govern (and not suffer) the dual transition, puts in place resources and tools to achieve these goals. An approach is needed that succeeds in establishing operational steps between them, adopting a supply-chain logic characterised by an ‘integral’ vision of the Italian context in its particularities, and which is not reduced to promoting the growth of a few selected large companies.

It was pointed out that without a true industrial policy, one cannot even imagine the respective training policies. It is on the basis of a development trajectory, planned and shared, that one can then identify the innovations to be introduced, consider their impact on companies and their organisation (but also, and above all, on territories), map the skills required and then collaborate with the training system to build them. Training, as noted by one interviewee, ‘means little if you don’t know where you want to go’, that is, if it is not functional in achieving a certain type of clear and shared development and sustainability goals.

In several other countries the choice has been made to draw up, through dialogue with the social partners, national plans for the development of the automotive sector, so that the community objectives can be adapted to the different national specificities. This has been lacking in Italy. **A clear industrial policy would allow for the development of training policies and also tie them to policies related to innovation, but also to labour policies themselves.** According to most interviewees, it is therefore a matter of thinking together about these different segments, moving beyond an approach which considers providing incentives to be sufficient for governing these epochal transformations.

It was also highlighted that a particularly important element in managing transitions lies in the attractiveness of territories and, in particular, the availability on a local scale of workers with appropriate skills. It therefore becomes increasingly crucial not only to envisage industrial policies at the national level, but also to articulate their different aspects on a territorial scale, working with local institutions to generate widespread benefits. And this is also – in the words of one interviewee – to avoid the risk of the ‘academy’ approach, that is, of training controlled by (a few) large groups, all focused on their own employees. More interesting, instead, is an approach based on collaboration with institutions (schools, ITSs, universities and research centres) on a local scale, so as to promote the shared and participatory development of territories.

A final element that has been repeatedly stressed concerns the importance of involving, structurally and not episodically, the representation of the automotive sector and therefore the social partners in the definition of these policies. This is not only in the

discussion phase, but also in the implementation of the measures. For example, it was pointed out by one interviewee how, albeit laudable, the national Industry 4.0 plan did not require union agreements at the company or territorial level to access the resources made available. In this sense, the role of industrial relations should be given more consideration by public decision-makers, according to most interviewees.

The interviewees agree that there should be a **change of approach to continuing education: thinking of it not only as a tool to manage emergencies and crises but also as a useful investment for the company and the worker**, thus fostering the development of a genuine new culture of training. These critical remarks were also directed, by many interviewees, towards the Italian system of active policies, which is too focused on the moment when a worker loses a job, without a lifelong learning-oriented approach.

Currently, the connection between training policies designed and managed by industrial relations and public policies dedicated to the same issues is therefore limited, if not completely absent. Some interviewees, however, pointed out that companies are also very attentive to regional training opportunities (as well as those of interprofessional funds), although in a context in which the latter are often little known, and not always easily accessible, by less structured companies.

Some typical features of the contemporary labour market make it even more difficult to access the measures put in place by public actors: many companies often have little knowledge of their own needs, just as the organisation of work often makes the time factor particularly valuable, for which training almost turns out to be a negative investment. Finally, in the case of easily replaceable staff or those on fixed-term contracts, it is more complex to convince the company to invest in them.

Therefore, it was highlighted that it would be appropriate to identify the different emerging training needs, and then link them, from time to time with the different tools available: whether regionally, nationally or devised by bilaterality and collective bargaining. Only by first having this overview will it be possible to imagine and develop a complementarity between different measures, even reasoning in terms of territory, supply chain or district.

However, it is also important to recall the (limited) experiments in which the public resources of the European Social Fund are combined with those of the European Regional Development Fund, thanks to which it has been possible **to design public announcements based on simultaneous investment in new technologies and innovation with investment in a complementary form of training.** These have shown the kind of integration which has been repeatedly denounced in the preceding pages as still lacking.

Interviewees also wanted to emphasise the importance of tying the training activity carried out to a recognisable result, such as **skills certification**, so as to avoid superficial use of public resources.

2.3 Companies facing the challenge of qualification and retraining

2.3.1 *Managing training at the company level*

The companies interviewed recognise the great importance of continuing education. Some highlighted how, as far as the automotive world is concerned, the transition from mechanics to mechatronics has been particularly important and impactful, generating not only

a redefinition of the organisation of work at the company, but also of the skills required of the workers themselves. These skills are not solely the technical, hard skills, but also transversal, soft skills.

Larger companies often have articulated systems for the management and delivery of training at the company level, organised by departments or production facilities, in close association with the human resources function, which has long since had an office responsible for training activities.

It is also interesting to point out how training is changing in content. That is not only true of 'training', but also and above all an understanding of one's role within the broader corporate landscape. For example, when faced with the introduction of new products, one company surveyed conducts widespread, cross-cutting training courses across different areas of the company, so that each worker understands their role in the creation of the new product.

More structured companies often develop **platforms for training management and delivery**, and adopt different training methodologies, ranging from on-the-job training and side-by-side training to distance learning and e-learning. In some cases, actual corporate training catalogues are prepared, covering (with varying gradation) all the skills needed by the enterprise.

In this sense, one of the interviewees shared a company project dedicated to **building a new mindset, oriented towards change**, that is, capable of recognising the value of continuing education and developing skills useful for adapting to new organisational models, characterised in particular by extensive digitisation of processes. It was then highlighted how the idea of **accompanying the new employee's or collaborator's entry into the company** and then involving that person in continuous learning over time, consistent with the lifelong learning approach, has also become established. In other words, not so much a series of courses unrelated to each other, but a truly personalised path of continuous growth that winds its way through an individual, group, professional family and community offerings, that crosses individual and societal dimensions.

Training, at these companies, is understood as both a useful tool for corporate competitiveness, as well as a **retention tool**, to attract and retain employees through the provision of structured training and growth pathways.

The impact of the pandemic has certainly also been felt by companies in terms of the management and delivery of training. After an initial period, in the first half of 2020, of understandable uncertainty, many entities have seized the opportunity of distance learning, innovating their training methodologies. Again, not all companies reacted in the same way: the more structured ones often developed, in a short time, digital classes and rethought their training offerings at a distance, even maintaining these innovative methods at the end of the emergency period; others found themselves in more difficulty and, especially for the more 'operational' training of employees with limited skills, suspended training activities.

2.3.2 Collective bargaining and industrial relations at the enterprise level

To finance their training activities, a number of companies resort to the resources made available by the **interprofessional funds**, but these often do not cover all the company's needs or are marked by the criticisms already mentioned.

In the metalworking sector, an important innovation involved the introduction of the **subjective right to training**, provided for by the renewal of the National Collective Labour Agreement (NCLA, in Italian CCNL) that took place in 2016, as already seen. The companies interviewed shared a positive assessment, highlighting that as entities already investing in widespread training of their employees, they were ‘ready’ when this right was introduced. At the same time, they also highlighted the enormous organisational complexity, especially (but not only) for larger companies, of initiating thousands of workers, and particularly low-skilled workers, into training for several hours over the 3-year period. This point was not intended to criticise the innovation introduced by the social partners. Rather it was intended to highlight that each company then had to independently manage the recognition of this right and that many found it difficult to organise, from scratch, the many required courses, with the risk then of experiencing this opportunity more as an obligation to comply with than a possibility for the development and growth of the company itself and its employees. Hence, the importance of introducing MetApprendo with the 2021 contract renewal.

The companies interviewed, especially the more structured ones, also highlighted the importance of the **Company Commissions for Professional Training**, created by the social partners at the level of the individual company, and where often in a collaborative atmosphere they work on the design and implementation of widespread training plans for the benefit of employees.

2.3.3 *Companies, training and the relationship with public policy*

The companies interviewed are entities that offer different training opportunities, including through the use of tools made available by the social partners (the interprofessional funds already mentioned, or the tools introduced by national or company collective bargaining). **The relationship with public actors and with national retraining programmes is limited**, as they tend to focus on subjects that are farther away from the labour market and are not very attractive to companies.

Often larger companies develop **corporate academies**, for the training of new hires yet also for the qualification and retraining of employees, and they personalise the training offer as much as possible. Thus, they do not rely on ‘external’ collaborations – for example with the training system – but rather try to involve professionals as teachers for pathways where the skills are always tailored to the specific needs and identity of the company.

Some companies of a more limited size are also identifying **‘external’ partners to provide solutions for their training needs**, for example by collaborating with higher technological institutes (ITS) and universities, and for the realisation of training and retraining courses, drawing on the resources made available by bilaterality. In these less structured contexts, it is rarer to find company agreements or internal joint bodies, such as the aforementioned company commissions on vocational training.

2.4 **The contribution of training bodies**

The training institutions involved in the interviews highlighted the **difficulties, already noted several times, of less structured companies in accessing funding dedicated to continuing training**, or to carry out activities for monitoring and anticipating needs, with the inevitable exceptions. There are, in fact, smaller companies that, being part of large groups, are often more able to seize these opportunities.

Even the less structured companies, it was recalled, work a lot on the topic of **digitalisation**, in which interest has increased in recent years, as well as on the **green transition**, also only at the level of awareness of company employees and in the light of the 'push' introduced by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The importance of the issue of digital skills was particularly stressed by one interviewee, who recalled that one Italian out of three lacks basic digital skills.

The respondents all stressed the important role of the social partners, although they are not present in all territories and sometimes lack in-depth training to understand or to address the impacts of the dual transition on training. The situation is therefore very diverse at the local level. All respondents agree, as already expressed by the social partners themselves, on the importance of the subjective right to training introduced with the NCLA of the engineering industry in 2016. The assessment of the New Skills Fund and the interprofessional funds is also shared, which emphasises that an initiative to reduce red tape is needed to facilitate access to them. The role of training institutions in these cases is often also to support less structured companies in gaining access to these funds.

The importance of interprofessional funds in the promotion of continuing training in Italy has nonetheless been widely recognised: the resources made available by them are now seven times greater than those made available by the regions, which are also in charge of adult training. Through specific alerts, the funds work to raise awareness and provide technical expertise on the issues of the dual transition. But they have recently widened their scope towards unemployed workers, enrolling them in courses financed by the funds in exchange for their recruitment at the end of the training period. These include subjects such as basic and linguistic skills, which are also fundamental in view of the low level of skills possessed by many workers and their social background, leaving them particularly in need of such theoretical and practical knowledge.

Just as different interprofessional funds are subject to different rules of access and financing, the same can be said of the training carried out at the regional level, financed by the regions. In this case, coordination or at least greater uniformity between the different regional training models would be useful. Clear rules, transparent and respected by all, are needed in order to avoid downward competition between the funds themselves, considering that the resources managed by the funds themselves are, according to Italian legislation, public. Some problems also arise from European rules, for example requiring interprofessional funds to certify the acquired skills but which the funds cannot do under Italian law as they are not among the entities entitled to carry out these activities.

Training institutions agree on the importance of better integration and coordination between the instruments introduced by the social partners for continuing training and public policies. They also seek to promote dialogue about the tools and resources dedicated to workers already employed (as the interprofessional funds and the New Skills Fund are) and unemployed (public policies, mainly). The social partners are less attentive to the opportunities offered by closer cooperation with the training system, like short and vocational courses such as IFTS (higher technical education and training, ISCED-4) or what is offered by the ITS Academy (higher technological institutes, ISCED 5 and 6), which is also useful for the retraining of workers and of increasing interest to many companies, as has been pointed out.

Some training institutions have stressed the importance of **enhancing (and partially rethinking) apprenticeship, in two directions.** The first is that of **raising the age limit**, providing the possibility of apprenticeship contracts for adults as well, which is currently

limited to workers receiving forms of income support and only for one type of apprenticeship, the “professionalizing” apprenticeship, which does not allow for the attainment of qualifications. In order to develop apprenticeship as (also) a reskilling and upskilling tool, it would therefore be important to imagine its use, as is already the case in other Countries, also with respect to workers and adults in general and for all three current types of apprenticeship present in Italy.

In addition, “dual” apprenticeship, that is, first- and third-level type apprenticeships, allow the attainment of upper secondary and tertiary qualifications and degrees (educational qualifications). On the other hand, it does not allow for professional qualifications, which do not correspond to educational qualifications and are often more specialized and require shorter training paths. An education qualification is, for example, an engineering master’s degree, while a professional qualification is, for example, a short course to become a numerical control machine maintenance technician, that lead to a public-recognized qualification. **Therefore, thinking about the possibility of using “dual” apprenticeship to also obtain professional qualifications and certifications and not only educational qualification could promote its diffusion**, especially towards those adults seeking new employment and who cannot sustain enrolment in a long training course leading to a degree, as well as providing a tool to respond with even greater precision and fewer constraints imposed by the curriculum to the needs manifested by businesses. **The training institutions wanted to highlight the absence of a uniform system, at the national level, for the certification of workers’ skills.** Regional regulations are fragmented and the service is not operational in all regions. That is to the detriment of an instrument – the transparency of the competences possessed – which would be so important for today’s working environment characterised by frequent transitions, but also to the further enhancement of the training received in non-formal and informal contexts.

Moreover, some of the tools made available by public actors to encourage the continuing training of workers have not been adequately exploited. One respondent gave the example of the aforementioned Industry 4.0 national plan and its Training 4.0 programme, which provided resources for the training of enabling and innovative skills. Unfortunately, it was then used as a tax incentive – in the face of the tax relief – rather than as a real opportunity for business development, with little attention paid to the training provided.

The training institutions also wanted to highlight the difficulty of engaging some specific groups in training activities, providing the example of young NEETs (not engaged in education, employment or training). To date, there are no instruments or institutions capable of reaching, or not without great difficulty, certain social groups, including these inactive or unemployed young people not engaged in training.

More generally, it was stressed that it is necessary to change, today, the paradigm, to provide training throughout life and especially at some ‘critical’ moments of transition: from school to work, from one job to another, but also from work to school, that is, by providing for the integration of training systems and work that also allows employees to enrol in or at least attend vocational courses organised by education and training providers as well as by universities. As also pointed out by industrial relations actors, apprenticeship is an instrument that is still not highly valued for the management of these transformative processes focused on investment in training.

2.5 The value of continuing education among workers

As part of the research, some workers and employee representatives in the company were also interviewed, as previously mentioned. **In their opinion, the value of training is confirmed, at least for two reasons: as an instrument for attracting and retaining staff, and to cope with the technological innovations introduced.**

Medium-sized and large companies are often equipped with effective onboarding pathways, covering the first months of work. Sometimes the training then develops informally, through support for more experienced workers, and on the job. As mentioned, having the opportunity to learn continuously is, especially in the eyes of the younger generation, an important element in their working career. At the same time, training is certainly necessary to cope with the transformations in the automotive sector, but its value is not always sufficiently recognised by companies. **Without a total rethink of the classification of professions provided for in collective agreements, training remains detached from remuneration**, with the risk of thinking that some professions which have been transformed in recent years still require the skills they did 10 or 20 years ago, and of treating new professions less favourably (with lower pay) than they should be.

In some cases, the risk of unilateral training by the company was highlighted, with the exclusion of some groups of workers. This was confirmation of a diverse panorama where, even in the presence of integrative corporate contracts, it is not always possible to develop a truly equal form of collaboration and development of training activities.

The point of view of the workers is therefore that of a general appreciation of training, but in the face of company cases where there is not always a willingness to imagine an enlargement of the same treatment to new categories of participants, new training content or new methodologies.

2.6 The results of the qualitative survey

All respondents agreed on the strategic importance of training to address the challenges posed by the twin transition. The impact of the latter is felt, in fact, by all companies in the automotive sector, although with a different intensity determined by the characteristics of individual companies.

Nevertheless, **there is no unified strategy to address these challenges.** Instead, there is a high degree of heterogeneity, based on the company (and in particular its size class), the territory and the type of worker considered.

The lack of a national industrial policy capable of synthesising the various emerging needs and of combining investment in innovation, new technologies and their enabling skills – and therefore training – has been recognised as **particularly problematic**. The lack of systems for anticipating needs or of mechanisms for public certification of skills only limits the effectiveness of the training carried out.

In this context, the role of industrial relations in the automotive sector is now decisive, whether we consider the important innovations introduced at the national level – among them, the subjective right to training and MetAppendo – or those defined at the company level, even if the latter dimension does not yet seem to be sufficiently exploited. Also crucial is the contribution of the interprofessional funds, and there is increasing interest in instruments such

as the New Skills Fund, the expansion contract and apprenticeships, despite the criticisms already mentioned.

What are also decisive are the characteristics of the tools and resources made available by both industrial relations and public actors, in order to ensure that training is as close as possible to the real needs of each individual undertaking it and each worker.

In this sense, it is particularly useful, within the framework of a broader national industrial policy, to encourage the development of mechanisms for integrating public resources and the role of the social partners. For example, access could be guaranteed to resources and incentives on the basis of territorial or company collective agreements, thus promoting participatory and joint formulas and ensuring better use of the resources and instruments made available, but also and above all, to accessibility of training processes for all workers.

3. Conclusions

The need for a new industrial policy for the automotive sector

Data collected on participation in continuing training courses in Italy, as well as the characteristics of the automotive sector (Section 1.1 and 1.7), together with scientific evidence (Section 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4) and empirical evidence (Section 2) point to the main problem that can be observed in the Italian context: the absence of national industrial policies aimed at promoting the sector, in the light of the challenges posed by the twin transition.

It is, therefore, urgent to devise and implement a truly national strategy, which is characterised by a 'supply chain' approach, attentive to the different ramifications for the value chain of the sector; to the characteristics of the companies involved, given the prevalence of micro and small to medium-sized enterprises; and to the integration of resources and tools to promote process and, above all, product innovation, but also to the skills acquired by workers. Without identifying a direction and a goal that we want to reach, it is impossible to design appropriate training policies, which must be thought of – and concretely implemented as – necessary elements for the very feasibility of policies and not as accessory items, as often happens. Only in this way is it possible to face the challenges of the transformations taking place by governing their impacts, not only economic but also social ones.

This industrial policy must also be characterised by three elements. It must be based on the integration of public (including the European Community) and private resources (including those made available by the social partners and the sector's bilaterality); be designed with the participation of and dialogue with the social partners in the sector; and be able to adapt to the different specificities of each territory, while maintaining the necessary integration between training, innovation, and research and development work.

The decisive role of bilaterality and collective bargaining

The social partners in Italy and especially in the automotive sector play a particularly important role in promoting continuing training and its accessibility. They do so, for example, through management of the joint interprofessional funds, but also thanks to important innovations introduced by contract. Among them are the right to subjective training (NCLA metalworking

industrial companies, 2016) and the platform MetAppendo (NCLA metalworking industrial companies, 2021).

However, there is room for further improvement. For example, the resources of bilaterality are not always adequately used, while equal realities such as the territorial observatories for vocational training, which should also carry out the fundamental task of mapping, anticipating and sharing the needs of companies and, in turn, contributing to developing paths of continuing education are not always effective. The same can be said about company bargaining, where most of the company collective agreements still do not contain any provisions on training.

In this sense, bilateralism and collective bargaining can play an even more important role. Examples include strengthening, through dialogue with the training system, the role of joint committees for vocational training, and the design of apprenticeship courses (also for adults) able to build professionalism consistent with the latest industry demands, thus overturning an approach to training as an element to be introduced to manage 'crisis' situations. Instead, rethinking it as structural element from every employment relationship, for example by providing ad hoc training accounts for fixed-term workers or with non-continuous jobs.

Skills and their recognition: Rethinking frameworks

There is still limited experience of collective bargaining (at the national and corporate levels) which allows for effective dialogue and coordination between management systems (and therefore for employee pay) once the skills have actually been acquired. There is also often a disconnect between the training profiles created in the context of study and continuing training and the occupational profiles linked to the categories of the classification systems. This distance creates at least two problems: a failure to make the most of the training carried out, with the risk of even more highly skilled workers being employed in low-skilled jobs, and a difficult dialogue between the world of training and the world of work, with the former building profiles that are disconnected from the actual professional framing systems.

Rethinking the latter in the light not only of the individual tasks performed by workers, but also in terms of the skills actually possessed, can therefore be useful in promoting the training carried out, linking it to growth paths at the company level and increasing its visibility, which is also useful in the formative planning phase.

Towards the construction of local ecosystems of training and innovation

In a sector such as the automotive one, characterised by the prevalence of micro and small to medium-sized enterprises, often subcontractors and individual territories are decisive for the competitiveness and attractiveness of companies. In this sense, the integrated, participatory and dialogical logic already mentioned must be oriented towards the construction of genuine ecosystems for training and innovation, characterised by forms of structured (not episodic) collaboration between the university world, research, training systems, enterprises and social partners.

The aim should be to develop, at the local level, effective systems for monitoring and anticipating local needs and for promoting common growth and integration between research processes, their implementation at the company level and related training, including the

retraining of workers and the unemployed, and the characteristics of individual enterprises and workers not involved.

In particular, the Social Partners must develop a new mindset, moving toward the formation of "untrained" skills, collaborating with educational institutions to **intercept young people before they finish their studies**: offering support to schools and universities, providing teachers from the world of work (professional experts), developing training modules by hosting students in companies, so as to help them not to just acquire professional skills immediately expendable in the labour market, but to achieve a form of training closer to the world of work, especially in terms of soft and transversal skills.

A clear reference framework

Some of the instruments that have been mentioned as crucial for the promotion of continuing training are still too fragmented at the territorial level or have rules that are not uniform. This applies, for example, to the certification of skills, which is only operational and accessible in some Italian regions. Or to the modalities of management of the interprofessional funds, which differ from one fund to another and which should be more uniform (in particular regarding the resources to be allocated to training). Apprenticeships, especially dual apprenticeships, are still only in a minority of national collective agreements.

Action is therefore needed at the national and regional levels to ensure the accessibility of these tools, while the social partners could also work to ensure that the opportunities (and the related resources) made available are effectively accessible to all companies in the sectors and territories they represent.

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