

**National summary sheets on  
education system in Europe  
and ongoing reforms**

**2009 Edition**



# ITALY

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## **1. Education population and language of instruction**

On the 1st of January 2007, the population aged between 0 and 29 years was 18 078 703 out of a total of 59 131 287 inhabitants. In the school year 2007/08, children enrolled in pre-primary schools were 975 757. Students enrolled in school education were 6 775 599. Of them, 5 370 455 were enrolled in compulsory education (6-16 years of age) distributed as follows: 2 579 938 in primary school, 1 625 651 in lower secondary school and 1 164 866 in the first two years of upper secondary school (all data refer to participation in State schools). The language of instruction is Italian, although in some areas the use of the local language (<sup>1</sup>) is officially authorised for education.

## **2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education**

Overall responsibility for school education lies within the Ministry of Education, University and Research (*Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca*), which works at central level, while regional and provincial education offices work at local level. Regions may delegate certain responsibilities to the provinces and municipalities.

According to Law no. 59 of 15 March 1997 and subsequent implementation decree (DPR 275/1999), all schools are granted teaching autonomy, organizing autonomy and research, experimentation and development autonomy. The Constitution establishes that the State has to provide for a state-owned education system, but it also establishes that also non-state school may exist. These can be of two different kinds: schools with equal status (*paritarie*) and schools with non-equal status (*non paritarie*) (law 27/2006).

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(<sup>1</sup>) Protection of minority languages and cultures is provided for in the Constitution and in the Law 482/1999. Minority languages are: Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, French, Provençal, Occitan, Friulan, Ladin, Sardinian.

The former, are the schools managed by private subjects or public bodies. They have been granted equal status, as they have met specific requirements such as: carrying out an educational plan in coherence with the principles included in the Constitution and in the legislation, allowing everyone willing to be enrolled, hiring teaching staff holding a qualification to teach and according to the national contracts (law 62/2000). Schools with equal status are allowed to issue legally recognised certificates and are part of the national education and training system. Schools without equal status are those that did not present a request for obtaining the equal status or do not meet the specific requirements. They are not allowed to issue officially recognised certificates, they cannot be called 'school' and they are not institutions for the fulfilment of the right/duty (*diritto/dovere*) to education.

In school year 2007/08, people enrolled in non-State school were the 5.5 % of the entire school population.

In 2004, the National service for the evaluation of the education and training system was instituted. Its task is to improve the quality of the education system, through the evaluation of its efficiency also in relation with the international context. The National institute for the evaluation of the education and training system (*Istituto nazionale di valutazione del sistema educativo di istruzione e formazione – INVALSI*) is entrusted with the national service.

Also the universities have gradually gained administrative, financial and accounting autonomy. The Ministry is responsible for the allocation of funds, for monitoring and the evaluation of the system. This latter is carried out by the National agency for the evaluation of the university and research system (*Agenzia nazionale per la valutazione del sistema universitario e della ricerca – Anvur*), which has been set up in 2008 <sup>(2)</sup>

According to university autonomy (Regulation no. 509 of 3 November 1999), each university establishes its courses organisation in the respect of the qualifying formative objectives of the courses. Each university decides the teaching organisation and structure of its degree courses in the teaching regulations which are approved by the Ministry.

### 3. Pre-primary education

<i>Scuola dell'Infanzia (nursery schools)</i>	Age 3-6
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The *scuola dell'infanzia* is the first stage of the education and training system and it is not compulsory. Children who turn three within the 31st of December of the current school year can enrol in the *scuole dell'infanzia*. From school year 2009/10, upon parents' request, also children who turn three on the 30th of April are admitted to pre-primary education.

Children enrolled in pre-primary education, considering both State and non-State schools, are about the 96-97 % of the entire population aged 3-5 years.

Pre-primary education is offered free of charge. Families are asked to pay a sum for transport and canteen services. Families with low incomes are exempted.

The amount of hours in one year is between 875 and 1 700 hours, corresponding at about a minimum of 25 and a maximum of 50 hours a week.

Generally, children are organised in groups according to their age. Groups can be made up of a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 25 children.

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<sup>(2)</sup> Anvur has replaced the already existing National committee for the evaluation of the university system and the Committee for the evaluation of research.

## 4. Compulsory education

Education is compulsory from 6 up to 16 years of age <sup>(3)</sup>. Compulsory education covers the first cycle of education (8 years) and the first two years of the second cycle. However, students have a right/duty (*diritto-dovere*) to continue their training within the education system for at least 12 years or up to the obtainment of a qualification (three years) within the vocational education and training system within 18 years of age.

### (i) Phases

<b>Primo ciclo di istruzione</b> (first cycle of education)	
Scuola primaria (primary school)	Age 6-11
Scuola secondaria di primo grado (lower secondary school)	Age 11- 14

### (ii) Admissions criteria

Enrolment to the first class of primary school is compulsory for all children who have turned 6 within the 31st August preceding the start of the school year (the 31st December of the current school year from 2009/10) or, earlier, within the 31st April of the current school year.

Enrolment to the first year of lower secondary school is compulsory for all pupils who have successfully completed the primary school.

Enrolment and attendance are offered free of charge for the whole first cycle of education. Families are free to choose the school, within the limits of available posts.

### (iii) Length of school day/week/year

The school year comprises at least 200 days between the 1st of September and the 30th of June. Schools open five or six days a week. Compulsory annual teaching hours are 891 in primary school and 957 in lower secondary school; this amount is subdivided into 33 teaching weeks with an average amount of, respectively, 27 and 29 weekly hours. According to school autonomy, each educational institution is responsible for the organisation of its annual teaching time. At primary level schools can also organize the teaching time on an average of 30 or 40 weekly hours.

Starting from school year 2009/10 at primary level also a weekly timetable of 24 hours will be available, with the use of one teacher per class. At lower secondary level, the compulsory annual amount of teaching hours is 990 (30 hours a week).

### (iv) Class size/student grouping

Pupils are usually grouped according to their age. According to their organisational autonomy, schools can also organise groups with pupils of different ages. Each class is generally made up of maximum 25 and minimum 10 or 15 pupils, at primary and lower secondary level, respectively. At primary level teachers are generalist. At lower secondary level, teachers are specialist in one or more subjects.

### (v) Curriculum control and content

Schools of the first cycle of education (primary school and lower secondary school) adopt National Guidelines (*Indicazioni nazionali per i piani personalizzati delle attività educative*) that are currently under revision. Such guidelines define the essential performance levels that should be ensured by

<sup>(3)</sup> The Constitution establishes that education is compulsory up to 14 years of age. The length of compulsory education has been prolonged up to 16 years of age in school year 2007/08, according to the Financial law for the year 2007.

each school. The guidelines are nationally determined and adapted to local needs by each school according to school autonomy. Knowledge and skills are indicated for each subjects; the school will help pupils to transform them into personal competencies.

Specific learning objectives at primary school level have been defined for the following subjects: Catholic religion, Italian, English language, history, geography, mathematics, science, technical education and ICT, music, art and drawing, sport and motory sciences. As for the lower secondary school, the specific learning objectives have been define for the following subjects: Catholic religion, Italian, English language, a second foreign language, history, geography, mathematics, science, technical education, information and communication technology, music, art and drawing, sport and motory sciences.

Teachers are free to choose textbooks and teaching methods.

#### (vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

At both educational levels, periodical and annual assessment of pupils' learning is carried out by teachers by assigning a mark from 0 to 10. At primary school level, also an analytic justified assessment is given together with the mark. Non-admission to the next class is used only 'in exceptional and suitably motivated cases' and the decision is taken unanimously by teachers.

Progression from primary to lower secondary school takes place upon pupil's positive assessment obtained at the end of primary school.

At lower secondary level, pupils progress to the next grade upon obtainment of a minimum mark of six in each subject.

At lower secondary level, also pupils' behaviour is assessed by assigning a mark from 0 to 10. Pupils obtaining a mark lower than 6, assigned by all class teachers, cannot progress to the next grade and they are not admitted to the final state examination.

On completion of the first cycle of education, students take a state examination. The minimum mark required to obtain the first cycle leaving certificate is 6. The certificate is required to be admitted to the upper secondary education level.

## 5. Post-compulsory education/upper secondary and post-secondary level

### (i) Types of education

<b>Secondo ciclo di istruzione</b> (second cycle of education)	
<i>Liceo classico</i> (classical upper secondary school)	Age 14-19
<i>Liceo scientifico</i> (scientific upper secondary school)	
<i>Liceo linguistico</i> (linguistic upper secondary school)	
<i>Liceo socio-psico-pedagogico</i> (upper secondary school with a sociological-psychological- and pedagogical orientation)	Age 14-18/19
<i>Liceo artistico</i> (artistic upper secondary school)	
<i>Istituto tecnico</i> (technical school)	Age 14-19
<i>Istituto professionale</i> (vocational school)/ <i>Istituti d'arte</i> (art schools)	Age 14-17/19
<i>Formazione professionale di base</i> (Initial vocational training)	Age 14-17

### (ii) Admissions criteria

Holders of the certificate of the first cycle of education, obtained after having successfully passed the first cycle leaving examination, may enter the second cycle of education. Enrolment and

attendance are not free of charge. However, fees are modest and the amount is fixed at central level. Students enrolled at the first, second and third year of the second cycle are exempted from paying, as they are still fulfilling the right/duty to education. Students are free to choose the school, within the limits of available posts.

Three-year vocational training courses (Initial vocational training) are offered by the Regions. Compulsory education can be accomplished also within these vocational pathways.

### (iii) Curriculum control and content

Central government determines basic curricula for each branch of general, vocational and technical upper secondary education and gives guidance on teaching methods. Core subjects common to all institutions are Italian, history, a modern foreign language, mathematics and physical education.

### (iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Periodical and annual assessment of pupils' learning and behaviour is carried out by teachers by assigning a mark from 0 to 10. Students who have been assigned a mark lower than 6 for their behaviour, cannot progress to the next grade and they are not admitted to the final examination. Students obtaining a mark lower than 6 in one or more subjects, are assigned a 'formative debt' which the student has to recover before the end of the school year. Students who have not been able to recover the 'debt', or who have been assigned too many debts to be recovered, are not admitted to the next grade. At the end of the upper secondary school, students take a state examination. Those who successfully pass the examination obtain an upper secondary school leaving diploma which allows them to continue their studies at higher level.

## 6. Higher education

### (i) Types of institutions

Higher education is organised at university and non-university level. This latter is offered by the higher level arts and music education system (*Sistema dell'Alta formazione artistica e musicale – Afam*) and by other institutions. The institutions belonging to the Afam system are: Academies of Fine Arts, the National Academy of Drama, Higher Institutes for Artistic Industries (ISIA), the National Dance Academy, Conservatoires.

Only universities and Afam institutes issue officially recognised degrees.

Higher education, both at universities and Afam institutes, is organised in three cycles: the first cycle lasting 3 years; the second cycle lasting 2 years and the third cycle has a variable length. Courses in medicine and surgery, veterinary science, and dentistry are still organised in one single cycle lasting 5-6 years.

### (ii) Access

Applicants must have the upper secondary school leaving certificate, or a foreign comparable qualification. Admission to the degree courses in medicine and surgery, dentistry, veterinary medicine, architecture is regulated by *numerus clausus* at national level. However, selection procedures are defined by each institution.

To access the institutes belonging to the Afam system, adequate basic skills are also required. Skills required and assessment procedures may vary, as they are defined by single institutions.

### (iii) Qualifications

Universities are autonomous for the planning of study courses, for which each university establishes the title, the objectives, the general framework of learning activities, credits attributed to each activity and the assessment procedures. Common objectives and general criteria are, however, defined at central level for all courses.

Universities issue the following degrees: first level *Laurea (L)* obtained after a 3-year course (180 credits); second level *Laurea magistrale* obtained after a 2-year course (120 credits) and a third level *Dottorato di ricerca* after a course which duration varies depending on the field of study.

*Afam* institutes issue the first level *Diploma accademico di primo livello*, obtained after a 3-year course (180 credits) and the second level *Diploma accademico di secondo livello*, obtained after a 2-year course (120 credits).

## 7. Special needs

Students with special needs are integrated into mainstream education and specialist support is provided.

## 8. Teachers

At present, teachers at pre-primary and primary level must hold a university *Laurea* in primary education sciences. Teachers at secondary level must hold a *Laurea magistrale* and, afterwards, have completed a 2-year specialisation course at the Specialisation school for teaching at secondary level (*la scuola di specializzazione per l'insegnamento secondario – SSIS*). The qualification for teaching is obtained after passing a specific examination.

Universities offer in service training to teachers for their professional development.

Primary school teachers are generalist teachers, but are responsible for a specific subject area. Secondary school teachers are specialist teachers. All teachers are civil servants.

At present, initial teacher training and recruitment procedures are under revision.

## 9. Current reforms and priorities

The reform of the Italian education system started with Law no. 53/2003. Since then, two governments, belonging to two opposite political coalitions, have been in power, with the consequence that the education system has been subjected to various reforms. On one hand, the reform of 2003 has been stopped and, on the other hand, further amendments have been introduced, such as, for example, the extension of compulsory education up to 16 years of age.

As for the reform of 2003, the following issues are still under debate:

- The reform law had provided that teachers at all education levels must hold a *Laurea magistrale* (3 + 2 years). This disposition has never been implemented. At present, initial teacher training is under revision, together with the reorganisation of the whole teacher recruitment system.
- The National Guidelines for the first cycle are under revision. Starting from school year 2007/08 and for two years, they have been replaced by the Guidelines for the curriculum, which will be applied on a trial basis. For the next three years (until 2011/12) the National Guidelines will be applied, together with the Guidelines for the curriculum, in order to amend their contents, where necessary.



- The reform of the second cycle has not been applied yet. At present, some amendments to the reform itself are under debate, according to the subsequent legislation issued from 2008 (see below). A reorganisation of this level of education is expected, in particular for the reduction of branches of study and the annual amount of hours in general and vocational upper secondary schools. The implementation of the reform is expected starting from school year 2010/11.

Law 133/2008 has provided for the revision of the organisation of the whole system. Therefore, law 169/2008 has established, starting from school year 2009/10, a reorganisation of school time at primary level. In fact, it has been introduced the possibility to organise the teaching time in 24 hours a week, with only one teacher in a class.

Starting from 2009/10 class size will be as follows: in pre-primary schools from 18 to 26 children; in primary schools from 15 to 26 pupils; in lower secondary schools from 18 to 27 pupils and in upper secondary schools at least 27 students. In 2009/10, maximum levels will remain those of the current school year.

In addition, it has been provided for the reduction of costs for the purchase of textbooks by introducing the obligation for publishers to keep the contents of textbooks unchanged for a minimum period of time (5-6 years), except for necessary updates. It is also provided that all textbooks should be downloadable from internet within 2012.

Also the higher education level has been under reform, always in the general purpose of reducing public expenditure. In fact, law 133/2008 provides that universities have the opportunity to change their status from state universities to private foundations.

For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE ([http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurybase\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurybase_en.php))