Skills anticipation in Italy

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Skills anticipation activities in Italy provide information on the current and likely future skills demand or needs, including:

- Skills assessments, such as the national survey of skills needs conducted by the Institute for the Development of Vocational Training of Workers (Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione Professionale dei Lavoratori, ISFOL); the AlmaLaurea Survey on graduates; the Unioncamere Excelsior Survey on professional profiles and skills demand; surveys implemented by the National Institute of Statistics (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, ISTAT) aimed at university and upper-second level graduates; and local level surveys carried out by regions and autonomous provinces;
- Skills forecasting (by Excelsior, ISFOL and the AlmalLaurea surveys) and
- Other skills surveys implemented by employers’ associations and training institutions (including universities)

Skills anticipation outputs are mostly used for guiding people in their education, training or employment related decisions.

In Italy, a high number of institutions collect, analyse and provide skills anticipation-related data, using different classifications and methods to serve differing objectives. Such heterogeneity exists due to the fact that almost all responsibility for education, training and the labour market fall to the local administrative level (mainly to the regions and autonomous provinces) with limited overall national coordination of skills anticipation activities. The National Integrated Information System of Professions’ launch, in 2012, represented an attempt to tackle the fragmented nature of skills anticipation activities.

Skills anticipation activities in Italy face a number of problems, namely:

- Employers have difficulties in identifying the skills they need over the medium term (and, recently, over the short term);
- There is a limited coordination of efforts to determine the skills needs at the national level and
- Training institutions’ programmes are not sufficiently adaptable to meet the changes in skills demand anticipated over the medium term.

Nonetheless, although the overall approach to skills anticipation has traditionally been fragmented, a higher level of national coordination has been pursued in the last three to four years starting with an agreement on common definitions and classifications to be used by all the organisations and entities engaged in skills anticipation.
Overview of the Italian approach

Skills anticipation in Italy

Key actors

Governance
- Ministry of Labour (also through ISFOL)
- Regions/autonomous provinces

Stakeholders
- Central/regional governments
- Social partners
- Education and training institutions
- Research institutions

Target groups
- Local governments
- Education and training institutions (incl. universities)
- Labour markets intermediaries
- Students, unemployed and citizens in general

Types of skills anticipation

Quantitative forecasting
- Excelsior and ISFOL provide medium term demand forecasts (5 years)

Skills assessments
- National level regular surveys (ISFOL/Almalaurea/Excelsior/ISTAT)
- Regional, sub-regional surveys (implemented by regions/autonomous provinces)

Foresight
- None

Other
- Skills/occupation profiles/demand side surveys by employers association
- Skill/training demand/needs surveys by training institutions
- ISFOL’s Audit of Skills’ Needs

Dissemination

Channels
- Education and training institutions
- Careers and guidance labour market
- Websites (e.g. National Integrated Information System of Professions)
- By guidance, employment, placement and counselling services
- By upper secondary schools, IVET providers, universities, non-academic tertiary level institutions to adapt curricula and training content
- By employer associations to improve CVET provision
Skills anticipation activities are implemented at both national- and local levels.

At national level the following activities take place:

- A national survey of occupational profiles and audit of skills needs, as part of the National Integrated Information System of Professions (1) (*Sistema Informativo Integrato delle Professioni*). For each occupational profile there is a list of the required skills, ranked by importance and complexity. The survey is carried out by the *Institute for the Development of Vocational Training of Workers* (*Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione Professionale dei Lavoratori*, ISFOL, part of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies). The National Integrated Information System of Professions, jointly promoted by ISFOL and ISTAT, includes studies, analyses and research activities aimed at providing knowledge on the structure of, and the changes in, the demand for skills in the labour market. It is used to assist jobseekers and those in employment, as well as in the development of education and training programmes. In addition, it identifies the importance of a range of skills in the labour market as reported by employers.

- The annual Excelsior Survey by the *Italian Union of the Chambers of Commerce* (Unioncamere), which maps labour demand and related skills needs.

- The annual survey on the profile and employment outcomes of university graduates is carried out by *AlmaLaurea* (an inter-university consortium). The employment of university graduates and postgraduates is also captured by a periodic survey, carried out by ISTAT. The survey was first conducted in 1989 with the most recent iteration conducted in 2015.

- The periodic surveys on the transition from school to work of vocational and technical upper-second level graduates is also conducted by ISTAT.

At the local level, there are several activities aimed at mapping, understanding and forecasting training and skills needs. At the regional level there are periodic surveys and, in some regions, labour market observatories (*Osservatori del Mercato del Lavoro*) that provide skills anticipation data and analyses. These generally fall under the supervision of relevant institutions in the regions and autonomous provinces. At the local level, skills anticipation activities tend to depend upon the priorities of local policymakers. They cover a range of local issues, including sectoral analysis and activities related to European Social Fund (ESF)-funded projects.

Recent efforts to develop a more cohesive system led to the implementation of the National Integrated Information System of Professions (under the auspices of ISFOL), intended to help improve the
fragmented situation and increase the coordination among the different actors at national, regional and local levels.(2)

Aims

As previously mentioned, the most comprehensive skills anticipation activities have been developed by ISFOL and ISTAT, the National Integrated Information System of Professions. It has three main objectives:

- Improving the national classification of occupations (*classificazione delle professioni*) thereby allowing a common base for all anticipation activities;
- Providing a national level skills assessment and forecast based on occupational profiles and
- Creating a web platform on which data from a wide variety of sources are collected and made available to final users.

More generally, the overall aim of the skills anticipation system in Italy is to support public policy design (especially in the fields of training and education, as well as that of employment) and, importantly, to provide labour market intermediaries (e.g. guidance experts, employment and placement services, matching services – both public and private – and training providers) with the information to assist individuals to make decisions about education, training and/or employment.

Legal framework

The Italian Constitution, following its 2001 reform, gives regions and autonomous provinces full competence in regulating and managing initial vocational training, labour market policies (except for the general norms), employment services (including matching services) and education and training guidance for students (together with the Ministry of Education’s Regional Offices). Accordingly, the way in which skills anticipation is carried out and regulated is decided at the regional/local level. At national level, ISFOL, directly linked to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, seeks to coordinate activities across Italy.

Governance

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (*Ministero del Lavoro e della Politiche Sociali*), at national level, and the regions and autonomous provinces, at local level, have responsibility for implementing skills anticipation activities. Numerous national actors share their data with ISFOL through the use of the occupational profile system, including:

- ISTAT with Labour Force Survey (LFS) data.
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (offering data collected through the website *Cliclavoro*, which is designed to support matching labour demand and supply rather than function as a skills anticipation tool)
- The National Institute for Work Accidents Insurance (*Instituto Nazionale Assicurazione contro gli infortuni sul Lavoro*, L’Inail) for data on work accidents
Discussions between ISFOL and the authorities at regional and provincial level, aimed at strengthening the coordination of skills anticipation and increasing networks between organisations, are currently under way.

**The role of stakeholders in the skills anticipation system**

The main stakeholders of the skills anticipation system are policymakers (at national and regional levels), and research institutions. Coordination of the system is done at a national level, and given the role of regional and provincial governments it remains a challenge. While the presence of local observatories and the range of anticipation policies at the regional and local levels provide detailed information, this has come at the price of using different methodologies and classifications. ISFOL is working with various stakeholders towards harmonising the variety of methodological approaches currently in use. In March 2016, the government launched a national skills strategy following the OECD approach. A uniform and comprehensive approach to skill assessment and measurement is expected, although the details of the strategy and stakeholders involved are still to be defined.

Policymakers at both national and regional levels are institutionally responsible for implementing skills anticipation systems, and for using their results in shaping and developing national or local level polices. Research institutions generally support central and local institutions as well as social partners in designing and implementing the different activities and surveys which feed skills anticipation activities.

**Target groups**

The intended target groups vary according to the type of skills anticipation instruments available. The most relevant target groups are local governments, training institutions (universities included), labour market intermediaries and individuals in general (mainly students and jobseekers). In particular, ISFOL, with its National Integrated Information System of Professions, mainly targets the public employment service (Servizi per l’Impiego) and policymakers at different levels. Its skills anticipation tools are potentially useful for training institutions, students, jobseekers, employers and researchers. AlmaLaurea, with its annual reports, primarily targets universities in its network (providing them with annual graduate profile reports and an annual report on the occupational destination of their graduates). Upper-second level students who are about to enrol in universities are an important target group as well (through a dedicated career guidance service). Recent graduates and companies are also surveyed. The Excelsior Survey conducted by the Unioncamere targets policymakers and training institutions operating at national, regional and local levels.

The direct influence of skills anticipation on public policy has been traditionally weak. Educational institutions and training providers use skills anticipation survey results both for informing their strategies and for supporting student guidance and counselling. Trade unions and employers’ organisations are mostly involved in national or local level boards or committees that are in charge of...
steering and monitoring the skills anticipation activities. Frequently, the boards/committees are coordinated by an institution which is formally responsible for education, training, employment or local development policies, depending on the particular issue being addressed. Employers’ associations also act as direct customers and users of skills anticipation aimed at supporting the planning of continuous vocational training at the sectoral level.

**Funding and resources**

There are no clear figures on how much is spent on skills anticipation in Italy. The volume of actors involved in skills anticipation activities makes it difficult to identify the scale of expenditure. Much of the funding for skills anticipation is supplied at the local level, given that responsibility for skills anticipation rests largely with local authorities. However, some national level funding is provided for some actors. ISFOL, for which the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies provides funding, had a budget of €151m in 2014; however, this sum covers activities other than research relating to vocational education and training (VET) and employment. AlmaLaurea, had a total budget of €3.9m in 2013, 18 per cent of which was supplied by the Italian government, while the rest came mainly from university funding.

**Methods and tools**

There are several skills anticipation activities conducted in Italy, focusing mainly on skills assessment and skills forecasting.

**Skills assessment**

The main skills survey in the country is the National Survey on Occupational Profiles (*Indagine campionaria sulla professioni*). It is an employee survey carried out by ISFOL every five years (the last of which was conducted in 2013) which addresses 16,000 individuals representative of the approximately 800 occupational profiles used by ISTAT and ISFOL, providing data to the National Integrated Information System of Professions. Data collected include the expertise and skills needed for a range of occupations along with tasks undertaken in each occupation. Several dimensions of work activity are analysed: knowledge, skills, work context, work styles, abilities, general work activities and values. For each of these items, the survey assesses their importance in the occupation and the level of complexity of the item required to perform the job.

Until 2013-2014, ISFOL conducted an employer survey, the ‘Audit of Professional Needs’ (*Audit dei fabbisogni professionali*), (3) on a sample of 35,000 private firms (excluding public employers) via face-to-face interviews. The main goal of the survey was to gather qualitative information on shortages or lack of specific knowledge or skills relating to tasks across specific occupations.

The AlmaLaurea survey uses a panel of people who graduated from the 64 universities in its network (covering 80 per cent of people graduating from Italian universities). Since 1998, data are gathered on graduates immediately after graduation and follow up data is sought one, three and five years following
graduation. AlmaLaurea offers a match-making service between graduates looking for employment and graduate recruiters.

The Excelsior Survey is a nationally representative annual survey of around 100,000 Italian companies, implemented in 1997. The survey collects information on job profiles into which companies are looking to recruit people. (4) Since 2010, Excelsior collects information on skills needs, particularly general and transversal skills, and provides an indication of skills shortages. It is implemented within the Italian National Statistical System (called Sistema Statistico Nazionale, SISTAN). It deals with the type of vacancies offered by companies, the level of education and experience required of applicants, whether training is provided at the point of recruitment, and the difficulties experienced in recruiting people.

Given the strong regional economic disparities and the fact that education and training are regional responsibilities, every region and autonomous province is entitled to adopt its own skills assessments. As a result, almost all of them have their own systems for regional or sub-regional skills assessments. In general these differ substantially according to their principal objectives and the methods used because they are designed to respond to local strategies and political mandates. In some areas it is possible to find parallel skills assessment activities at different geographical levels, though this is becoming less common. Skills assessments at the local level are often based on questionnaire surveys of employers and individuals, and secondary analysis of administrative data.

Skills forecasts

The surveys mentioned under skills assessment also have a forecasting element. In particular, the AlmaLaurea survey on university-to-market transition has both a short- and medium-term time horizon built into it. It provides information on changes universities need to implement in order to train future graduates with the skills demanded by the labour market.

However, there are also two forecasting exercises which provide medium-term projections:

- The Excelsior project medium-term forecasts are developed by an econometric model similar to that used by CEDEFOP for its forecasting exercises. The model forecasts occupation demand for 30 sectors, including the estimations for both the expansion and replacement demand component. Sectoral forecasts are subsequently provided for occupations at ISCO 3 digits level. (5) Since 2015, forecasts are produced annually with a time horizon of five years. So far, only demand forecasts have been produced; supply-side forecasts are foreseen in 2017.

- Within the National Integrated Information System of Professions, ISFOL conducts medium-term forecasts by using an econometric model of the demand for labour. Also, in this case, projections are provided for different occupations, including the estimations for both expansion and replacement demand. The time horizon is five years and the exercise is conducted every two to three years.

Skills foresight

No practices of this type are undertaken in Italy.
Other skills anticipation practices

Other skills anticipation practices are conducted in Italy, namely:

- The ISFOL Audit of Skills Needs, which focuses on competences and skills needed by employees, mapped through employers’ surveys;
- Employer association surveys focusing on in-demand skills for planning and fine-tuning the content of continuous vocational training and
- Surveys conducted by training institutions/providers, similar to the surveys mentioned in the above point, for developing and aligning the supply of training with demand.

Dissemination and use

Use of skills anticipation in policy

In Italy, it is difficult to identify the use of skills anticipation evidence in policy design and development, either at national or local levels. This is in large part because the outputs of the skills anticipation system are sometimes considered to be of poor quality by policymakers, and/or because of the partial coverage provided by various outputs. One of the main uses is informing and supporting people in deciding which educational or training path to take and providing them with information about the skills needed to find a job or change job. Guidance, employment, placement and counselling services are therefore the most important target groups for skills anticipation information, but they operate at a service level and not at the policy level. Training institutions – mainly upper-secondary schools, IVET (6) providers, universities and other non-academic tertiary-level training institutions – use estimates of future skills demand for adapting curricula and training content to the needs of the labour market.

Target groups’ uses of skills anticipation outputs

The ISFOL National Integrated Information System of Professions web portal is aimed at a wide range of target groups: policymakers at national and local levels, educational institutions and training providers, social partners, research institutions, students choosing courses at university or in VET, young graduates, job-seekers and, in general, workers looking for a career change. The web portal was launched in 2012 and within two years registered 1,000 visits a day. (7)

Much effort has been made to disseminate labour market intelligence to employers and training institutions. Traditionally, training institutions have tended not to use skills forecasts when designing their courses, while employers have tended not to identify their future skills needs. It has been noted that training providers have been resistant to significantly modifying their training offer – given the costs of doing so – in response to changing labour market demands. It continues to be a challenge to influence employers and training providers.

As a result of the work being undertaken by ISFOL, (8) Excelsior and AlmaLaurea, upper-second level graduates have access to a wide range of data on higher education opportunities. (9) There is, however, no clear evidence on the extent to which the data are used by students.
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The following sources were drawn upon in preparing this document.


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Endnotes

(1) See: http://fabbisogni.isfol.it/

(2) An example worth mentioning will be the standardisation of the categories following the ‘unitàprofessionali’ (literally ‘professional units’) classification, a more detailed version of the ISCO 88 (which is the standard classification used by Istat).

(3) ISFOL (n.d.).

(4) Unioncamere (2016b).

(5) For an overview of ISCO 2, 3, and 4 digits please see http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/1978984/6037342/ISCO-88-COM.pdf

(6) Initial Vocational Education and Training


(8) ISFOL. 2012.

(9) Mignoli (2012).