



“Recruitment and retention in the education sector, a matter of social dialogue” A European project by ETUCE and EFEE

Country case: Italy

The following country case presentation is based on talks with representatives from the Italian teachers' unions FLC-CGIL and UIL in Rome in July 2012. Within the framework of the project “Recruitment and retention in the education sector, a matter of social dialogue” it focuses on the following three topics:

1. Recruitment and retention in the education sector
2. Challenges to recruitment and retention of teachers
3. Recruitment and retention as a topic of the social dialogue in education in Italy

1.1. What is the current situation in Italy with regard to recruitment and retention of teachers?

Recruitment:

In Italy, the Ministry of Economy and Finances is responsible for economic, financial and budget policy and planning of public investment, coordinating public expenditure and verifying its trends, revenue policies and tax system.¹ In this context it allocates funds to the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research. This budget is used to finance the salaries of teachers, school staff and other people employed in the education sector. Each year the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research informs the schools about the number of employees are needed for the operational work and how many can be recruited. Then, the trade unions have the opportunity to bargain on the number of staff numbers at the different levels within the same budget. According to the Italian trade unions in education, currently 800.000 teachers are permanently employed in Italy.

In the last twenty years there have been increased problems about precarious working conditions in the education system. For example, the schools must ensure that an equivalent substitute is present during vacation times or

¹ See website of the Ministry of Economy and Finances of Italy:
<http://www.tesoro.it/en/index.asp>

illness. At the level of the districts there are list of teachers available to step in and act as a replacement. In this case, people with a license to teach are the first choice to replace absent fully employed teachers. When this first list is empty the school has to use a second list and employ people who hold a master degree but are not entitled to teach. In case of simple short-term substitution the schools' principal offices can find a substitute. In case of long-term substitution it is the directors of the district school offices who are in charge of employing a substitute. However, even in cases of long term/permanent vacancies substitute teachers do not get a proper employment contract. They rather get fixed-term employment contracts at the beginning of a school year and which come to an end in June.

During the last two years the unions have tried to negotiate a practice change with the aim to create more regular permanent employment. But due to severe budget cuts the negotiations remained unsuccessful, and no acceptable offer was made. The trade unions suspect that there may also be political reasons in order to support private schools. According to the Italian trade unions in education currently, about 94% students go to public schools.

Retention:

At present, the issue of retention seems to be no major concern in the Italian education system. In the view of the teacher unions the reason for this is the lack of real alternatives. The change from one discipline or sector to another proves to be difficult for teachers. While representatives of the professional groups such as lawyers, architectures, economists can get a teaching license a work in education², teachers would need to invest much more time and efforts to re-skill and to change careers. A further problem in this context is the fact that many representatives from other professional groups with a teaching license do not work as teachers but they do keep their places for the sake of a secure workplace.

1.2. Are there policies facilitating recruitment and retention and how they improved the situation compared to previous policies? If so, have the social partners given their input?

Apparently, there are no policies in place yet to regulate recruitment and retention in education. The teacher unions have been demanding that regulations of this kind would be established. Each year, the teacher unions have taken up negotiations for more permanent positions. However, due to budget restraints the situation has worsened during the last years.

There is a law establishing the number of recruited people per year. The trade unions get informed about the current number and have then the opportunity to file an objection. However, the Ministry of Finance is not obliged to take the complaint into consideration. Good results are matter of a well-functioning social dialogue, good will and compromise.

The social partners participate in collective bargaining. The recognized education social partners five teacher unions and one employers' association. The level of trade union organisation is quite high. About 48% of the public sector's employees are organized in trade unions. In education there are three large teachers unions and a few autonomous trade unions. On the other side of the negotiation there are the Ministry of Economy and Finances, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research and the Ministry for Public Administration and Innovation.

² Until 2011 holders of a Master's degree could apply for a teaching license. Since 2011 holders of a Master's degree need to prove two more years of supplementary training to be allowed to pass the final examination for the teaching license.

1.3. Where do you still see further needs for new policies? What areas have maybe not been sufficiently covered yet?

There are several areas where conditions should be improved:

- Excessive workload: These days, teachers work much more than thirty ago. They teach larger classes integrating pupils with learning difficulties. When teachers are absent, very often and in order to save financial means the school principals would rather split classes instead of finding substitutes. There would not be much logistical support to the enlarged classes either.
- Child care: In Italy, good laws are in force regulating maternity leave. However, combining family and professional life remains very difficult, due to the lack of child care facilities and insufficiently flexible working conditions.
- Disadvantaged schools: Particular attention to and support for children and teachers in "difficult schools" should be increased.
- Harmonisation of salary levels: The relevant Ministries should find a way to balance the significant wage and salary differences between the North and the South of Italy. These salary differences are the reason for the sector facing high mobility with teachers moving from the South to the North. Most of those teachers fill temporary vacancies on an annual basis waiting for a later chance to get permanently employed. This phenomenon has not only a serious impact on social structures but also on the quality of education. Some teachers provide relief support for many years. They often receive salaries during the school year only and do struggle during the months of the summer holiday. Their social security contributions are lower than those of the permanently employed teachers, too.
- Motivation of weaker pupils: Like in most European countries, Italy faces serious problems about early school leavers. Educational disadvantage and efficient motivation is a major challenge for the education sector particularly in so-called risk areas. Aiming for significant social changes through education the education sector should focus on strategy building to motivate pupils to study and thus to develop best future professional and life perspectives.
- Motivation of teachers: Not much has been done to increase teachers' motivation either. As a matter of fact, many teachers would change not only their current workplace if there was a chance, but also their occupation in order to secure their living. These days, many teachers struggle to defend their living conditions due to low salaries. Italian teachers' monthly average net salary is about 1.400 Euro. Taxes and living costs particularly in big towns are too high.
- Recruitment: For a long time, teacher unions have asked for rules enabling teachers to work at the same school for at least three years. So far, teachers in Italy have to be flexible to work at different schools each year. New rules regulating the time of the posts could help to improve school activities. Teachers could get to know their students much better and be able to efficiently support weaker pupils. Also, the schools would be able to make reliable long-term plans for all subjects and thus improve the quality of education. Currently, schools have to adapt their plans each year.

1.4. Are any future reforms being planned?

There has been no plan for reforms on teachers' recruitment and retention but for a reform on teaching licensing. The Ministry of Economy and Finances has also introduced plans for public administration reforms.

In the opinion of the teachers' unions the education sector needs more policies regulating the sector rather than just reforms of the few existing ones. They have been asking for rules and regulations on longer duration of posts at the same schools on three-year basis.

They also have also suggested establishing rules limiting the expensive, inefficient and tiring movement of teachers between different schools. Italian teachers work at up to three different schools within the same school year. They do not get financial compensation for the transport costs.

1.5. Is the policy implementation the same in all of Italy or are there regional differences?

It is the same in all of Italy.

1.6. Has an assessment been carried out?

For a long time, the teachers unions have unsuccessfully asked for a national assessment on the learning outcomes of the students and a long-term recruitment plan. It was suggested as a three-year plan. Instead, the Ministry of Education tried to assess the performance of the teachers but not the entire education system.

2.1. Where do you see the main challenges to recruit teachers and to keep them in employment?

1. Professional career insecurity
2. Poor working conditions
3. Low salaries
4. Lack of interest for certain core subjects such as mathematics (probably related to professional development. Not enough pedagogical courses at math and sciences faculties.)
5. Gender imbalance (traditionally, in preprimary schools predominantly female teachers. Related to salary, too. Men are still primary breadwinners in Italian families and are therefore rather looking for jobs in Higher Education)
6. Poor public image of the teaching profession
7. Worsening perception of parents who often believe that teachers and not the difficult conditions in the sector are solely responsible for bad education quality and bad Pisa results.

2.2. What are factors that could attract teachers in Italy to the sector?

Compared to the private sector salaries are very low but there are other benefits such as job security in case of permanent employment, good working times, longer holiday, pensions usually higher in public sector than in private sector, earlier retirement (currently introduction of new law on retirement though).

2.3. Has the current economic and financial crisis had an impact on the situation? Have you noticed particular problems with regard to recruitment and retention as a result of the crisis?

In education the workforce has been dramatically reduced. There have been about 140.000 less teachers during the last three years. About 100.000 teachers have retired but have not been replaced. There are also less vacancies for principals and less for non-teaching school staff. The number of schools has been reduced from 13.000 to 9.000 schools within the last three years. The merger of schools was planned long before the economic crisis but the reform implementation has been done much faster and in brutal ways. Schools must also deal with lower budgets and bigger classes. Some schools find solutions through additional project money. The schools are autonomous and dispose on their budget and workforce. They can ask the parents at the beginning of each school year to contribute with a facultative amount for copies and other study material. They can also look for sponsors to buy equipment.

4.1. Is there an efficient social dialogue in the education sector in Italy and how is it organised?

The social partners naturally engage in collective bargaining for the collective agreements. There is also a dialogue about the contents of the curricula. The Ministry of Education issues a national draft CV with a focus on the skills to achieve and the contents of each discipline. The trade unions and professional association are asked to comment on the proposal and to make further recommendations. Also, the schools can provide an input via an online platform where they have the opportunity to participate in an active debate.

4.2. Where are the social partners involved? Would they be consulted and have a saying on the development of education policies? In particular with regard to recruitment and retention policies?

There are no policies in place yet. The social partners can lobby for their members' interests. They also get consulted. However, there is no established definition for the way of consultations. Each government changes priorities and thus the pace of consultation with the social partners. Sometimes, they also simply seem to forget about the social dialogue and the social partners need to remind them. Often, decisions have already been taken by the time when the opinions of the social partners are heard.

4.3. What do you expect from the European level policy developments? Where could the European social dialogue in education help to improve the situation in recruitment and retention?

In the future the interviewed teacher's unions would like to see regulations that will enable people to reach similar working and living conditions in all EU member states. The introduction of new standards should lead to equal purchase power in all countries in the EU. They would also hope for an improvement of their profession's image and public recognition of their efforts. Considerations should be given to the fact that teachers do work more hours than only those 18 hours of teaching in school classes. Eg. in upper secondary schools teachers have to attend coordination meetings, engage in teachers' councils and spend more time on preparing the courses. The entire school system would also benefit from the introduction of regular vocational training for teachers at all levels.