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Erasmus+ KA2 – Strategic Partnership for Adult Education

**ISEV - Inclusive Senior Education Through Virtual U3A**

ANALYSIS ON THE SENIOR EDUCATION IN ITALY

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**INTRODUCTION**

This analysis examines the state of the Adult Education in Italy with a particular focus on the lifelong learning and the formal and non-formal educational offer for seniors.

The purpose of the first and the second part of this analysis is to explore the Italian lifelong learning system and participants’ expectations prior to enrolling in a training course organized by Fondazione Mondo Digitale (FMD) within the ISEV project. In order to analyse seniors expectations, FMD has carried out a survey to determine how their expectations were formulated, and what factors influenced their decision to participate in a training course.

The last part of the analysis is focused on the FMD experience respect to the four pillars of the project: social inclusion, use of ICT, active seniors’ participation and engagement of the youth into the senior education.

1. **THE LIFELONG LEARNING IN ITALY AND THE SENIORS**
   1. **The population’s ageing process in Italy**

Similarly to most advanced economies, an important aspect of the demographic situation in Italy is the ageing process of the population produced by declining fertility and by improvements of life expectancy.

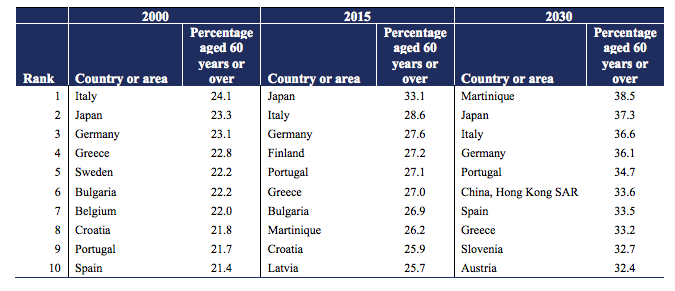
As a consequence, the percentage of the seniors population is growing in the Italian society. This change will have a significant impact on families and individuals.

On the one hand, the percentage of active population is decreasing, on the other hand, always more people can not participate in the community’s life. The retirement moment is in fact experienced very often as a moment of exclusion from the society because the pensioner hardly finds spaces and places in which to use acquired skills and experience.

In this context, the education as lifelong process has a strategic role in the perspective of elderly people’s relocation in the society in order to harness their skills and improve their autonomy and quality of life.

Compared to the rest of the world, Italy is one of the countries in which the ageing process is very significant (2° position after Japan)[[1]](#footnote-1).

Table I. Ten Countries with the most aged populations, 2000, 2015 and 2030[[2]](#footnote-2)



* 1. **Lifelong Learning against social exclusion**

Dealing with the issue of seniors education, we must consider the topic of social exclusion, a condition more often experienced by seniors over 65 for economic reasons and/or the lack of social relationships. The changes on family structure and job mobility of young people during last decades have, in fact, their consequences on elder relationships.

According to the Italian Law n. 328/2000 establishing the Commission for the Investigation of Social Exclusion, social exclusion, from a normative point of view, means poverty combined with social marginalisation[[3]](#footnote-3).

Therefore, citizens not more able to participate in the social life and to integrate themselves in the community, are excluded from society. As a consequence of this situation these persons don’t have access to common resources.

Nevertheless, today we know that the fight against social exclusion requires the marginalised groups’ active empowerment and participation, hence lifelong learning must be considered as a possibility of re-evaluation and social promotion.

In this sense, the educational activities are beneficial for senior citizens providing them with the skills to face the challenges of present society and to be more active and participative. It is therefore possible to improve the seniors’ well-being and quality of life through education. Education can impact seniors' quality of life considering that social activities, keeping active and busy and meeting other people are important for retaining an interest in life, avoiding depression and, consequently, for well-being.

Moreover, seniors education promotes peer to peer exchanges in order to share experiences and competences; encourages the active participation in the society and consequently enhances seniors’ self-esteem and identity.

For these reasons, over the last years, the students’ number of Universities of the Third Age and the Popular Universities in Italy has increased a lot, together with the participation in other initiatives within the formal and non-formal educational offer.

* 1. **The Legislative Framework**

The Italian legislative landscape on Adult Education presents different characteristics at national and regional level.

At national level, the normative is characterized by the lack of a specific legislative framework. At the regional level, instead, we should highlight the effort to create a territorial system of orientation to the training.

In Italy, 1997 has been an important year for the Adult Education because the Law n.59 of 15th March[[4]](#footnote-4) and the Ministerial Order n. 455[[5]](#footnote-5) have been enacted establishing the Permanent Territorial Centers for Adult Education (CTP).

During the year 2000 the State and the Regions signed an agreement concerning the reorganization and strengthening of adult permanent education[[6]](#footnote-6). This document affirms that Adult Education is an integral part of the citizenship right and State and Regions have to work to create an integrated lifelong learning system in order to offer training opportunities to adults of all ages and conditions.

From this point of view, Adult Education has become an important resource for the local development and the recovery of the territory’s social identity.

Nevertheless, after more than ten years, with a considerable delay compared to the European context, in Italy the recognition of the importance of lifelong learning is enshrined in the Law n.92/2012[[7]](#footnote-7), the reform of the labour market.

The so-called Fornero reform recognizes the individual / universal right of the citizen to the recognition and validation of the learning outcomes acquired in formal, non formal and informal educational settings. Thus, it is claimed the paradigm of the learning throughout life, in a diachronic perspective (lifelong learning), in every place (lifewide learning) and the person has the right to the acquired skills’ recognition and validation.

In this new framework, based on the Fornero reform, in 2012, there has been the reform of adult education in Italy regulated by the Decree of President of Republic n. 263 of 29th October[[8]](#footnote-8), that marked the transition from the Permanent Territorial Centers for Adult Education (CTP) to Provincial Centers for Adult Education and Training (CPIA).

After a first starting phase, through several projects assisted by the *Ministry of Education, University and Research* (MIUR) from the 1st September 2014, fifty-six CPIA were activated in eight Italian Regions, and today there are 126 CPIA on a national scale.

The main innovation of this law, compared to the previous legislative system, is to have introduced the school autonomy with a head teacher and a director of general and administrative services. In this way the CPIA have become autonomous school institutions with their own staff and budget.

* 1. **The funding of third age education in Italy**

In Italy, national institutions, ministries and governmental agencies are not directly involved in supporting and funding educational activities for seniors.

These activities are mainly funded at a local level, decentralised, by regional and local authorities (Regioni, Province, Città). Through the emissions of calls and proposals, local authorities support specific projects of “voluntary sector” organisations (no-profit associations, seniors centers and Universities of the Third Age) experienced in the education field.

Depending on the donor and project many educational opportunities are free for elders. Still, some Universities of the third Age for example propose a wide palette of activities where some of them need a small contribution. Other organisation might just ask for annual membership as a form a contribution to be able to participate for free at the activities. As an example, Fondazione Mondo Digitale (FMD) implements since 2002 a project of intergenerational solidarity and social inclusion of elders through the use of ICT called “[Grandparents on the Internet](http://www.mondodigitale.org/cosa-facciamo/aree-intervento/invecchiamento-attivo/nonni-su-internet)”[[9]](#footnote-9). Within the years, the project has been implemented in many different Italian regions (and also abroad) supported by many regional or local councils. This year implementation is supported by the city of Rome.

1. **THE EDUCATIONAL OFFER FOR ADULTS IN ITALY**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines “adult education” as the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development. Adult education, however, must not be considered as an entity in itself, it is a subdivision, and an integral part of, a global scheme for lifelong education and learning[[10]](#footnote-10).

Currently, Adult Education in Italy is developing and there is not yet an homogeneous educational offer at national level. Moreover, there are no educational models that are differentiated according to the ages so the category “adults” includes different generations.

* 1. **The formal educational offer**

Regarding the formal educational offer for adults, the Provincial Centers for Adult Education and Training (CPIA) have a central role.

CPIA are state schools established by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research. The school offers Italian and foreign citizens adult education services and activities, considered as an element to encourage the personal, cultural, social and economic growth of all citizens.

The centres are organised to establish a close link with local authorities, the business world and the regulated professions, and to provide education according to three learning levels:

1. Italian language and social integration courses for foreigners (Italian L2). These courses lead to a certificate stating at least A2 level mastery of the Italian language according to the common European framework for languages designed by the Council of Europe;
2. Programs aimed at acquiring a diploma at the end of the first cycle of education (a compulsory education certificate) and certification attesting basic skills related to compulsory education;
3. Second-level programmes, delivered by education institutions offering technical, vocational and artistic programmes, leading to an upper secondary education diploma: these may be technical schools, professional schools and artistic schools.

Regarding the requirements for participants:

1. The Italian language courses for foreigners  admits adults over 18 years old with non Italian citizenship and also with an educational title obtained in their countries of origin;
2. The first level education courses admits adults over 18 years old who have not obtained the middle school certificate;
3. The second level education courses admits adults over 18 years old who have the middle school certificate, or young people over 16 who have the middle school certificate and can demonstrate that they cannot attend a daily course because of the job.

In the light of the above, it is clear that the formal educational offer for adults does not provide specific training opportunities for seniors, who must therefore turn to the non-formal educational offer that will be analyze below.

* 1. **The non- formal educational offer**
     1. **Popular Universities and Universities of the Third Age**

Popular Universities have begun to develop since the Second World War, promoted by no-profit associations and social movements. In the 70s, the orientations on adult education and lifelong learning have progressively developed and the Popular Universities have been gaining in importance.

At the same time, the attention to the senior lifestyle and quality of life has increased, by both public actors and social organizations and movements. Alongside senior clubs and Popular Universities are born the Universities of the Third Age, destined to be developed over time.

Since the 80s, these Universities have been an opportunity for the seniors to participate in courses on different topics form general culture to more specific topics.

Nowadays, the Popular Universities and the Universities of the Third Age are spread all over the Italian Regions and those who call themselves "Popular" are open also to young people. Moreover, over time, new courses have been activated on all the possible areas of interest, from archaeology to bridge without excluding traditional topics.

From the first experiences, today there is an organic structure at the national level that has led to the confederation of most of these Universities. At the moment, in Italy there are about 1000 among Popular Universities, Universities of the Third Age, the Free Age, almost all of them confederate within the three National Confederations Fipec[[11]](#footnote-11), Federuni[[12]](#footnote-12) and Unitre[[13]](#footnote-13).

* + 1. **No-profit associations and Senior centers**

The Associations in Italy have always considered the non-formal education as fundamental tool in order to improve population’s quality of life and to promote the cultural growth. The majority of the associations’ projects aims at preparing people for their role as an active and aware citizen.

In general, most of the association’s activities are held in the areas of education and training because their action represents an adult learning path divided into two moments of both informative and educational nature.

The associations’ crucial role in the field of non formal education has been rarely recognized by Italian institutions until the Agreement subscribed by the State-Regions Conference on March 2, 2000[[14]](#footnote-14).

Nowadays, there are a lot of associations that work in the field of non formal education with seniors, such as Arci, Acli, Legambiente, Aidea, Unla, Cesvot, Cofir, Cnupi and Auser.

The Association for Active Ageing (Auser) [[15]](#footnote-15) is the more active organization from the point of view of lifelong learning to fight against social exclusion and to promote the practice of active citizenship.

Moreover, from the 70s, there are a lot of auto-organised experiences denominated seniors centers. In these places seniors can attend a lot of training courses on ICT, theatre, artisan, cooking, etc. Over the years, these places have become very important for the seniors education.

1. **SENIORS EXPECTATIONS AND CONCERNS**

This paragraph presents the results of the questionnaires filled out by sixty seniors. The questionnaire on the Senior Education in Italy aimed to collect seniors expectations on the ISEV training course.

In the first two questions, participants were asked to provide information on their gender and age.

The next question was about the type of activities they miss. Here, 16 seniors answered “seniors club”.

Subsequently, participants were asked if they ever attended courses where students assisted them and if they like to have the youth involved in the classes.

The next questions regarded their confidence with PC and Internet and the desire to improve their competences in this field.

Regarding the topics, the more interesting are:

* Natural and cultural monuments with excursion
* Geography
* Literature
* Medicine, health, security
* Psychology, sociology and other social sciences
* History and Philosophy
* Media and Communication
* Sport, games, recreation, dance
* Politics and law
* Languages

Regarding the question “What is important for you when choosing a U3A course, the majority of participants answered “Interestingness”.

As concern the reasons for what they want to learn something new, the majority of answers were: “I want to be in touch with the young generation” and “Learning makes me feel satisfied”.

Participants were also asked to describe their best motivation to education in U3A and the answers more popular were: “Meeting new people”, “Possibility of intergeneration dialogue with young people” and “Possibility of thinking about the history of our family and my own biography story”.

The last question of the questionnaire was “How do you evaluate the possibility to study in U3A for your quality of life?” and the majority of participants answered “Very important”.

1. **THE EXPERIENCE OF FONDAZIONE MONDO DIGITALE**

Since 2002 FMD has been working in the field on intergenerational solidarity and social inclusion elders through the use of ICT.

The Foundation started out with confidence in the winning role that could be played by the young in fighting the social alienation of the seniors over 65 and built an alliance between schools and social centers for the elderly. The first official agreement between the *Ministry of Innovation and Technologies* and the *Municipality of Rome* reached in 2002 opened the door to the *Grandparents on the Internet* project[[16]](#footnote-16). The validity of the training programs in the schools was then acknowledged. FMD took action to oppose recurrent illiteracy, improved the quality of life of seniors, and helped young people already familiar with digital technology assume responsibility.

Today, the **inter-generational learning method** is a model of national and transnational intervention. In 14 editions in 20 Italian Regions and 11 European Countries, FMD has succeeded in involving:

* 30,000 senior participants
* 21,000 students as tutors
* 2,100 coordinators/teachers

FMD offers people over 65 years old the generational exchange formula: school students teach pc, Internet and technologies to the elderly under the supervision of expert teachers in an authentic school of social welfare.

The model is based on collaborative, cooperative, and personalized teaching methods in which the young tutor is allowed to personalize the training provided to the individual needs of the adult learner. The difference between the entry levels of the participants no longer creates problems but instead enriches teaching processes and stimulates the search for new solutions.

The model is useful to promote social values and the development of life skills such as patience, communication skills, cooperation and active participation in the community and solidarity and dialogue between generations.

This type of intergenerational experience can help seniors to understand how they can actively participate in society and increases their self-awareness and motivation. Learning basic ICT skills and use of social media not represent the only learning outcome for seniors in the initiatives which focus on ICT. Seniors can also learn about young people’s lives and how to communicate with them. The contact with young people positively influences their self-esteem, improves their social and mentoring competences and their general health and wellbeing. Seniors feel valued and feel that their role in society is recognized. Depending on the specific focus of the initiative, seniors can also learn about many different areas, such as nature, cooking, arts, theatre, storytelling and so forth.

On the other hand, students can understand the importance of intergenerational exchange and they benefit from intergenerational activities by improving their social and communication skills and discovering older people’s worlds. In several case studies, young people also learn about teaching methods and test their skills in a context which is more similar to a work environment than a school one.

They have the opportunity to discover and build on their talents and to learn from seniors about traditional values, professions, techniques and folklore. During the implementation of activities, young people are required to demonstrate punctuality, flexibility and empathy.

In conclusion, the model is a winning one especially in the training area and includes the transmission of values, dialogue, and the sense of belonging to a community among their objectives. In tune with this method choice, also the training kit provides different instructions for use for the different parties involved: *Guidelines for Grandparents*[[17]](#footnote-17), *Guidelines for tutors*[[18]](#footnote-18)*, Guidelines for tea*chers[[19]](#footnote-19)). The project also strengthens all the fundamental skills for 21st century education.

Today there are different project implementation models with different local partners in different Italian Regions which have all been inspired by the initial model: the teachers are young students supervised by expert teachers who have time and training to mentor them.

The Italian media defined the [Grandparents on the Internet](http://www.mondodigitale.org/cosa-facciamo/aree-intervento/invecchiamento-attivo/nonni-su-internet) model a “export format” project for two reasons: it can be replicated in any territorial context, from areas devastated by earthquake to tiny rural villages near Liege, Belgium, and because it is formulated in complete turnkey version supported by the coding of the knowledge required for its implementation (manuals, questionnaires, evaluation tests, guides, and training workshops, etc.).

**CONCLUSIONS**

This analysis has focused on the state of the senior education in Italy and seniors’ expectations regarding their participation in training activities.

Nowadays, senior education is related to the concept of a learning society to ensure equal learning opportunities for all, regardless of the age. Since the 70s, senior education has become integral part of the lifelong learning concept, and it is not more limited to providing higher skills, retraining or upgrading older. It offers a second or third chance, ensures continuous improvement and self-improvement of the individual.

In Italy senior education and lifelong learning has become an established reality, a pathway to continually adapt to the requirements and face the challenges of changing society. The role of no-profit associations, seniors centers and Universities of the Third Age have been constantly increased in this respect and the intergenerational learning model has become always more used across the whole country.

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2. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: the 2015 Revision,* New York, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Law n. 328 of 8th November 2000, *Legge quadro per la realizzazione del sistema integrato di interventi e servizi sociali*, <http://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/00328l.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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5. Ministerial Order n. 455 of 29th July 1997, *Educazione in età adulta - Istruzione e formazione*, <https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/argomenti/ifts/eda/om455.shtml> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Agreement n. 223 of 2nd March 2000, *Accordo tra Governo, Regioni, Province, Comuni e Comunità montane per riorganizzare e potenziare l’Educazione permanente degli Adulti*, <http://www.isfol.it/sistema-documentale/banche-dati/normative/archivio/accordo-2-marzo-2000/Accordo_PCM2marzo2000.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ### Law n. 92 of 28th June 2012, *Disposizioni in materia di riforma del mercato del lavoro in una prospettiva di crescita*, <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2012/07/03/012G0115/sg>

   [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ### Decree of President of Republic n. 263 of 29th October 2012, *Regolamento recante norme generali per la ridefinizione dell'assetto organizzativo didattico dei Centri d'istruzione per gli adulti [Regulation framework for the re-organization of the adult education centers]*, <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/02/25/13G00055/sg>

   [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://www.mondodigitale.org/cosa-facciamo/aree-intervento/invecchiamento-attivo/nonni-su-internet> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. UNESCO, *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education 2015*, <http://uil.unesco.org/adult-education/unesco-recommendation/unesco-recommendation-adult-learning-and-education-2015> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Italian Federation for Continuing Education [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Italian Universities Federation of third age, <http://www.federuni.org> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Universities of the Third Age, <http://www.unitre.net/unitre/Home.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Agreement subscribed by the State-Regions Conference on March 2, 2000, <http://www.orientamentoirreer.it/sites/default/files/norme/054%20accordo%20del%202%20marzo%202000.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <http://www.auser.it> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <http://www.mondodigitale.org/it/cosa-facciamo/aree-intervento/invecchiamento-attivo/nonni-su-internet> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <http://www.mondodigitale.org/it/risorse/pubblicazioni/nonni-su-internet-linee-guida-per-nonni-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <http://www.mondodigitale.org/it/risorse/pubblicazioni/nonni-su-internet-linee-guida-per-tutor-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <http://www.mondodigitale.org/it/risorse/pubblicazioni/nonni-su-internet-linee-guida-per-docenti-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)