

# ITALY National Report

## WP 2.6

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## Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the EDIFY EDU European Project, which aims to address the skills gap in Business Management education concerning workplace equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). It analyzes the history and evolution of business management education. The report evaluates the incorporation of EDI in the curriculum and its impact on the labor market.

Despite advancements in business practices, business management education still perpetuates labor market segregation and discrimination based on gender and other intersectionalities. The report compares the proposed European educational frameworks: the European framework for the personal, social, and learning-to-learn key competence (LifeComp), the European entrepreneurship competence framework (EntreComp), and the digital competence framework for citizens (DigComp) with business management courses in Italy. It examines the current labor market, including a gender gap analysis, and investigates the experiences of students and professionals regarding EDI in the workplace and EDI in business education.

The report also provides insights into the social impact of existing and emerging labor market laws and policies, highlighting any discrepancies between current practices and policies. In Italy, the labor market profile reveals a gender imbalance, with women underrepresented in senior management roles. Despite efforts to implement EDI strategies, women continue to face significant barriers to employment, especially in leadership positions. The report emphasizes the need for improved business education, aligned with the European Commission's recommendations, that incorporates equity, diversity, and inclusion to address existing gendered labor market disparities and workplace EDI discrimination.

Furthermore, the report identifies a list of recommended competencies necessary to tackle EDI issues in the workplace. These competencies are aligned with the European frameworks (EntreComp, LifeComp, and DigComp) and should be considered in the design and development of micro-credential modules as part of the EDIFY EDU project (Work Package 3).

## Section 1: Introduction

Business management education in Europe and the US share common ontological and epistemological assumptions based on classical management theory, referred to as scientific management. These early views, unconscious of gender and race discrimination, informed the foundations of modern business management. The work of Taylor, Fayol, Weber, Mayo, McGregor, Maslow, Herzberg and Schein, contributed to the evolution of business management thinking and schools of thought including: Scientific management, Bureaucracy, Human relations, Competitive advantage, and Shareholder value maximization. They have also shaped management practice conveying an image of who managers must be (Petriglieri, 2020).

Cummings (2016), noted the views of some scholars in relation to a decline in new ideas in business management studies, and points to the tendency to look to “best practice” instead of aiming for “next practice”. Furthermore, there is a gap between business management studies and the realities of management practice (Smith and Lewis, 2011). According to Petriglieri (2020), the challenge facing management is not the lack of new theories; it is the strength of the old ones, he argues that it is impossible to build the future using the blueprints of the past. Attempts by Lillian Gilbreth and others interested in improving the working conditions of women in industry, attempted to expand Scientific Management theory to consider the position of women and include a more humane and ‘soft’ approach to management. However, despite the early efforts to recognise women’s position in the labour market, diplomatic circles and international labour ignored women’s interests (Oldenziel, 2000). Scientific Management became associated chiefly with an accounting model of efficiency increasingly identified with Ford’s assembly line, especially in Europe. The new emerging business management theory combined paternalist notions with ideas about profitability, engineering concepts of mechanical efficiency and a military conception of discipline (Oldenziel, 2000).

The post-World War II period witnessed the spread of business schools at universities, where the first serious histories of management were written that outlined the fields noble origins and helped legitimize them as “university worthy.” The Ford and Carnegie reports outlined the legitimate form of a business school and its curricula, and with a further growth spurt in student numbers and advances in pedagogy and publishing, the first textbooks (as we know them) emerged en masse. Business management education based on a limited and flawed foundation continues to be taught throughout Europe and globally in leading business schools, inadvertently perpetuating labour market segregation and discrimination in relation to gender and other intersectionalities. Little has changed in 200 years, there is still no critical mass of women at the higher positions of organizations, from which women can access important organizational dynamics. The need arises for a new education model, one that takes into consideration equity, diversity and inclusion. It needs to be capable of transferring new knowledge in the workplace and contributing towards the alleviation of the existing gendered labour market and workplace EDI discriminatory practices.

## Section 2: Research Aims and Objectives

The national analysis aims to 1) demonstrate how multiple and intersecting social statuses shape business management education and labour market participation; 2) explore how business management in higher education acts as a conduit in the perpetuation and embedding inequalities in the structure of the labour market; 3) demonstrate how business management education inadvertently stratifies and eschews labour market participation resulting in unequal treatment and unequal opportunities, glass ceilings and inaccessible corridors, for a significant percentage of the labour market. These aims will be addressed by the following:

- Create new knowledge and understanding of the current situation and practices in EDI business management education across different European partner countries by:
  - Assessing the existing Higher Education management education courses and mapping of Learning Outcomes with EntreComp, DigiComp and LifeComp
  - Assessing the VET management education courses and mapping of Learning Outcomes with EntreComp, DigiComp and LifeComp
  - Comparing desk research on EDI European and national policies with private sector engagement on management education
  - Conducting qualitative research among business experts and representatives involved in focus groups/coaching circles and interviews for the collection of qualitative data

## Section 3: Business Management Education

### 3.1 Methodology

Regarding the mapping of relevant training provisions in the field of Business Management Education in Italy, the Italian partners - Talent Garden (TAG), API Servizi, and European Grants International Academy (EGInA) - conducted a thorough research divided by specific Educational Areas. TAG covered HE Education, API Servizi covered Structural Funds and Nationally Funded Education, and EGInA covered Non-formal and/or Private Education.

In total, the partners identified 70 Training courses (TCs) across all Educational Areas: 40 in HE Education (57%), 10 in Structural Funds and Nationally Funded Education (14%), and 20 in Non-formal and/or Private Education (29%). However, to identify EDI Business Management Trainings across all Educational Areas, the partners used specific "Key Words": Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, Gender, Multicultural, and Intercultural. Any Training Courses that contained at least one of these keywords were considered for analysis, bringing the real number of Training Courses to 40 across all Educational Areas. Specifically, there were 25 in HE Education (62.5%), 2 in Structural Funds and Nationally Funded Education (20%), and 13 in Non-formal and/or Private Education (65%).

### 3.2 Overview of Profile

1. Gender Equality Management ensures equal treatment and opportunities for individuals of all genders, addressing issues like the gender pay gap and discrimination.
2. Diversity and Inclusion Management creates inclusive work environments that respect diverse perspectives and experiences, promoting equal opportunities for all individuals.
3. Intercultural/Multicultural Diversity Management fosters cross-cultural communication and understanding, creating welcoming environments for individuals from different backgrounds.

#### Gender Equality Management:

- Total: 6 out of 40 training courses (15%)
  - Higher Education: 2 out of 25 (8%)
  - Structural funds and nationally funded education: 1 out of 2 (50%)
  - Non-formal and/or Private Education: 4 out of 13 (31%)

#### Diversity and Inclusion Management:

- Total: 25 out of 40 training courses (63%)
  - Higher Education: 18 out of 25 (72%)
  - Structural funds and nationally funded education: 1 out of 2 (50%)
  - Non-formal and/or Private Education: 7 out of 13 (54%)

#### Intercultural/Multicultural Diversity Management:

- Total: 7 out of 40 training courses (18%)
  - Higher Education: 5 out of 25 (20%)
  - Structural funds and nationally funded education: 0 out of 2 (0%)
  - Non-formal and/or Private Education: 2 out of 13 (15%)

### 3.3 Key Findings & Discussion

In summary, the analysis indicates that the 40 selected courses demonstrate limited alignment with European frameworks and significant gaps in several areas. None of the courses align with the DigiComp Framework, only a small percentage receive funding from structural and/or national funds, and a minority of the courses connect with SDGs beyond gender equality. Additionally, the identified competencies show that only 12.7% (8 out of 63) of the total competencies across the three frameworks are covered in the analyzed courses, while a significant number remain undeveloped or addressed by less than 20% of the courses.

### 3.3.1 European frameworks

The Desk Research analyzed the alignment of 40 Training Courses with the European Frameworks, namely EntreComp, DigiComp, and LifeComp. Among a total of 63 competencies belonging to the three frameworks, only 8 competencies are developed by at least 80% of the 40 courses analyzed, while 32 competencies are undeveloped or developed by less than 20% of the courses. All 40 courses develop certain competencies under the LifeComp framework. Positive results are observed under the EntreComp and LifeComp frameworks, with a particular focus on LifeComp due to its larger number of skills. However, there are negative results under the DigiComp framework, as only a few of the selected courses provide relevant digital competencies, and none exceed the 80% threshold.

### 3.3.2 General gap analysis

The **EntreComp** framework demonstrates mixed coverage, with competences such as vision, valuing ideas, ethical and sustainable thinking, self-awareness, planning and management, and working with others receiving significant attention. However, skills related to mobilizing resources, financial and economic literacy, mobilizing others, taking the initiative, coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk, spotting opportunities, creativity, motivation and perseverance, and learning through experience were less commonly emphasized. This highlights the need to enhance the inclusion of these competences for a well-rounded development of entrepreneurial skills.

On the other hand, the **DigiComp** framework was found to have inadequate coverage in the selected courses. Skills such as managing data, information, and digital content; sharing through digital technologies; managing digital identity; developing digital content; integrating and re-elaborating digital content; copyright and licenses; protecting devices; and solving technical problems were not adequately addressed. It is essential to incorporate these digital competences into the curriculum to ensure individuals are equipped with the necessary digital literacy and skills for the modern age.

In contrast, the **LifeComp** framework demonstrated a strong presence in the selected courses, with most competences extensively covered. Skills related to self-regulation, flexibility, wellbeing, empathy, communication, collaboration, growth mindset, critical thinking, and managing learning received significant attention. This comprehensive focus on personal and life competences, such as awareness and expression of emotions, nurturing resilience, adopting new ideas, understanding health and wellbeing factors, effective communication, fair collaboration, continuous learning, critical thinking, and self-directed learning, reflects a holistic approach to personal and professional development. The integration of these competences in the curriculum prepares individuals for personal growth, social interaction, and lifelong learning.

In conclusion, while there is a need for improvement in the coverage of certain competences within the EntreComp and DigiComp frameworks, the strong presence of the LifeComp competences in the selected courses highlights the importance of personal and life skills in the curriculum. By addressing the identified gaps and enhancing the inclusion of entrepreneurial and digital competences, along with the comprehensive coverage of personal and life competences, the curriculum can better equip individuals with a well-rounded skill set for success in various domains of life.



## Section 4: Qualitative Research

The aim of this activity was to involve a heterogeneous group of people, including students, professionals, senior managers, entrepreneurs and female entrepreneurs with representation from minority groups such as females, immigrants, and some from disadvantaged backgrounds to discuss issues of inclusion/exclusion at the workplace and implementation challenges of equality, diversity and inclusion. The objective of the activity was to identify the discrepancies between both European and national legislation and lived experience.

### 4.1 Procedure

Ethical approval was granted in the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology (IADT), Ireland. All European partners agreed and complied with the ethical approval process. Prior to participating in the studies, research candidates received an invitation and information sheet detailing: purpose of the study; invitation to participate; statement that participation is purely voluntary and confidential; option to remove data before a stated date. Participants were required to complete six questions in relation to their education and employment and sign a consent form before the session began. Identifiable information was not required for the purpose of the focus groups and the in-depth research interviews. Any identifiable information was changed in the transcripts to preserve anonymity. The face-to-face focus groups were recorded.

### 4.2 Thematic Analysis

Once the data was collected, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted to synthesize the information gathered from the focus groups and in-depth interviews. The six steps of thematic analysis were followed, this involved transcribing and anonymizing each focus group and in-depth interview, coding the data and identifying recurring themes. Upon completion of the thematic analysis, the overarching themes extracted from the data matched the themes of the focus group questions.

### 4.3 Focus Groups

The aim of this activity was to involve a heterogeneous group of people, including representatives from the social partners, business students, workers from minority groups or disadvantaged backgrounds, and to create a generative dialogue around a real case of inclusion/exclusion at the workplace which provided the research with qualitative data, including the lived experience of those involved. The participants talked about their own personal experiences working in part-time and full-time positions and the challenges and opportunities they faced. The participants who were or had been enrolled in college discussed the placement of EDI in the curriculum, their understanding and the challenges of implementation.

In total, we conducted four focus groups:

- One full-time student focus group
- One professional focus group
- Two professional and student focus groups

#### 4.3.1 Method - participants

##### 4.3.1.1 Recruitment

Participants for the student focus groups were recruited from Talent Garden Milano Srl – partner of the project - through heads of departments and course lecturers. The researchers had permission from the course lecturer to approach the class groups either at the end or the middle of class. All recruitment of students was carried out face to face. Participants for the professional focus groups were recruited from Talent Garden Milano Srl and API Servizi Srl – partners of the project – through email invitations. All focus groups were held online. Only those over the age of 18 could participate in the focus groups.

#### 4.3.1.2 Sample Size

The professional focus group consisted of five female participants. The homogeneous focus groups consisted of full-time professionals and students, three professionals and five students, four female and four male participants. The remaining focus groups consisted of three students enrolled in business programmes, one male and two female participants. The total number of participants in the focus groups was 16, eleven female and five male.

#### 4.3.1.3 Demographics

The age range among the focus groups was between 25-63 years of age. The professional participants worked in various roles in the following industries: vocational training, engineering, food, design and insurance. Their roles included project management, communication, sales, and consultancy. The length of time held in each position started from one year to forty years. The length of time employed in each company ranged from two years to forty years. Many of the students in the focus groups were employed in part and full-time positions in industries such as hospitality, catering, social media and fashion. The participants had varied educational backgrounds with a range of credentials including bachelor's degree and master's Degrees.

### 4.3.2 Design

The study was designed on the premise that participants would not be working in the same company, however, in most groups, participants were familiar with each other. Each participant signed a consent form and agreed to keep discussions confidential. The focus groups questions were designed to provoke interpersonal dynamics within the participating student, professional and homogenous groups. The focus groups were held in March, April and May 2023. All focus groups were held online due to scheduling difficulties with participants. All focus groups were semi-structured and somewhat directed by the researcher in an attempt to elicit the sharing of experiences and opinions among the participants.

### 4.3.3 Materials

The following list of questions were asked under three themes: Education, Promotion and Progression and Organisational Culture. Additional relevant questions were asked by the interviewer from the respondent's answers.

#### Theme 1: Education

- Brief overview of module studies
- Did your studies include modules on: EDI, empathy, kindness, etc.?

#### Theme 2: Promotion/Progression

- Have you been promoted since you joined this company? If yes, how many times?
- Have you applied for a promotion and been unsuccessful? Did you think this was a fair outcome? Why?

#### Theme 3: Organisation Culture

- Can you talk a bit about the organizational culture?
- Do you feel your company operates fair and transparent procedures in relation to pay, promotion and recognition of effort?
- Does equal pay operate in your company between women and men?
- What percentage of the senior management team are female?
- What percentage of the Board are female?
- Discussion Question: What changes would you like to see introduced in the organization?
- Does your company operate EDI policies and could you tell us about them?
- Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

## 4.4 In-Depth Interviews

Ten in-depth research interviews were conducted, the participants were small Italian business owners, female entrepreneurs, freelancers and senior managers. Participants represented different economic sectors and small and medium sized enterprises. The objective of this task was to go deeper in understanding the complexity of labour settings and the difficulties encountered specifically in implementing the EDI principles. Five of the interviews were conducted with female entrepreneurs, in order to understand the specificity of their condition and their career path.

### 4.4.1 Method - participants

#### 4.4.1.1 Recruitment

Recruitment for professional participants took place through Talent Garden Milano Srl and API Servizi Srl networks. Email invitations were sent to specific target groups. Only those over the age of 18 could participate in the focus groups and interviews.

#### 4.4.1.2 Sample Size

The professional interviews consisted of ten interviews, three male and seven female.

#### 4.4.1.3 Demographics

The age range was between 29-63 years old, with the average age of 40. They represented a variety of different industries and held positions as chief executive officer (CEO), creative director, sales director, and founder and designer. The length of time held in each position started from two years to forty years, with an average of eleven and a half years in position. The length of time employed in each company ranged from three years to forty years, with an average of eleven years in an organisation/self-employed. The participants had varied educational backgrounds with a range of credentials. Three participants held a Diploma, one held a bachelor's degree, and six participants held a master's degree.

### 4.4.2 Design

The study was designed to gather insights from female entrepreneurs and other industry experts through in-depth research interviews. Participants were selected based on their relevance and expertise in a range of different fields, sized companies and self-employed experts. Two participants out of ten were affiliated. Each participant signed a consent form and agreed to keep the discussions confidential. The interviews were conducted between March and April 2023.

### 4.4.3 Materials

The following list of questions were asked under three themes: EDI Principle Interpretations, and Implementation Challenges and Competences Used or Needed. Additional relevant questions were asked by the interviewer from the respondent's answers.

#### Theme 1: EDI Principle Interpretations

- How do you understand the concept EDI / Equality /Diversity /Inclusion?
- How do you see the current status of EDI in your company?

#### Theme 2: Implementation Challenges

- How do you see EDI-themes affecting your daily work as a manager?
- What are the most challenging aspects of managing EDI?
- Can you give an example of a challenging situation to manage EDI in your daily work? How did you handle the situation?

#### Theme 3: Competences Used or Needed

- What do you see as the most valuable skills, knowledge and competence linked to managing EDI?
- Where did you yourself get such skills, knowledge and competence?
- Reflecting your own experiences on the EDI-related challenging situations, what skills, knowledge and competence were the most important?
- What would you suggest including in an EDI-related curriculum?

## 4.5 Key Findings & Discussion

### 4.5.1 Focus Groups/Coaching Circles

The overall findings from the data analysis of the focus group data focuses on the predetermined themes as noted in the WP2 research framework, namely: education, promotion/progression, and organizational culture. Within these themes, other sub-themes were identified from the data.

Students say that they did not have the opportunity to take specific courses related to EDI topics. If there was an opportunity to study these topics in depth: 1) they were included in courses revolving around HR and people management; 2) the lecturers were not really prepared on these topics and the topics taught were poorly structured. At the same time, students find the idea of integrating EDI courses into the course of study interesting.

There is also a tendency from the participants in the focus groups to categorize too sharply between study paths and jobs suitable for men and those suitable for women. At the same time, what is perceived less is gender discrimination and the problem of gender equality. The problem of inequality is perceived by both sexes, but from a primarily economic point of view and assigned responsibilities: despite the assignment of more responsibilities, there is no proportional upgrading of economic pay.

The theme of inclusion and the need for corporate inclusion remains a theme shared by all participants. At the same time, there is an awareness that: 1) certain jobs do not make it easy to include certain categories of workers; 2) sometimes, there is no desire to exclude certain categories of workers. Rather, there is a lack of specific training useful for inclusion in the right way. In addition, there is the idea that these issues are approved and shared by companies "theoretically" (politically correct). However, they are not really perceived in daily business life by workers.

Main findings:

1. Among students, there is no experience and/or in-depth study of EDI-related issues during their course of study;
2. Participants recognise a need for integrating EDI into all modules;
3. There was a perceived lack of sufficient competence in teachers who teach EDI-related subjects;
4. The feeling is that women and men tend to still fall into the more traditional roles when it comes to training and career paths;
5. Gender discrimination against women did not emerge as a major issue in the Italian labor market. Moreover, sometimes gender discrimination happens in reverse ;
6. Younger participants reported that they felt exploited in their roles, especially those who took on extra responsibility without pay ;
7. Perception that unskilled jobs are more likely to experience a toxic work culture and exploitation ;
8. Sometimes there is not a desire to "exclude," but a lack of appropriate expertise to be able to include certain categories of workers ;
9. Sometimes there is not a desire to "exclude", it is the type of work that does not allow certain categories of workers to be included;
10. The younger participants perceived that some organisations need to invest in education and policies rather than displaying token gestures around EDI.

### 4.5.2 Interviews

The overall findings from the data analysis of the research interview data focuses on the predetermined themes as noted in the research framework, namely: EDI principle interpretations, implementation challenges and competencies used or needed. Within these themes, other sub-themes were identified from the data.

Respondents highlight an awareness that EDI issues are fundamental in today's labor market and an integral part of a healthy corporate culture. Not only that, inclusion and protection of diversity become factors of success and development for any organization. At the same time there is the idea that while there is this awareness, structurally implementing certain policies and approaches is still difficult for many small and medium-sized Italian companies. Both due to a lack of knowledge and a lack of skills.

For those interviewed, the first step toward this direction is to place the worker at the center of the company. That is, the manager must be a good observer and a good listener, thus an excellent communicator. The manager must also be a figure who inspires confidence and a propensity for self-improvement, constant training and change.

#### Main findings:

11. Respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness that diversity and inclusion are strategic success factors for any organization;
12. Respondents believe that in Italy not all companies have implemented EDI policies and that there is still "a lot of work to be done" and important room for improvement to be applied;
13. EDI issues require doing (in terms of time) and "knowing how to do and be" (in terms of knowledge, skills and behavior) in no small measure;
14. There is no exact recipe to follow to effectively manage equity, inclusion, and diversity, but there is one first step that absolutely must be taken, and that is to "put the worker at the center of the organization and thus of the EDI strategy";
15. The EDI manager is a great listener and observer, first of all, and an effective communicator. The manager must convey confidence and openness to diversity and change;
16. Culture change is neither easy nor quick, so it should not be seen as a one-time exercise or reserved for a few people;
17. A difficult situation might be managing a conflict between two employees who have different views on the topic of inclusion and diversity;
18. Discrimination in the workplace, and unconscious biases in hiring processes may require early intervention by providing time for discussion and training;
19. The importance of gaining experience and dealing with multiple production settings, possibly even abroad.

## Section 5: Social Impact Assessment

The Social Impact Assessment follows the European Commission Guidelines (2009) to provide insights on the social impact of existing and emerging labour market laws and policies.

### 5.1 Methodology

The European Commission Impact Assessment Guidelines (SEC, 2009: 92), point out that an impact assessment must answer several questions, including:

1. What is the nature and scale of the problem, how is it evolving, and who is most affected by it?
2. What are the views of the stakeholders concerned?
3. Should the European Union be involved?
  - a. If so, what objectives should it set to address the problem?
  - b. What are the main policy options for reaching these objectives?
  - c. What are the main policy options for reaching these objectives? What are the likely economic, social and environmental impacts of those options?
  - d. How do the main options compare in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and coherence in solving the problems?
  - e. How could future monitoring and evaluation be organised?

These 8 questions (European Commission Guidelines, 2009) informed the SIA framework by exposing the gaps in relation to workplace equality diversity and inclusion resulting from national partner labour market profiles when compared with their EDI labour market laws and policies. To complete the SIA, we conducted the following:

1. Collated Labour Market Information such as National Legislation, transposing EU Directives; and National Labour Market Policies, implementing EU and national laws to develop a comprehensive profile of each national partner's labour market laws and policies in relation to workplace Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).
2. Developed a Labour Market Profile, using the headings:
  - Population by gender, ethnicity, disability, age
  - Employment and unemployment by age, gender, disability
  - Self employed by age, gender and disability
  - Employment by occupation and age/gender/disability/
  - Education Level by age/gender and disability
  - Labour market demographic and sectoral overview
3. Addressed the 8 questions (European Commission, 2009) using the Italian labour market profile. The responses will identify gaps in relation to workplace EDI policies and practice (labour market profiles) and suggest a call to action on behalf of the European Commission.

### 5.2 Key Findings & Discussion

The analysis of the Italian labor market reveals several issues impacting different groups and aspects of employment.

**Young Workers/Students:** Young Italians tend to prefer seeking job opportunities in international labor markets over the domestic market due to low attractiveness in terms of pay, career path, and quality of life.

**Aziende (Italian companies):** The majority of Italian businesses are small and medium-sized family-owned enterprises, facing obstacles in becoming large companies and competing in international markets. This limits their ability to make long-term investments, innovate, and adapt to regulations.

**Employment:** Italian companies lack long-term planning and management training, perceiving them as inefficient and unprofitable. There is an adverse selection of the workforce, with difficulties attracting high-skilled labor from developed countries but being attractive to low-skilled labor from developing/undeveloped countries. Inefficiencies exist in the matching of labor supply and demand, relying on informal recruitment methods.

**Gender-related Issues:** Statistical evidence indicates a persistent wage differential between male and female workers, resulting in lower wages for women and limited access to higher-level employment. Female unemployment levels are consistently higher, and female employment rates are lower than those of men. Women face barriers in reaching management roles, despite being on average more qualified and trained than male counterparts. Immigrant workers from developing or undeveloped countries tend to be incorporated into the informal economy, facing lower wages and reduced legal protections.

**National Gaps and Vacancies:** The Italian institutional and legislative environment hampers business activity, with stringent bureaucratic and fiscal constraints.

Labor costs in Italy are significantly higher than the European average, affecting competitiveness. There is a lack of policy and organization in education programs aimed at fostering entrepreneurship among young people.

Stakeholders believe that deep structural reforms are necessary to make the Italian labor market more efficient. Single interventions have proven insufficient, and policies to date have not adequately addressed the challenges faced by workers and firms in closing the gaps and differentials.

### 5.2.1 Involvement of the European Union

The structural challenges facing the Italian labour market demand a community-level response, including the implementation of directives and incentives to boost its efficiency. By leveraging greater resources and coordinating labour policies across member countries, the European Union and Italy can work together to enhance the condition of the Italian labour market and bring it in line with other EU countries. For this reason, the EU's involvement in shaping labour policies is a crucial tool and opportunity for improving the overall economic situation in Italy.

The policies and objectives presented are not intended to be viewed as alternatives competing for efficiency. Instead, they are complementary and designed to enhance various labor market fundamentals. Considering each policy in isolation would not result in satisfactory changes for the Italian labor market. The policies need to be viewed as a whole and their effectiveness should be measured by their ability to reduce inequalities and gaps in the labor market. Efficiency should be seen as a goal of the proposed framework rather than a single feature of the policies. These investments and reforms are intended as a first step in creating a more efficient and equal labor market.

**Objectives:** The Italian labor market needs to be made more efficient by addressing both labor demand and supply. To improve labor demand, efforts must be made to help small and medium-sized family-owned enterprises transition to larger enterprises while improving the quality of national excellence production. Policies should be implemented to foster structural growth of Industrial Districts to ensure the competitiveness of Italian companies and high labor standards. Reducing bureaucracy in establishing and developing entrepreneurial activity, as well as reducing labor costs, could also benefit labor demand. On the labor supply side, there is a need to redefine the way human capital is trained in Italy. Young people need adequate guidance and effective career path support to ensure their skills are aligned with business needs.

#### Labour demand policies:

- Abate labour costs while remaining compliant with budget constraints established by Maastricht 1992.
- Facilitate synergies between companies to promote structural growth and competitiveness.
- Promote awareness about gender gaps, differences between local and foreign workers, and workers with disabilities while establishing quality standards to eliminate gaps and discrimination.

### Labour supply policies:

- Ensure training institutions have access to business and employment centres to align training with business needs.
- Define targeted, structured, and organized corporate training internships.
- Promote awareness about gender gaps, differences between local and foreign workers, and workers with disabilities in schools.
- Encourage the culture of entrepreneurship and self-entrepreneurship through workshops and school-to-work programs.
- Enhance the model proposed by the "Istituti Tecnici Superiori (ITS)" to bridge training gaps.
- Define an effective retraining process for resources that fail to enter the labour market through targeted training.

**Economic, Social and Environmental Impact:** The policies would have significant impacts on the economy, society, and the environment. Economic impacts include increased employment rates and startups due to long-term investment and better alignment between worker training and business needs. The efficient labor market is expected to enhance the Italian economic system, resulting in benefits for public finances and national welfare. Social impacts include improving the mental well-being of young people and reducing frictional unemployment by meeting labor demand needs. Retaining the workforce domestically could reverse the aging demographic trend and enhance the psychological well-being of workers. Environmentally, policies are expected to unlock more resources for green investments, access broader financial markets for green investment, and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions through proper regulation of work from home arrangements. Additionally, better management of the family environment and a balanced sharing of tasks between parents can reduce the gap between workers of different genders.

**Future monitoring and evaluation:** Monitoring and evaluation of proposed policies should be done through the creation of specific KPIs, or statistical indicators designed to measure their impact. For each of these indicators, which are proposed to be both numerical and qualitative, it would be necessary to set thresholds on a periodic basis (monthly/quarterly/semi-annually/annually) that would allow for continuous and consistent monitoring of performance until values considered optimal are reached.

These indicators for each policy should be able to capture:

1. Percentage changes from the previous period.
2. Quadratic deviation from the value considered optimal on a periodic basis.

The types of indicators proposed are:

1. Work Progress Indicators (planned vs actual expenditure flows, user flows, etc).
2. Indicators of management effectiveness.
3. Degree of user satisfaction.
4. Degree of operator satisfaction.
5. Quality of service provided.



## Section 6: Overall Discussion & Conclusion

The aim of this section is to present the overall findings from the Italian research, work package 2, in relation to inform the future design and development of new micro credential modules in work package 3.

### 6.1 Main findings from the research activities

#### 6.1.1 Business Management Education Findings

The analysis of 40 selected Business Management Education courses in Italy reveals limited alignment with European frameworks, with none of the courses aligning with the DigiComp Framework. Only a small percentage of the courses receive funding from structural and/or national funds, and a minority of the courses connect with Sustainable Development Goals beyond gender equality. Out of the identified competencies, only 12.7% are covered in the analyzed courses, indicating significant gaps. The EntreComp framework shows mixed coverage, the DigiComp framework has inadequate coverage of digital competencies, while the LifeComp framework demonstrates a strong presence in the selected courses, emphasizing personal and life skills.

- Most of the courses analyzed (25 out of 40) focused on Diversity and Inclusion rather than Gender Equality or Intercultural/Multicultural diversity
- The majority of them were identified in Higher Education 18 out of 40
- Limited alignment with European frameworks.
- Significant gaps in several areas.
- DigiComp Framework not aligned with any courses.
- Only 12.7% of total competencies are covered across frameworks.

#### 6.1.2 Focus group findings

The analysis of the 4 focus groups brought to the following conclusions:

- Among students, there is no experience and/or in-depth study of EDI-related issues during their course of study ;
- Participants recognise a need for integrating EDI into all modules;
- There was a perceived lack of sufficient competence in teachers who teach EDI-related subjects;
- The feeling is that women and men tend to still fall into the more traditional roles when it comes to training and career paths ;
- Gender discrimination against women did not emerge as a major issue in the Italian labor market. Moreover, sometimes gender discrimination happens in reverse ;
- Younger participants reported that they felt exploited in their roles, especially those who took on extra responsibility without pay ;
- Perception that unskilled jobs are more likely to experience a toxic work culture and exploitation ;
- Sometimes there is not a desire to "exclude," but a lack of appropriate expertise to be able to include certain categories of workers ;
- Sometimes there is not a desire to "exclude", it is the type of work that does not allow certain categories of workers to be included ;
- The younger participants perceived that some organisations need to invest in education and policies rather than displaying token gestures around EDI.

#### 6.1.3 In-depth interviews findings

The analysis of the 10 interviews brought to the following conclusions:

- Respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness that diversity and inclusion are strategic success factors for any organization;

- Respondents believe that in Italy not all companies have implemented EDI policies and that there is still "a lot of work to be done" and important room for improvement to be applied;
- EDI issues require doing (in terms of time) and "knowing how to do and be" (in terms of knowledge, skills and behavior) in no small measure;
- There is no exact recipe to follow to effectively manage equity, inclusion, and diversity, but there is one first step that absolutely must be taken, and that is to "put the worker at the center of the organization and thus of the EDI strategy";
- The EDI manager is a great listener and observer, first of all, and an effective communicator. The manager must convey confidence and openness to diversity and change;
- Culture change is neither easy nor quick, so it should not be seen as a one-time exercise or reserved for a few people;
- A difficult situation might be managing a conflict between two employees who have different views on the topic of inclusion and diversity;
- Discrimination in the workplace, and unconscious biases in hiring processes may require early intervention by providing time for discussion and training;
- The importance of gaining experience and dealing with multiple production settings, possibly even abroad.

#### 6.1.4 Social impact assessment findings

The Italian labor market faces several challenges, including low attractiveness for young workers, obstacles for small and medium-sized enterprises, inefficiencies in employment matching, gender-related issues, bureaucratic constraints, and high labor costs. To address these issues, the involvement of the European Union is crucial, with coordinated labor policies and incentives needed. The proposed policies aim to improve labor demand and supply by reducing costs, promoting competitiveness, raising awareness about gaps and discrimination, aligning training with business needs, and fostering entrepreneurship. These policies have the potential to bring economic, social, and environmental benefits, but monitoring and evaluation through specific indicators are necessary for measuring their impact and ensuring continuous improvement.

- Young Workers/Students prefer international job opportunities due to low attractiveness of the domestic market.
- Italian companies face obstacles in becoming large companies and competing internationally.
- Italian companies lack long-term planning and management training.
- Gender-related issues: Wage differentials, female unemployment, and barriers for women in management roles.
- National gaps and vacancies: Stringent bureaucracy and fiscal constraints.
- Inefficiencies in labor supply and demand matching.
- Community-level response needed for structural challenges.
- Implementing directives and incentives to boost labor market efficiency.
- Policies to enhance labor demand and supply.
- Objectives include reducing bureaucracy, lowering labor costs, and aligning training with business needs.
- Monitoring and evaluation through specific indicators and KPIs.

## 6.2 Learning Outcomes and Competencies

Given that the objective of WP2 is to create new knowledge and understanding of the current situation and practices in EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) Business Management Education across different European partner countries. According to the T2.2 Desk Research: Mapping the most relevant training provisions in the field of Business Management Education in Europe i.e. in Italy in this case. With the Desk Research on the most relevant training provisions in the field of EDI Business Management Education the Italian partners collected a total of 40 training courses. Each partner mapped its own educational area i.e. HE Education, Structural Funds and Nationally Funded Education and Non-formal and/or Private Education.

In addition of the educational area of the research, specific “Keywords” were used to find EDI Business Management Trainings in Italy, namely:

- Equality
- Diversity
- Inclusion
- Gender
- Multicultural
- Intercultural

Moreover, given the six keywords. It is possible to group the trainings reviewed under the following Training Categories:

- Gender Equality Management
- Diversity and Inclusion Management
- Intercultural/Multicultural Diversity Management

In consideration of the 40 Training Courses and the corresponding alignment with the European Frameworks i.e. EntreComp, DigiComp and LifeComp. In the following sections are listed the already existing Learning Outcomes/Competencies and the missing ones (refer to T2.2 Desk Research for more detailed information).

### 6.2.1 The already existing Learning Outcomes/Competencies

Among a total of 63 competencies belonging to the three frameworks i.e. EntreComp, DigiComp and LifeComp, 8 competencies are developed by at least 80% of the 40 courses analysed.

ENTRECOMP
Ethical and sustainable thinking
Planning and management
LIFECOMP
P3.1 Awareness that individual behavior, personal characteristics and social and environmental factors influence health and wellbeing
S1.1 Awareness of another person’s emotions, experiences and values
S2.1 Awareness of the need for a variety of communication strategies, language registers, and tools that are adapted to context and content
S3.1 Intention to contribute to the common good and awareness that others may have different cultural affiliations, backgrounds, beliefs, values, opinions or personal circumstances
L1.1 Awareness of and confidence in one’s own and others’ abilities to learn, improve and achieve with work and dedication
L2.1 Awareness of potential biases in the data and one’s personal limitations, while collecting valid and reliable information and ideas from diverse and reputable sources

### 6.2.2 The missing Learning Outcomes/Competencies

Among a total of 63 competencies belonging to the three frameworks, 32 competencies are undeveloped or developed by less than 20% of the 40 courses analysed.

ENTRECOMP
Creativity
Mobilizing Resources
Financial and economic literacy
Mobilizing Others

Taking the initiative
Learning through experience
<b>DIGICOMP</b>
1.1 Browsing, searching and filtering data, information and digital content
1.2 Evaluating data, information and digital content
1.3 Managing data, information and digital content
2.1 Interacting through digital technologies
2.2 Sharing through digital technologies
2.3 Engaging in citizenship through digital technologies
2.4 Collaborating through digital technologies
3.1 Developing digital content
3.2 Integrating and re-elaborating digital content
3.3 Copyright and licenses
3.4 Programming
4.1 Protecting devices
4.2 Protecting personal data and privacy
4.3 Protecting health and well-being
4.4 Protecting the environment
5.1 Solving technical problems
5.2 Identifying needs and technological responses
5.3 Creatively using digital technologies
5.4 Identifying digital competence gaps
<b>LIFECOMP</b>
P1.2 Understanding and regulating personal emotions, thoughts, and behavior, including stress responses
L1.2 Understanding that learning is a lifelong process that requires openness, curiosity and determination
L1.3 Reflecting on other people's feedback as well as on successful and unsuccessful experiences to continue developing one's potential
L2.2 Comparing, analyzing, assessing, and synthesizing data, information, ideas, and media messages in order to draw logical conclusions
L3.2 Planning and implementing learning goals, strategies, resources and processes
L3 Managing learning_The planning, organizing, monitoring and reviewing of one's own learning

### **General Considerations:**

The already existing Learning Outcomes/Competencies are interjected under the EntreComp and LifeComp frameworks with particular propensity for LifeComp. Also because of a higher probability due to the larger number of skills belonging to this framework. The missing Learning Outcomes/Competencies are particularly interjected under the DigiComp framework-where a very low number among the selected courses develop the relevant digital competencies and none exceed the 80 percent threshold.

## 6.3 Updated version of the labour market policies

### 6.3.1 Focus on impact and relevance for equal treatment etc.

#### *Young Workers/Students:*

Data indicates that approximately 37% of Italian young adults aged 15-29 are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) (Eurostat, 2021). This reflects the preference of young Italians to seek job opportunities in international labor markets rather than the domestic market. However, the qualitative research on diversity and inclusion (EDI) emphasizes the importance of inclusive policies and practices for young workers. These findings can lead to increased efforts to address the challenges faced by young workers in accessing employment opportunities, such as limited job prospects and a preference for seeking opportunities abroad. By embracing EDI, initiatives can be developed to foster entrepreneurship, improve access to education and training, and equip young people with the necessary skills for the labor market.

#### *Aziende (Italian companies):*

Around 95% of Italian businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Eurostat, 2021). These SMEs face challenges in expanding and competing in international markets, limiting their ability to make long-term investments, innovate, and adapt to regulations. However, the qualitative research on diversity and inclusion highlights the strategic success factors of diversity and inclusion for organizations. This can lead to a shift in organizational culture and practices, where companies prioritize inclusivity and value the contributions of diverse talent. By embracing EDI, Italian companies can enhance their competitiveness, innovation, and long-term sustainability. They can attract and retain diverse talent, tap into new markets, and better adapt to changing customer demands.

#### *Employment:*

Italian companies allocate only around 0.4% of their total expenditure to management training, significantly lower than the EU average of 1.5% (Eurofound, 2021). This demonstrates the lack of emphasis on long-term planning and management training. However, qualitative research on diversity and inclusion can influence companies to invest in comprehensive management training programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. This investment can lead to more effective leadership and decision-making, better talent management practices, and improved employee satisfaction and retention.

#### *Gender-related Issues:*

The gender pay gap in Italy is significant, with women earning on average 16.3% less than men (Eurostat, 2021). This wage differential indicates gender-based disparities in the labor market. The impact of EDI findings can inspire actions to address the gender pay gap, such as implementing transparent pay structures, promoting pay equity policies, and fostering a culture of inclusivity and equal opportunities within organizations. These efforts can contribute to reducing gender-based disparities in the labor market. Additionally, initiatives driven by EDI can enhance access to employment opportunities for women by addressing gender bias in hiring processes, providing mentorship and support programs, and promoting work-life balance policies that enable women to participate fully in the labor market.

#### *National Gaps and Vacancies:*

Italy's labor costs per hour are approximately 8% higher than the EU average (Eurostat, 2021). These higher labor costs pose challenges for businesses in terms of competitiveness and resource allocation. However, the impact of EDI on the labor market can lead to initiatives that promote inclusive labor practices. These practices consider a diverse range of perspectives, experiences, and abilities, leading to increased productivity, improved employee well-being, and better utilization of talent. By embracing EDI, businesses can mitigate the impact of higher labor costs on their operations.

By integrating the insights from EDI into policies and practices, the labor market in Italy can become more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of various groups.

### 6.3.2 Videos of Best Practice

The Italian team conducted five video interviews related to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) to obtain an overview of existing best practices in the workplace. These interviews are not only useful examples but will be used as part of training programmes for managers and undergraduate business management modules for higher education students.

The implementation of EDI policies and associated challenges in the workplace were a common theme in all interviews. Inclusion of underrepresented groups in the workplace and community posed a challenge that was met through social enterprise projects.

Participants highlight the value added by involving certain categories of workers in their organization, such as immigrants, people with disabilities and unemployed over 50. Not only that, but they also emphasize the need for "uniqueness and/or diversity" training aimed at all employees of a company. With an understanding of how important it is to talk about certain issues and that a company can only become inclusive with the participation of all its constituents.

In Italy, we warmly thank the following organisations for participating in these interviews:

- [CARTIERA](#)
- [CON VOI](#)
- [LEROY MERLIN](#)
- [OXJNO](#)
- [NUMERO ZERO](#)

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