



Matching Practices for Elementary Schools – Italy

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Relevant country background

The Italian school system is governed by the central government that defines the schools' organization, the curriculum, and allocates funds to schools, primarily based on the number of students. Nonetheless schools have, since 2000, been granted some autonomy regarding the curriculum, the day schedule, the material taught and extra-curriculum activities. They can do this also in collaboration with other schools, e.g., through school networks. The autonomy of organization is higher in the 5 regions that have a special autonomous status (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Sicily, Trentino-Alto Adige and Valle d'Aosta) and (in some cases) recognized languages other than Italian taught in schools.

School education is compulsory and free from age 6 to age 18. Some schools are publically funded, some are private and some are private but partly publically funded. Public school is free, while students enrolled in recognized private schools can get as much money back as a student in public schools costs the State by obtaining a fixed per-student amount voucher that is redeemed in the tax declaration. Primary school covers age 6 to 10. First-level secondary school covers age from 11 to 13, and it is organized in the same way as primary school. Preschool for children aged 2.5 and above is also offered and publically funded, but it is not compulsory, and it is managed at the city hall level (Comuni). This profile applies to enrollment in primary schools and first-level secondary schools, i.e. age 6 to 13.

“Matching in Practice” is a research network that brings together the growing community of researchers in Europe working on the various aspects of assignment and matching in education and related labour markets.

These country profiles are part of a collective effort by network members to map matching practices across Europe

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Summary box

Organization of education	National
Stated objectives of enrollment policy	Every student has the right to a seat, since primary education is free and compulsory.
Who's in charge?	Each school governing body, but local authorities can serve as coordinator at a local level.
In place since	2004, after that minor changes were introduced, but enrollment policies have not been changed.
Available capacity	Decided by Local Authorities in an attempt to match offer and demand of seats each year.
Timing of enrolment	Starting date for registrations set nationally by the Ministry of Education.
Information available to parents prior to enrollment period	The curriculum of each school, the timetables and the services that each school provides (canteen, gymnasium, and so on) are available online.
Restrictions on preference expression	One application (to one school) per student to be sent within a deadline specified by the central government.
Matching procedure	Decentralized, but schools are asked to coordinate to match offer and demand.
Priorities and quotas	Children have priority in their local schools; in the other schools the criteria are set by the schools' governing body, sometimes in collaboration with other schools or the local authorities (mostly in densely populated areas and cities).
Tie-breaking	Set by school governing body.

Description of current practices

The governing body of schools is made of the principal, the teachers, representatives of parents and representatives of non-teaching workers of the schools. A governing body can be responsible of one or many schools of the same area (*comprensorio scolastico*).

Parents have to apply to send their child to primary school (attendance is compulsory but it is not automatic through pre-allocation). When the registration period starts (the date is set by the national Ministry of Education each year, as well as the deadline for registration), parents have to send ONE application to their preferred school. Since February 2012, it is possible to apply online via the website <http://cercalatuascuola.istruzione.it/cercalatuascuola/>. (The website also provides information on the

schools' characteristics and facilities.) At the application stage, parents can inform the school about their preferences over the timetables and services the school offers, which can help the school adapt its offering (In practice however, each school tends to offer a similar curriculum every year, and this is what mostly drive parents' choice of the school). One of the most important difference across schools is the timetable, i.e., whether children attend school in the afternoon (*tempo pieno*) and on Saturdays.

Schools have to accept all the pupils from their catchment areas (*bacino d'utenza*). In contrast, each school's governing body is free to determine the admission criteria for pupils outside their catchment area. A (common) example of priority criteria is the following: (1) siblings in primary schools in the same area; (2) siblings in secondary school in same area; (3) parents' workplace; (3) grandparents' residence. Time of registration is another priority criterion, although this is not very common because it is perceived as unfair.

In case a pupil is not admitted, the school must justify its decision. Furthermore, the principal has to actively help the parents to find a seat in another school. Enrollment at another school can happen only if the parents agree. The schools within an area are asked to coordinate among themselves and in consultation with the local authorities (which play a major role in cities), to match the demand and the offer of seats. They can also coordinate with "scuole paritarie" (the half-public/half-private schools which are recognized by the state and are entitled to give diplomas).

The governing body is also free to set the rules for the creation of parallel classes and pupils' assignment to these classes. This is what parents typically care about the most, but their power is limited to influence the governing body in setting these rules via their representatives.

Registration after the first year of attendance is automatic until the diploma is obtained.

Performance

Complete decentralization makes assessing the current system difficult. Since pupils have to find a seat by law, the governing bodies coordinate to guarantee an equilibrium between the supply and demand of seats, together with the local authorities. The system is far from self-equilibrating however: when time is the main priority criterion, it is important to be among the first to request registration. The queues of parents in front of schools in big cities the night before the start of registrations are a clear sign that the system does not work well in dense areas or in areas where the supply of schools is limited. Such queues have made the headlines of newspapers in recent years. Nonetheless, these queues happen also in places when time is not used as a tie-breaker and should therefore also be seen as reflecting parents' misunderstanding of the admission criteria.

Recent policy change

The education system in Italy has gone through a lot of reforms recently. There were three reforms in the last 7 years, the last one being introduced in 2011. Most of them are minor changes, and they do not include reforms to the admission procedure.

Perceived issues

Admission is not seen as an issue in Italy, except for students with disabilities and foreign students (usually they are not fluent in Italian and therefore require special assistance, for which schools have very limited funding).

A very important issue in Italy is the admission to pre-schools (age 3-5), since these schools are highly demanded when both parents are working, but they are not compulsory. As a result, the number of seats in public facilities (that are cheaper than private ones, although still expensive: typically 500 EUR per month) is limited compared to demand. These pre-schools are put in place and organized by local authorities that freely decide on criteria of admission and fees.

Existing data

School-level data are available since 2012:

http://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/scuola_in_chiaro/open_data/index.html

Legal texts

Webpage of the ministry of Education, University and Research:

<http://www.istruzione.it/web/istruzione/home>

In particular:

- on the organizational autonomy of schools: <http://www.istruzione.it/web/istruzione/famiglie/autonomia-scolastica>
- on registrations/admissions: http://www.istruzione.it/web/istruzione/cm4_10
- on online registrations: http://www.istruzione.it/web/istruzione/prot6865_11

Other resources and references

Some examples:

- Milan: <http://goo.gl/TFzvW>
- Trento: <http://www.provincia.bz.it/intendenza-scolastica/>

MiP Country Profiles downloadable from matching-in-practice.eu

MiP Country Profile 1. Cantillon, Estelle (2011), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Belgium \(French-speaking region\)](#).

MiP Country Profile 2. Kübler, Dorothea (2011), [University admission practices – Germany](#).

MiP Country Profile 3. Irving, Rob (2011), [Matching practices for entry-labor markets – Scotland](#).

MiP Country Profile 4. Kiselgof, Sofya (2011), [Matching practices for universities – Ukraine](#).

MiP Country Profile 5. Biró, Péter (2011), [University admission practices – Hungary](#).

MiP Country Profile 6. Biró, Péter (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Hungary](#).

MiP Country Profile 7. Chen, Li (2012), [University admission practices – UK](#).

MiP Country Profile 8. Chen, Li (2012), [University admission practices – Ireland](#).

MiP Country Profile 9 Cantillon, Estelle and Koen Declercq (2012), [University admission practices – Belgium](#).

MiP Country Profile 10. Chen, Li (2012), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Ireland](#).

MiP Country Profile 11. Chen, Li (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Ireland](#).

MiP Country Profile 12. Manlove, David (2012), [Matching practices for primary and secondary schools – Scotland](#).

MiP Country Profile 13. Merlino, Luca Paolo and Antonio Nicoló (2012), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Italy](#).

MiP Country Profile 14. Merlino, Luca Paolo and Antonio Nicoló (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Italy](#).

MiP Country Profile 15. Merlino, Luca Paolo and Antonio Nicoló (2012), [University admissions practices – Italy](#).

MiP Country Profile 16 Hiller, Victor and Olivier Tercieux (2013), [Matching practices in secondary schools – France](#).

MiP Country Profile 17 Calsamiglia, Caterina (2014), [Matching Practices for elementary and secondary Schools – Spain](#).

MiP Country Profile 18 Lauri, Triin, Kaire Põder, and André Veski (2014), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Estonia](#).

MiP Country Profile 19. Salonen, Mikko A.A. (2014), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Finland](#).

MiP Country Profile 20 Terrier, Camille (2014), [Matching practices for secondary public school teachers – France](#).

MiP Country Profile 21 Basteck, Christian, Katharina Huesmann, and Heinrich Nax (2015), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Germany](#)

MiP Country Profile 22 Cantillon, Estelle (2015), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Belgium \(French-speaking region\)](#).