



University admissions practices – Italy

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Relevant country background

Students typically enter university at age 19 in Italy, one year later than in most EU countries. Following the Bologna harmonization process, universities are organized in a first cycle of 3 years (BA), followed by a 2-year secondary cycle of two years (MA).

There are both public and private universities in Italy (the large majority of universities are public). Independently of their status, universities must follow the same rules regarding a range of decisions (e.g. the degree they can confer, their curriculum, hiring and pay practices for professors) in order to be accredited to deliver a laurea, which is the generic term for university degrees and has legal value.

The main differences between public and private universities concern funding and admissions. While both public and private universities receive yearly transfers through the *Fondo di Finanziamento Universitario* (Agasisti and Catalano, 2005; Catalano, 2003), private universities receive much less and rely more on (higher) tuition fees and private funding. Students, scholarships and various degrees of tuition fee exemptions are available to lower income students both in public and in private universities. These instruments are managed by the regional “administration for the right to study” (*enti regionali per il diritto allo studio*), together with the universities themselves.

As far as admissions are concerned private universities are free to set a cap on the number of students and to choose entry criteria for incoming students. Public universities are in principle required to take all students, independent of capacity (there are some exceptions, see below).

“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 higher education	Ministry of Education, together with the universities.
Stated objectives of admissions policy	Ensure professors/students ratio is compatible with an adequate quality of teaching.
Who's in charge of admissions?	Ministry of Education, together with the universities. Decentralized for private universities.
Admissions system in place since	1999 (before it was decentralized).
Available capacity	Caps on the number of students apply to private universities and to some degree programs at public universities.
Timing of enrolment	An entry exam applies to degree programs that have a cap on the number of students they can admit. Registrations for other programs take place at the level of each university and are open starting around September each year.
Information available to students prior to enrolment period	Programs and courses offered and type of test (if applicable).
Restrictions on preference expression	None, except for the constraint imposed by the impossibility to take the entry exams of different universities that organize their exams on the same day.
Matching procedure	Students are free to choose among all the degree programs into which they got admitted. If there is no cap on the number of students, public universities have to admit all students who apply.
Priorities and quotas	Based on exam results for degree programs with an entrance exam.
Tie-breaking	The tie-breaking rule for degree programs with a legal cap on the number of students is set by the Ministry of Education (typically: results obtained in subsections of the test, final grade in high school and date of birth). Set by universities for other degree programs.

Description of current practices

All students finishing high school and who have passed the national exam (*Esame di Stato conclusivo del corso di studio di Istruzione Secondaria Superiore or Esame di Maturità*) are eligible to start university and can enroll at any university and program of their choice (open access). There are three major exceptions however.

First, private universities can limit their intake and organize an entry exam to select the students they want to admit. They are free to decide on the date and content of the exam, as well as on the way to use the entry exams to do the selection. The chosen selection procedure must be communicated officially (with a *Bando*) at least 60 days before the deadline for registration for the exam.

Second, Italian law imposes a maximum number of students that can be enrolled in certain degree programs, at each university offering these programs (this is the case for medicine, surgery, dentistry, veterinary medicine, other health professions, and architecture). For these degree programs, the entry exam takes place *on the same day* at each university. This means that a student interested in one of these degree programs can select only one university. If (s)he passes the entry exam, (s)he can only register in the university where (s)he has passed the test. If (s)he fails, (s)he has to take another exam the year later or study for another degree, i.e., no re-matching takes place. The Ministry of Education provides exam guidelines for universities to design the test and releases self-assessment tests (see links below). The Ministry also provides the rules to break ties and establish priorities, based on the exam results (in total and in each subsection), the secondary school degree and the date of birth. Exam results and cut-off scores from previous years are not public.

Finally, universities can ask the Ministry of Education to cap student intake in some of their degree programs by sending a detailed justification for the request (physical/organizational constraints). This permission must be renewed every year. These universities are then free to schedule the exam and the priority rules they wish, as long as they abide by the same publicity rules as those for private universities.

Students can take as many entry exams as they like, as long (of course) as they do not take place on the same date, which typically happens only for the special degrees described in second point above, i.e., medicine and the like. Nonetheless, since students have to go physically to the university where they wish to enroll to take the test and since all exams take place in September, it is very costly and difficult to take many exams.

Public universities with no caps sometimes try to reduce the number of students by making it difficult to pass exams in the first years to select the best students. Nonetheless, the way public funding is distributed does not encourage this practice. Indeed, universities receive a budget that is determined on a fixed part (per student) and a variable part which is meant to adjust the previous transfer to account for the proportion of students that are *effective*: these are calculated precisely using (among other things) the number of students that successfully pass exams (see Agasisti and Cattaneo, 2005). So, professors do not have incentives to have high failure rates in the courses they teach. Rather, they have incentives to dissuade students to attend classes and to promote them easily when they get tested.

Performance

Students who do not pass the test in a given university either try the next year or change degrees. This probably results in distributing good students who do not want to take risks across good and not so good universities. There is no detailed evidence on this however.

Recent policy change

Until 1999, admissions criteria and decisions on the maximum number of students were decentralized. Following court trials that found that some of the decisions made by universities to select students violated the “right to study”, the caps to the number of students admitted are now set by the Ministry of Education (Legge 2 agosto 1999, n. 264, “*Norme in materia di accessi ai corsi universitari*”).

Perceived issues

The inefficiency of the system is clear, and the cost to students willing to study certain degrees are very high. Nonetheless, up to now the only suggestion that students movements brought up is the abolishment of the limitations to freely register to any course.

Existing data

Data on aggregate student enrollment: <http://anagrafe.miur.it/index.php>

Legal texts

National Ministry of Education, University and Research, with links to legal texts and guidelines

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

Information on degree programs with a cap on the number of students

<http://accessoprogrammato.miur.it/2012/index.html>

<http://www.istruzione.it/web/universita/accesso-corsi-a-numero-programmato>

On-line preparatory tests for admission exams:

<http://www.university.it/index.php/highered/accessoprogrammatopresenta>

Other resources and references

Agasisti T. and Catalano G. (2005), “Il finanziamento pubblico delle università con modalità formula-based: aspetti metodologici ed esperienze applicative in alcuni paesi europei”, SIEP working paper 450, <http://www-3.unipv.it/websiep/wp/450.pdf>

Catalano, G., (2003), “Gli strumenti finanziari e la valutazione”, in Casciotti, C. (editor), La valutazione: un indispensabile strumento di garanzia e di governance, pp.73-100, CRUI, Roma.

Le risorse delle università, http://statistica.miur.it/Data/uic2009_2010/capitolo_1.pdf

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 \(French-speaking region\)](#).